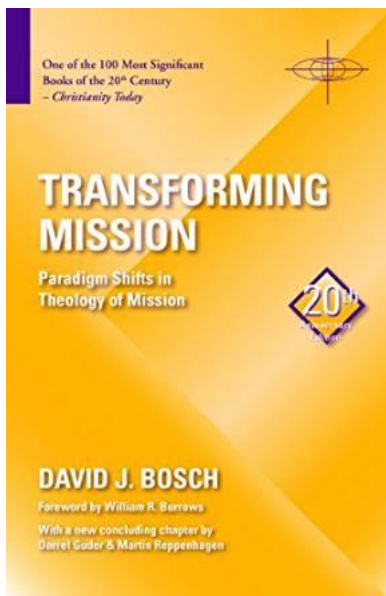


David J. Bosch



Review

Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission

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Reviewed by

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This book seeks to explore the global dimensions of the Christian faith and mission, to invite to dialogue with diverse cultures and religious traditions, and to serve the cause of reconciliation and peace.



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David Jacobus Bosch was an influential missiologist and theologian and a member of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa (NGK) as well. He taught from 1971 missiology at the University of South Africa and served as dean of the Faculty of Theology in 1974-1977 and also in 1981-1987. He was general secretary of the Southern African Missiological Society from its founding in 1968 and editor of its journal *Missionalia* from its beginning in 1973.

The book "*Transforming Mission*" was edited for the first time in 1991. On April 15, 1992, just one year after, David J. Bosch died in an automobile accident in South Africa. At the age of 62, being a preeminent protestant missiologist, his contribution and influence in mission studies were globally immense. When "*Transforming Mission*" first appeared, it was received with critical acclaim, recognized as a monumental magisterial work and a superb teaching tool. It was selected, one of the Fifteen Outstanding Books of 1991 for "*Mission Studies*", by the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*.

William R. Burrows, the author of "Preface to the 20th Anniversary Edition", claims, "*I formed what may have been one of the first international friendships born with new technology as the midwife before we met each other on a rainy spring day in 1991*". In the two years before "*Transforming Mission*" was published, before email had become common, we were constantly faxing one other with questions, suggestions for revisions, criticisms of the text, and so forth.

The reason why "*Transforming Mission*" has been translated into so many languages (approx. 15 languages) and is now being brought out in an anniversary edition is precisely because David Bosch leads us so skillfully through the theological underbrush to an oasis in which God is free to be God. "*Transforming Mission*" recovers the universal horizon of God luring us beyond ourselves and becomes, paradoxically, an

invitation to *particularize* our theology, missiology, ecclesiology, and spirituality.

This book has three parts. In the first part, "*New Testament Models of Mission*", the author debates on the New Testament as a Missionary Document: "*Matthew: Mission as Disciple-Making, Luke-Acts: Practicing Forgiveness and Solidarity with the Poor, Mission in Paul- Invitation to Join the Eschatological Community*". The second part called, "*Historical paradigm of Mission*", is about *Paradigm changes in Missiology, The Missionary Paradigm of the Eastern Church, The Medieval Roman Catholic Missionary Paradigm, The Missionary Paradigm of the Protestant Reformation, Mission in the wake of the Enlightenment*. Moreover, finally, the third part, "*Toward a Relevant Missiology*", with "*The Emergence of a Postmodern Paradigm, Mission in a Time of Testing, Elements of an Emerging Ecumenical Missionary Paradigm, Mission in Many Modes*".

Into the first part of the book the author's debate about mission and missiology, the term "mission" presupposes a sender, a person or persons sent by the sender, those to whom one is sent, and an assignment (p. 22). The contemporary crisis, as far as the mission is concerned, manifests itself in three areas: the *foundation*, the *motives* and *aim*, and the *nature* of the mission (p. 24).

The author claims: "*Mission includes evangelism as one of its essential dimensions. Evangelism is the proclamation of salvation in Christ to those who do not believe in him, calling them to repentance and conversion, announcing forgiveness of sin, and inviting them to become living members of Christ's earthly community and to begin a life of service to others in the power of the Holy Spirit*" (p. 30). A significant highlight is the actuality of mission in the New and Old Testament. This book is a handy tool for every missionary, who want to know much more about

the new challenges from contemporary society, like globalism, materialism, and secularism.

Ben Meyer, the theologian and scholar of religion, who studied with the Jesuits, interprets: *"Christianity had never been more itself, more consistent with Jesus and more evidently en route to its future, than in the launching of the world mission"* (p. 32).

An interesting approach is also the subchapter *"Mission from the Perspective of Easter"* where David Bosch speaks about Easter like the most important celebration: *"For the disciples of Jesus the Easter experience was pivotal. They interpreted the cross as the end of the old world and the resurrection of Jesus as the irruption of the new. The resurrection was ultimately viewed as the vindication of Jesus as putting a seal of approval on the practice of Jesus. It is only because of Easter that our gospels were written. Without Easter, they make no sense. Even more particularly, they were written from the perspective of Easter; the glow of that experience permeates all the gospels not only the fourth"* (p. 51).

