"Mission as …." must we choose?

A dialogue with Bosch, Bevans & Schroeder and Schreiter in the South African context[1]

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Abstract

This paper explores three approaches to the theology of mission that use the phrase "mission as …" to descr be the basic nature of (or indicate the diversity within) the encompassing mission of God. The views analysed and compared in the paper are mainly those of Bosch (1980, 1991), Bevans & Schroeder (2004) and Schreiter (1992, 1997, 1998). In dialogue with these scholars the paper develops a praxis approach to mission as transformative encounters, which holds together seven dimensions of mission in creative tension.

Keywords: Missiology, multidimensional mission, missio Dei, pastoral circle, praxis cycle

Introduction

This paper is an exploration of the assumptions behind - and the implications of - "mission as" language in missiology. I compare three designs in this regard: a) David Bosch's proposal of an "emerging, ecumenical, postmodern" paradigm of mission that has 13 "elements"; b) Bevans and Schroeder's proposal of "mission as prophetic dialogue" with its six "essential components" of the "single but complex and articulated reality" of God's mission; c) Robert Schreiter and Ross Langmead's proposal of "mission as reconciliation".

1. Understanding David Bosch

1.1. Mission as (multi)dimensional

1.1.1. *Witness to the World* (1980)

To my knowledge, David Bosch first developed his view of "mission as" in *Witness to the World* (Bosch 1980). I call this a "dimensional"

[1] This paper was presented at a seminar on "Mission as prophetic dialogue: An encounter with the author(s) of the term" at the University of South Africa on 16 April 2010. Prof Roger Schroeder, the co-author of *Constants in context* (Bevans & Schroeder 2004) in which "mission as prophetic dialogue" is proposed, was present at the seminar and also presented a paper.

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understanding of mission, because Bosch was insistent that we should not see God's one mission as consisting of different *components* that need to be "held in balance" but as a wide variety of *dimensions* that are delicately and integrally related to each other and that need to be held in "creative tension." In *Witness to the World* (1980:228) he used the image of a prism, which refracts white light into the colours of the rainbow, to illustrate the integral unity of God's one mission as well as the genuine differences between its dimensions. Why he insisted that we should not speak of "parts" or "components" of mission (like "evangelism *plus* social action", John Stott 1975) that need to be "kept in balance" was that such strategies always led to fruitless priority battles. Instead, he proposed that we speak of the many *dimensions* of mission that need to be *held in creative tension* with each other. To use the metaphor of a scale (from which the term "balance" is derived) implies inherently unconnected (or opposing) entities that need to be weighed up "against" each other. For Bosch that was a fatal misunderstanding of mission. The various dimensions of mission are all intrinsically and inseparably connected to each other (like the colours of the rainbow) within God's one mission, and they therefore need to be held in tension with each other within a specific context: "Evangelism is something more than a mere component of mission and mission is something more dynamic than the sum total of evangelism and social action" (1980:16). Evangelism is "an essential dimension of mission" (1980:18), and mission is the church crossing frontiers. Mission "describes the total task which God has set the church for the salvation of the world" (1980:17). In *Witness to the World* Bosch defined evangelism as the core of mission, "the centre of the all-embracing mandate of God to the church" (1980:18, quoting Hans Bürki), but never to be separated from all the other dimensions of God's inclusive mission, which he described as follows:

> Mission takes place where the Church, in her total involvement with the world and the comprehensiveness of her message, bears her testimony in word and deed in the form of a servant, with reference to unbelief, exploitation, discrimination and violence, but also with reference to salvation, healing, liberation, reconciliation and righteousness (1980:18).

1.1.2. The impact of *Witness to the World*

Those of us who were privileged to work with David Bosch in the Department of Missiology at Unisa during the 1980s found this dimensional approach to mission very helpful and, as a department, we developed an undergraduate missiology curriculum to express this vision. With time we realized that the only way to embody this "dimensional" approach to mission, was to use the expression "Mission as …". We designed modules with titles like Mission as evangelism and service, Mission as dialogue,

Mission as liberation, Mission as African initiative, etc. It expressed the conviction that, whereas God's mission is a wide and encompassing endeavour, we are now, here, focusing on mission as evangelism or liberation, but never in isolation from (or in opposition to) the other dimensions of mission.

