

7.1.2020 Midweek Meditation, Week 3
Galatians 3:28; John 1:14

Pastor Timothy McKenzie
(David J. Bosch)

“Transforming Mission”

Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

This week’s readings come from a well-known work by the South African missiologist, David Bosch, titled *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Though not without certain valid criticisms, *Transforming Mission* remains the definitive work on the history of Christian mission in which Bosch traced the contours of Christian mission from the New Testament through the end of the twentieth century. Today’s two readings come from chapters about the late medieval and Enlightenment periods. As heirs of a five hundred year period of colonial and missionary enterprise that helped shape many structures and institutions in the modern world, it is also part of our shared history.

These two readings from two different eras, reveal half a millennia of the interdependence of colonial expansion and Christian mission. They reveal the Christendom worldview that led Pope Alexander VI to divide the globe in half between Spain and Portugal (which had tragic consequences for the Americas in the introduction of slavery), and the realization that the post-Enlightenment period has been about the additional expansion of Western technological superiority and dominance.

From the fifteenth century onward, Bosch traces the interdependence of colonialism and mission, something that affected both Roman Catholic and Protestant nations as they began to build systems and institutions in their respective spheres. It is crucial to see that the relationship of colonial expansion and missions was, as Bosch argued, “an integral part of the much wider and much more serious project of the advance of Western technological civilization.” This continues into the present with respective spheres of influence and territories between nations meant to maintain global, commercial and military balances of power. To a great degree the concept of modernity and national self-understanding has been shaped by an encounter with *difference* – with ethnicities, cultures and religions that were profoundly different than those of western European origin. In other words, “the Other” was needed to help construct and define the self. The massive project published by the University of Chicago Press *Asia in the Making of Europe* (edited by Donald F. Lach) argues the point, as did Edward W. Said’s pioneering work, *Orientalism*.

David Bosch reflected on his own experience of “the Other” while growing up in a South African Afrikaner home. As a youth Bosch was raised to believe in apartheid, in the inherent racial and cultural superiority of white Afrikaners over black Africans. Bosch later reflected upon the world of his youth, writing that black Africans were “a part of the scenery but hardly a part of the human community... They belonged to the category of ‘farm implements’ rather than to the category ‘fellow-human beings’” (“Prisoners of History or Prisoners of Hope?” in *The Hiltonian*, March 1979). However, his inherited worldview gradually changed while at university. Bosch eventually sensed a call to ministry, graduating from the University of Pretoria with degrees in languages and theology, and in 1956, from the University of Basel with a Th.D. in theology.

Bosch’s work as a missionary of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) to the Xhosa people in the Transkei of South Africa challenged his views of apartheid and widened his understanding of

human community. His research and writing began to reveal an opposition to both apartheid and his church's complicity in South Africa's political structure of oppression of black Africans. Though his writings began to isolate him from the DRC, he never left this church, but was effectively banned from its pulpits in the 1970s. Denied a position on the DRC theological faculty in Pretoria, he instead accepted a post as Professor of Missiology at the University of South Africa (UNISA), an interracial university, in Pretoria, where he taught from 1972 to 1992.

Like Dietrich Bonhoeffer who, a generation earlier, had refused a position at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, where he could have waited out the war in safety, Bosch declined two invitations to join the faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary, instead deciding to remain in South Africa during a dangerous and historic time in the life of his country. In his critique of apartheid, Bosch argued that the church must become an "alternate community," set apart from the world as a servant church, without privilege, that embodies the servanthood of Christ Jesus. This did not mean that the church was to escape the world; rather, the church was to point to God's vision of reality - the kingdom of God - rather than seeking to uphold the dominant structures of apartheid.

For Bosch, the church must be grounded in the reconciling work of Christ who reconciles all humanity. As Paul writes in Galatians (3:28), "*There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*" Christ breaks down the differences and "otherness" among people, and while racial, economic, linguistic, cultural, religious difference remain real in the secular world, *in the church* all people become one in Christ. Bosch argued that it was "nothing but a heresy" to divide the one church of Christ by giving "an unduly high value to racial and cultural distinctiveness." Bosch was writing about the DRC's inherited nineteenth century ideology of *Volkskirche*, that different racial groups should form separate churches. In this twisted theology, black Africans were treated as a separate ethnic *volk* rather than seen as part of the one human family created by God. It was essentially a denial of Christ's sharing of humanity as expressed in "*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen its glory*" (John 1:14). Identity in Christ's body, the church, transcends ethnic and "racial" identities that the world uses to classify and judge fellow human beings. For Bosch what was at stake was the universal *catholicity* of the church in which all human beings share in the universal and redeeming humanity and work of Christ.

Bosch wrote, "the church begins to be missionary not through its universal proclamation of the gospel, but through the universality of the gospel it proclaims." Bosch argued that mission is transformed when the church works as a servant with Christ for the *justice* of the world; when it works for the *unity* that Christ creates out of the diversity of the world; when it works as a *reconciling community* seeking peace where there has been conflict. Finally, Bosch argued that God's mission is "moored in the church's worship, to its gathering around Word and the Sacraments" what Bosch termed "*poiesis* - the rich resources of symbol, piety, worship, love, awe and mystery."

Freedom in Christ has greater expression when the church views itself not as an essential aspect of society and the world, but as *the* essential expression of God's mission in the world. Our humanity is most fully experienced in the one body, the church, in which through Christ, all

“otherness” is continually transformed into a new certainty that with Christ, we are all sisters and brothers. Amen.