Another important point in the first part is the gospel of Matthew and the actuality of mission in our difficult times, because *"Matthew desires his community no longer to regard itself as a sectarian group but boldly and consciously as the church of Christ (he is the only evangelist who uses the word ekklesia, "church", and precisely therefore as the "true Israel" " as the author says (p. 67). "Disciple" is far more central in Matthew than in the other synoptic gospels. The term occurs seventy-three times in Matthew, compared to forty-six times in Mark and only thirty-seven times in Luke.*

"The notion of the first disciples as prototypes for the later church manifests itself in many forms. The members of Matthew's community, too, are the ones who expect God's reign. They too are the salt of the earth and the light of the world" (p. 79).

The aim of the last chapters from the first part of the book is to learn much more about the Luke and Acts and to apply the forgiveness, solidarity, and tolerance with the poor people in our days, which is a great mission for the Church. The author is trying to make the gentle difference between Gospel and Acts: *"The principal manner in which Luke attempts to articulate his theology of mission is by writing not only one book but two. Most scholars agree that the writing of the Book of Acts was not an afterthought but that, from the outset, Luke intended to write two volumes. This emerges clearly when we look at the overall structure of the two writings. Luke regards Jesus' mission as universal in intent but incomplete in execution"* (p. 91).

The chapter is very complex and rich in biblical terms, and the author gives prominence to the Greek translation of many words, for example: *"repentance-metanoia, sinners-hamartoloi, forgiveness-aphesis"* (p. 104).

The second part of the book is an instrument for every missionary because the author writes: *"about the meaning of mission for our own time, keeping in mind that the present era is fundamentally different from the period in which Matthew, Luke, and Paul wrote their gospels and letters for the first and second generations of Christians"* (p. 165). The point is just that the Christian church in general and the Christian mission, in particular, are today confronted with issues they have never dreamed of and are crying out for responses that are both relevant to times and in harmony with the essence of Christian faith.

Another important chapter in the second part of the book is: *"The Medieval Roman Catholic Missionary Paradigm"* where the author tries to emphasize the differences between The Church from the East and The Church from the West. For example, the language was Latin and then Greek starting with the year 1054.

Into the final part, the author speaks about the contemporary mission and her challenges and practice of mission in the postmodern era. *"The thesis of this study is that, in the field of religion, a paradigm shift always means both continuity and change, both faithfulness to the past and boldness to engage the future, both constancy and contingency, both tradition and transformation"* (p. 314).

An interesting approach is the subchapter *"Mission as Missio dei"* which preceding centuries was understood in a variety of ways, but in the fundamental message remain Gods mission. *"Mission has its origin in the heart of God. God is a fountain of sending love. This is the deepest source of mission. It is impossible to penetrate deeper still; there is mission because God loves people"* (p. 335).

The reaction of church and mission to the challenge of modernism was very generally put twofold. The first reaction in both Catholic and Protestant circles was for people to continue to define salvation in traditional terms, ignoring, as it were, the challenges of the Enlightenment, and proceeding as if nothing had changed and the second reaction was to attempt to take the challenges of modernism seriously, also with respect to its understanding of salvation.

In the vision of the author, the *mission* remains primary, *evangelism* secondary. One reason for such a *"synchronizing"* of mission and evangelism lies in the fact that the distinction between work among *"not yet Christians"* (*"mission"*) and *"no longer Christians"* (*"evangelism"*) is increasingly breaking down; there are now also *"not yet Christians"* (people who are not only alienated from the church but who have never had any link whatsoever with it) in the West, just as there are *"no longer Christians"* (people who were once Christians but have become alienated from the church) in the traditional *"mission"* territories (p. 350).

Another interesting subject is about *mission and liberation*, a new perspective of worldview and also the term *inculturation* that the author claims: "*is a challenge for mission*" (p. 371). The theology of liberation is theology "*from below*" (p. 371). Inculturation represents a *second* important model of contextualizing theology and is, like *liberation theology*, of recent origin even though it is not without precedent in Christian history. *Inculturation* is one of the patterns in which the pluriform character of contemporary Christianity manifests itself (p. 380). *Inculturation* also has a *critical* dimension. The faith and its cultural expression even if it is neither possible nor prudent to dislodge the one from the other are never entirely coterminous. *Inculturation* does not mean that culture is to be destroyed and something new built up on its ruins; neither, however, does it suggest that a particular culture is mere to be endorsed in its present form (p. 386).

The author is observing on three models just outlined from the perspective of a postmodern missionary paradigm: *to accept the coexistence of different faiths, commitment, dialogue (and, for that matter, mission)* (p. 409).

Bosch's *Transforming Mission* is an example of the integrative character of mission as a discipline of research and teaching, but as the reception of the book since 1991 demonstrates, it is more than an example. Bosch's way of going about this integrative discipline has substantially refined its scope and practice by broadening and deepening the understanding of mission and its importance for the entire enterprise of Christian theology (p. 453).

Mission can be interpreted in more than one way, which might be difficult to capture in other languages. Of course, there are a lot of rich terms and essential notions of theology in the book of David J. Bosch, but I recall the most significant percepts from my vision.

Therefore I would like to recommend the book *Transforming Mission* to everyone who wishes to learn about mission and evangelism in the context of our contemporary life.