When Bosch put forward this "dimensional" view of mission in the late 1970s, we were still stuck deep in apartheid, and it helped us to counter the racist distinction between evangelism and mission that was common in the Dutch Reformed tradition in South Africa, namely that mission is what white Christians do among black people, and evangelism is what they do among lapsed white Christians. A DRC congregation would have a mission committee, which was the "department of black affairs" and dealt with relations to the black congregation(s) sometimes in the same town or city and sometimes at a distance in a "homeland" or a neighbouring country usually with the view to giving them money to pay their minister or erect a church building. The "evangelism committee", on the other hand, would attempt to draw "backsliding" members back to the church. Bosch's design helped us to get away from this habit of distinguishing evangelism and mission by the (racially defined) recipients of these respective enterprises.

Internationally, the major impact of Bosch's missiological design was to strengthen the hands of the missiologists who were working to overcome the polarization between "evangelicals" (who made evangelism the essence of mission and relegated all else into second-level auxiliary activities) and "ecumenicals" (who concentrated on the "horizontal" aspects of mission like overcoming economic injustice, political oppression, sexism and racism). It also helped us to get rid of the last vestiges of the romantic colonial idea that mission is only what you do far away, across the waters, among "benighted heathens", while evangelism is what you do among "civilized" post-Christian people. In this sense it is not surprising that the growing "missional church" movement in the USA and SA refer to David Bosch, along with Lesslie Newbigin, as the two key missiologists who helped them develop a new missiology for the global North (cf Keifert 2006:18).

1.1.3. *Transforming mission* (1991)

1.1.3.1. Multidimensional mission

In *Transforming mission*, Bosch (1991:368-510) stayed with his dimensional approach to mission and developed it further. He writes: "Our mission must be multidimensional in order to be credible and faithful to its origins and character" (Bosch 1991:512). However, he does not use "dimension" as the key concept; instead he speaks of the: "Elements of an emerging ecumenical missionary paradigm" (heading of Chapter 12). But

his "dimensional" approach remains intact when he issues the following "warning" before discussing the 13 elements:

> The elements discussed below should by no means be seen as so many distinct and isolated components of a new model; they are all intimately interrelated. This means that in discussing a specific element each other element is always somewhere in the background. The emphasis throughout should therefore be on the wholeness and indivisibility of the paradigm, rather than on its separated ingredients. As we focus our torchlight on one element at a time, all the other elements will also be present and visible just outside the centre of the beam of light (Bosch 1991:368)

It is interesting that he once more uses a light metaphor. In *Witness to the World* the different colours were inherent in the light and the prism merely revealed (or refracted) them, whereas in TM it is Bosch as theologian who shines his torchlight on his newly constructed paradigm with its 13 differentiated elements. This probably signals a shift in Bosch's theological method from a more essentialist to a more constructivist epistemology, in line with Bosch's declared move to break with modernism and develop a postmodern paradigm of mission.[3] The influence of Danie Nel (1988), one of Bosch's doctoral students, is evident here. Nel proposed in his thesis that missiology should adopt "critical hermeneutics" as its preferred approach, and Bosch (1991:24) concurred. He described his epistemology as one that encouraged dialogue between various Christian self-definitions, through which those self-definitions are extended, criticized, or challenged:

> It assumes that there is no such thing as an objective reality 'out there,' which now needs to be understood and interpreted. Rather, reality is *intersubjective*; it is always *interpreted* reality and this interpretation is profoundly affected by our self-definitions (Bosch 1991:24, italics in original).

This epistemology is not only inherently relational but by the same token also inherently provisional and "in process", having the ability to live with paradox:

> Such language ["We appreciate this tension, and do not attempt to resolve it" - JNJK] boils down to an admission that we do not have all the answers and are prepared to live within the framework of penultimate knowledge, that we regard our involvement in dialogue and mission as an adventure, are prepared to take risks, and are anticipating surprises as the Spirit guides us into fuller understanding (Bosch 1991d:489).

[3] After summarizing the key features of modernity (Bosch 1991:342-345), Bosch explains how modernist rationality needs to be "expanded" in order to overcome its limitations (1991:351-362).