Week 3 midweek meditation readings:

1) (excerpt) “Colonialism and Mission” (pp. 227-28) in *Transforming Mission* by David J. Bosch

Colonization of non-Christian peoples by Christian nations predated modern colonialism by many centuries, but those exploits were launched by Europeans to Europeans, and in each case the vanquished peoples soon embraced Christianity and were assimilated into the dominant culture. Now however, European Christians met people who were not only physically, but also culturally and linguistically very different from them. One of the most appalling consequences of this was the imposition of slavery on non-Western peoples. In the ancient Roman Empire as well as medieval Europe slavery had little to do with race. After the “discovery” of the non-Western world beyond the Muslim territories this changed; henceforth slaves could only be people of color. The fact that they were different made it possible for the victorious Westerners to regard them as inferior. Spain and Portugal introduced slavery and were soon emulated by other emerging colonial powers (Protestant ones as well), who all claimed a share in the lucrative trade in human bodies. In 1537 the pope authorized the opening of a slave market in Lisbon, where up to twelve thousand Africans were sold annually for transportation to the West Indies. By the eighteenth century Britain had the lion’s share of the slave market. In the ten years between 1783 and 1793 a total of 880 slave ships left Liverpool, carrying over three hundred thousand slaves to the Americas. It has been estimated that the number of slaves sold to European colonies amounted to between twenty and forty million. And all along the (assumed) superiority of Westerners over all others became more and more firmly entrenched and regarded as axiomatic...

Hard upon the discoveries of the sea routes to India and the Americas, Pope Alexander VI (in the Papal Bull *Inter Caetera Divinae* [1493]) divided the world outside Europe between the kings of Portugal and Spain, granting them full authority over all the territories they had already discovered as well as over those still to be discovered. This bull (like its predecessor, *Romanus Pontifex* of Nicolas V [1454], which had dealt with privileges granted to Portugal only) was based on the medieval assumption that the pope held supreme authority over the entire globe, including the pagan world. Here lies the origin of the right of patronage (*patronato real* in Spanish, *padroado* in Portuguese), according to which the rulers of the two countries had dominion over their colonies, not only politically, but also ecclesiastically. Colonialism and mission, as a matter of course, were interdependent; the right to have colonies carried with it the duty to Christianize the colonized.

This right to “send” ecclesiastical agents to distant colonies was so decisive that the activities and designation of the envoys were to derive their names from this action; their assignment came to be called “mission” (a term first used in this sense by Ignatius of Loyola), and they themselves “missionaries”...

For fifteen centuries the church used other terms to refer to what we subsequently came to call “mission”: phrases such as “propagation of the faith”, “preaching of the gospel”, apostolic proclamation”, “promulgation of the gospel”, “augmenting the faith”, “expanding the church”, “planting the church”, “propagation of the reign of Christ”, and “illuminating the nations.” The new

word, “mission”, is historically linked indissolubly with the colonial era and with the idea of magisterial commissioning...

2) (excerpt) “Mission and Colonialism” (p. 312) in *Transforming Mission* by David J. Bosch

We have to probe deeper still, however. The issue is more serious than just that of the demonstrable collusion of mission with colonial powers. If we were to define it merely in these terms we might easily be persuaded to believe that the colonialist traits of Western mission belonged to only to a particular historical period, that they were merely exterior and could be easily discarded again. We would then be tempted to treat the issue too narrowly as simply a matter of the relation of mission to colonialism and overlook the fact that this relationship is but an integral part of the much wider and much more serious project of the advance of Western technological civilization. Furthermore, such a narrowness of perspective may fail to do justice to the implications of neocolonialism, which is only a continuing and more subtle form of Western dominance. We would miss the point that, with the Enlightenment, a fundamentally new element had entered into the issue of relations between people. Whereas in earlier centuries the essential factor that divided people was *religious*, people were now divided according to the levels of *civilization* (as interpreted by the West). This led to the next criterion of division – *ethnicity* or *race* – now interpreted as the matrix out of which civilization (or the lack of it) was born. The “civilized”, however, not only felt superior to the “uncivilized”, but also responsible for them. In the words of D. Schellong, “Since the Enlightenment, ‘good’ means to know what is ‘good’ for *others*, and to impose it on them.” This was true of Western missionary “expansion”. The fact that missionaries were sent not to educate and guide others but to be in their midst in a spirit of true self-surrender tended to take a back seat. A “potent blend of Providence, piety, politics, and patriotism” made it hard for the missionary enterprise to be what it was called to be.

Reading recommendations:

Bosch, David J., *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Mission Theology*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991.

Bosch, David J., *Believing in the Future: Toward a Missiology of Western Culture*. Trinity Press (US) / Gracewing (UK), 1995.

David Jacobus Bosch (1929-1992)

David Bosch was a missiologist, ecumenist, and Professor of Missiology at the University of South Africa (UNISA) in Pretoria, 1972-1992. Born into an Afrikaner farming household, he was educated at the University of Pretoria (M.A. and B.D.), and at the University of Basel (Th.D., 1956). From 1957-1971, with his wife Annemarie Elizabeth, he served as a missionary of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa in the Transkei. Bosch was instrumental in founding the South African Missiological Society (SAMS), serving as its General Secretary, from 1968-1992, and as general editor of its journal *Missionalia*. Twice offered the prestigious chair of mission and ecumenics at Princeton Theological Seminary, he declined believing he could not leave South Africa in its struggle against apartheid. He was tragically killed in an automobile accident on 15 April 1992, while returning to Pretoria.