The "bold humility" or "creative tension" inherent in this approach underlies Bosch's "multidimensional" paradigm. In chapter 12 he traces the contours of Christian mission by identifying 13 "elements" of mission, all of them described in terms of "mission as":

Mission as:	The church-with-others
	Missio Dei
	Mediating salvation
	The quest for justice
	Evangelism
	Contextualization
	Liberation
	Inculturation
	Common witness
	Ministry by the whole people of God
	Witness to people of other living faiths
	Theology
	Action in hope

Let me just make two comments about these 13 elements:

1.1.3.2. Starting with the church

It is significant where the list starts, namely with the *church*, and Bosch (1991:168) explains that the first section is longer than the following ones, mainly because all the issues that will emerge in subsequent sections are, in one sense or another, already present here. Once we have discussed the place of the church in mission, we can be briefer on the other elements of the emerging paradigm.

Bosch starts with the church, to show that he accepts the schema God-church-world, rather than God-world-church, the radical view of the *missio Dei* proposed by Hoekendijk and others (Bosch 1991:381-388). In all humility and provisionality, the church is a primary agent of God's mission and therefore the identity or "inner life" of the church is an essential part of its life in mission.

1.1.3.3. Creative tension

Throughout his treatment of the 13 elements, Bosch interacts with the views that he discusses in an inclusive and reconciliatory way. He regularly uses the term "creative tension" to express this. For example, in his discussion of "already" and "not yet" in the section "Action in hope" (element 13), he recommends an eschatology "that holds in creative and redemptive tension the already and the not yet" (:508). In his discussion of the church-with-others (element 1) he devotes a section of 9 pages (with the heading

"Creative tension") to the overcoming of the evangelical-ecumenical polarization in missiology. In a sentence that is emblematic of his postmodern paradigm (and in fact of his whole life) he suggests that we should find ways to "integrate the two visions in such a way that the tension becomes creative rather than destructive", but he adds, with more than a tinge of sadness: "Such an integration is seldom achieved". What applies to the two visions he speaks about here also applies to the thirteen elements of his paradigm as a whole: they should all be held in a creative rather than destructive tension. He says at the end of Chapter 11: "A crucial notion in this regard will be that of creative tension: it is only *within the force field of apparent opposites* that we shall begin to approximate a way of theologizing for our own time in a meaningful way" (1991:367). It is important to note that Bosch admits that there is tension; he does not try to create a superficial harmonization between the "opposing" elements in the "force field of apparent opposites", but he shows a way of holding them together. I would say that such a "holding together" is an act of love (ignoring nobody and willing only good for everyone, even your enemies), an act of justice (not excluding, humiliating or oppressing anyone; listening to them carefully), an act of faith (trusting the bona fides of the others), and an act of hope (not despairing of anyone or writing them off).[4]

1.1.3.4. If everything is mission…

In the last chapter of *Transforming mission* (c.13), entitled "Mission in many modes", in a kind of recapitulation of the 13 elements he surveyed in Chapter 12, Bosch lists 11 dimensions of mission: "Mission is a multifaceted ministry, in respect of witness, service, justice, healing, reconciliation, liberation, peace, evangelism, fellowship, church planting, contextualization, and much more" (:512). In the process he consciously runs the risk of being accused by Walter Freytag of "panmissionism" or of falling into Stephen Neills' trap ("If everything is mission, nothing is mission"). He contends that "it remains extraordinarily difficult to determine what mission is" (Bosch 1991:511). Moving beyond the well-known ecumenical schema of *kerygma, koinonia, diakonia* and *leitourgia*, he argues that "we need a more radical and comprehensive hermeneutic of mission" which may mean that we could "move close to viewing everything as mission" (:512). Bosch believes that this is a risk we need to take, rather than to succumb once again to some form of reductionism: " … even the attempt to list some dimensions of mission is fraught with danger, because it again suggests that we can define what is infinite" (:512). This is quite a

[4] I am not hereby suggesting that Bosch's approach was faultless. I point out below that he did omit a number of crucial dimensions of mission and that he failed to listen adequately to "all God's people" (as was his declared intention). I contend, however, that the approach which he modeled in *Transforming Mission* deserves serious consideration.

distance away from his view in *Witness to the World* (Bosch 1980) of evangelism as the core or centre of mission, and from his view there that using mission too widely had an "inflationary" effect, so that "mission" became "the flag under which practically every ecclesiastical (and sometimes every generally human) activity is sailing" (Bosch 1979:12). Whereas he quoted Neill and Freytag (and even Donald McGavran) with some agreement in 1980, that was no longer the case in 1991.

1.1.3.5. Theology and practice of mission

It is significant, however, that Bosch didn't conclude *Transforming mission* on this note. He concludes with a brief survey of "Faces of the church-in-mission" in which he looks at six "Christological salvific events" (:518) that form the theological focus of a number of denominational traditions in the Christian movement: Incarnation, cross, resurrection, ascension, Pentecost, parousia. He explains the need for this survey by saying that it will "give a profile" to what multidimensional mission entails (:512). Bosch perhaps realized that the multidimensional, infinite, undefinable mission of God as set out in Chapter 12 is too vague and encompassing to wrap your hands around, too complex to grasp and put in motion, and that one therefore needs a set of "handles" to grasp it in order to implement it. And yet that inspiring closing section of *Transforming mission* does not really mediate between the 13 elements of his postmodern paradigm and actual mission practice.

This brings us to a crucial question regarding Bosch's post-modern paradigm: How can a mere mortal, a mere congregation, or even a mere denomination, hold all of this together and put all of it into practice? It is a magnificent and inspiring vision, but in terms of the sub-title of the book this is (only) about the theology of mission, not about the full-rounded praxis of mission. The title, *Transforming mission*, expresses the intention that mission, that is, the practice of mission, should be transformed, and that mission should actually transform people and societies; and yet the book addresses that concern only incidentally; it is mainly about *theologies* of mission. So how are these ideas and insights to be mediated to congregations and missionaries so that they may be put into practice?

In principle one could say that Bosch intended his book to be used as a mirror in which churches, organisations and individuals could self-critically examine their mission praxis (theory and practice) and could ask how their actions, attitudes and policies could be made to embody these ideas more clearly and impactfully. But now some questions:

- Could a congregation or church legitimately raise a *strategic* concern and say that, for practical reasons, it only practises one or two of the 13 elements of mission, even though the others are all there, in the background, "just outside the centre of the beam of light"?

- Could an individual or church legitimately raise a *spiritual* argument and claim that its particular charisma lies in the exercise of one or two of these elements, leaving the rest of the elements to other believers and churches?
- Could a church or group legitimately raise a *contextual* concern that the situation in their country at a particular time justifies a clear focus on one or two of the elements at the expense of the others, for a specific *kairos* period, even though those other elements are not devalued or rejected?
- Could a church or group legitimately raise a *doctrinal* question about the applicability of some of the 13 elements to its own faith community and justify its concentration on only some of the 13 elements of mission?

It seems to me that *Transforming mission* does not answer these questions simply or directly with a yes or no. It addresses them indirectly by saying: Watch it! Beware of every form of reductionism! Strive to embody *all* of God's mission as faithfully as possible, as small or limited as you may be! Perhaps this is why Bosch also called his paradigm "ecumenical". He might have called it "catholic", but that word is often misunderstood. It certainly reveals Bosch's high ecclesiology. What irritated him most was every form of reductionism or sectarian tendency, probably due to his negative experience as a Christian growing up with the fatal compromise between Afrikaner nationalism and Reformed Biblicism or pietism.

To me this approach is a major contribution to the practice of missiology, and yet questions remain: Is it primarily ideas that have the power to transform situations? Are these *ideas* to be uniformly implemented in all contexts, regardless of personal, spiritual, social, cultural, economic and political factors? More fundamentally: How is mission *theology* related to mission practice in principle? This could be called a meta-theoretical question: What is the theory behind these theories? How does all of this hang together? I ask these questions because there are some implicit assumptions in *Transforming mission* about the relationship between theory and practice, but Bosch did not bring these assumptions to the surface or reflect on them systematically in a satisfactory way.[5]

To answer these questions we need a theory about the interrelationship between missiological ideas and mission agencies, contexts, spiritualities, and practices. We need a pastoral circle or a praxis cycle. Perhaps I could put it like this: *Transforming mission* has spread out before us the "horizontal" width of God's multifaceted and multidimensional mission. However, for the sake of the embodiment of these theological reflections in

[5] In a recent publication (Kritzinger & Saayman 2011:147-167; 182-189), there is some reflection on the meta-theoretical dimensions of Bosch's missiological method.

particular contexts, we also need to reflect on the "vertical" relationship between a specific theological dimension of mission (such as "mission as evangelism") and the people, contexts, spiritualities and practices in which they get embodied. I return to this in the second half of my paper.

1.1.3.6. Omissions?

What important dimensions of mission did Bosch leave out of his multidimensional paradigm? There are commentators who have criticised him for leaving out issues such as earthkeeping (ecology), reconciliation, and Pentecostalism. It must be admitted that these are important dimensions of God's mission that should be part of our mission agenda today, and that Bosch did not devote a separate section to each of these. At the same time it should be pointed out, in all fairness, that Bosch did touch on these issues, even though he did not develop them in detail.

For example, when discussing the need to overcome the "subject-object scheme" of modernity (1991:355), he refers to the *ecological crisis* and calls for a basic reorientation: "One should, again, see oneself as a child of Mother Earth and as sister and brother to other human beings. One should think holistically rather than analytically, emphasize togetherness rather than distance, break through the dualism of mind and body, subject and object, and emphasize 'symbiosis'".

Similarly, when discussing the need to expand our rationality to overcome the rationalist legacy of modernity, he refers to the *Pentecostal* movement as a "novel and virile version of Christianity" that has grown "to become the largest single category in Protestantism" (1991:352).

Concerning *reconciliation*, one could say that Bosch's whole approach in *Transforming mission* was an act of reconciliation, in the way that he made connections and built bridges between people, theologies, and churches, in addition to the fact that his whole adult life was dedicated to reconciliation in South Africa.[6] But it is true that he did not dedicate a separate section in *Transforming mission* to "Mission as reconciliation". However, it is only if one misunderstood Bosch's missiological method and intentions altogether that one would regard these omissions as disqualifying his multidimensional approach to mission as such. By using the words "and much more" at the end of his list of 11 mission dimensions (Bosch 1991:512), he was indicating that his list was exemplary and not exhaustive. However, there is a critique of *Transforming mission* that refers to omissions of another order. It points out that Bosch consulted mainly literature from the global North, thereby ignoring or downplaying the views

[6] One only needs to mention Bosch's role in PACLA (1976), SACLA (1979), the National Initiative for Reconciliation (NIR), and in numerous intercultural (or interracial) discussion groups in which he was involved to realise that reconciliation was one of the controlling "passions" of his public life (see Kritzinger & Saayman 2011:97-101; 177-179).

of many creative theologians from the "Third World" or global South (see e.g., Sugden 1996; Verstraelen 1996). Perhaps it is inevitable if one is working to overcome a dominant paradigm that one is (still) to some extent dominated by it, in the sense that it determines the agenda of the debate. When Bosch explains his use of Hans Küng's paradigm shifts, he remarks that "people who, by and large, still operate within the old paradigm may already embody significant elements of the new" (Bosch 1991:186). He did not foresee the shift from a modern to a postmodern paradigm in missiology as abrupt (:188). In theology, paradigms function differently than in the natural sciences; in theology old and new paradigms often exist side by side, since old paradigms seldom disappear completely (:186). The "epistemological priority" of the Scriptures also exert a stabilising influence on paradigm shifts, providing a "point of orientation" in the midst of cultural and historical flux (:187). At the same time the Christian church should serve as an "international hermeneutical community" in which theologians from different cultures and theological traditions "challenge one another's cultural, social, and ideological biases" (:187).

Acknowledging, then, that Bosch was still part of the (late) modern paradigm, while looking beyond it and fostering a conscious departure from it, it is a pity that he did not interact with more interlocutors from the global South, particularly postcolonial thinkers. It is up to the missiologists who wish to further develop Bosch's multidimensional approach to broaden and deepen this debate.

While supporting Bosch's basic dimensional approach to the theology of mission, I believe it is necessary to develop it in at least three ways. Firstly, we need to admit that he did not give an exhaustive picture of all the important dimensions of mission in this "post-modern" or post-colonial era. We also need to speak of Mission as healing, as reconciliation, as earthkeeping, as development, etc., as pointed out already. In terms of a "dimensional" understanding, Christian mission is *not only* reconciliation or earthkeeping or liberation; it encompasses this broad spectrum of activities, intimately linked to each other, and constantly interacting with each other, with no inherent priority assigned to any of these dimensions since all are equally valid and indispensable to the project as a whole.

Secondly, since this comprehensiveness can be overwhelming and lead to a sense of paralysis it is important to qualify it in two ways: a) Not every person or group has the same charisma or abilities, and therefore it is to be expected that some Christians will concentrate on one or two of these dimensions at the expense of others, on the basis of natural or spiritual giftedness. That is acceptable and understandable, as long as the other dimensions of mission are not rejected or devalued; b) Not every context in which mission takes place faces the same challenges. In a specific context one or more of these dimensions of mission may stand out as more

important than the others, as a result of the unique challenges and opportunities of that particular place and time. It may be that mission as liberation, as evangelism, or as earthkeeping stands out as the demand of the hour, and that will be acceptable, provided the other dimensions are not rejected or devalued; and provided all the dimensions are not somehow subsumed under one dimension.

Thirdly, the theology of mission needs to be more directly and methodologically related to the actual practice of mission in various contexts. The implicitly "idealist" approach underlying Bosch's missiology is that ideas or theories influence events and actions, rather than the other way around. We need a theological model that highlights the constant interplay between the theory and practice of mission (see below).

1.2. Mission as God's mission

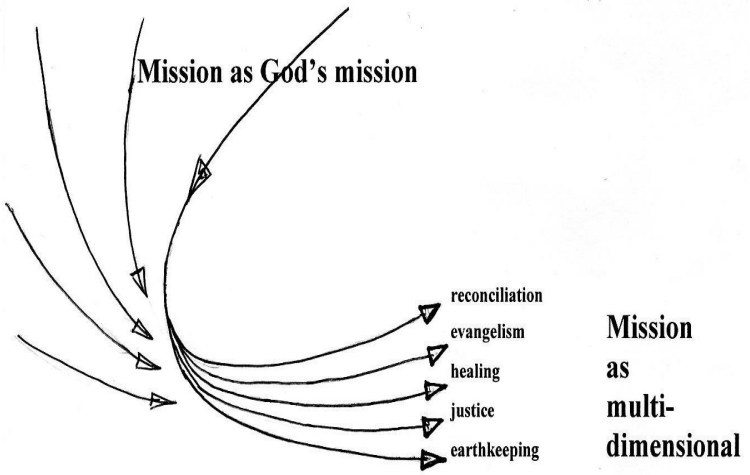
The second fundamental assumption of Bosch's theology of mission that I want to highlight is that the one multi-dimensional mission is *God's* mission, a divine initiative, therefore, rooted in the Trinity. The church's mission (or missions) is therefore human participation in God's work on earth. The following diagram expresses these two basic ideas of Bosch's theology of mission: a) Mission as multidimensional, and b) Mission as *missio Dei.* The five dimensions of mission included in the diagram are not exhaustive, but merely a sample selection.Philip Wickeri (2010) has recently delivered a telling critique of the *missio Dei* concept. He suggests that it has outlived its usefulness and therefore entitled his article "The end of *missio Dei*". It isn't possible to respond here to all the aspects of Wickeri's thought-provoking essay, but it is necessary to point out that his critique applies only partly to Bosch's understanding of *missio Dei*. Wickeri's main objections to *missio Dei* is that it is a) an abstract and "all-embracing" concept (Wickeri 2010:28; 42), the "last grand narrative of the missionary movement" (:41), which has dominated ecumenical missiology for decades and has precluded other approaches to mission practice (:28); b) that it represents an elite understanding of mission (:36; 41), which ignores or looks down on "popular religion" (what people are doing); c) it implies a universal view of world history (:29), which played a negative role in justifying colonial and imperialistic projects in the past; d) it is a vague concept that refers to too many things, which makes it "dogmatically unclear" (:41); e) it overemphasizes what God does at the expense of what believers do, thus creating paralysis or indifference; f) it leads to a superficial harmonization of the diversity found in the Bible (:41). What Wickeri poses as an alternative to *missio Dei* is an understanding of mission that focuses on actual practices, rather than ideas. Such an approach will be characterised by an emphasis on particular, concrete, local encounters and therefore on presence and listening.

The question is why such an approach necessarily requires of us to jettison the *missio Dei* concept. Wickeri affirms that Christians are "always called to mission" (:43), but on what basis can he say that without invoking some kind of theological "grand narrative"? His critique of *missio Dei* in many ways does not apply to *Transforming mission*, since Bosch consistently affirms the delicate and paradoxical interplay between God's salvific initiative and human participation in it. Where Wickeri is correct is in insisting that we need more than abstract theological concepts of mission; we need an approach that overcomes the dichotomy between concepts and practices. I return to this in my final section.

2. Understanding Bevans and Schroeder (2004)

2.1. The structure and method of the book

In their book *Constants in context*, Bevans and Schroeder (2004:1) explicitly acknowledge the influence and importance of *Transforming mission,* indicating that their book does not intend to belittle or replace it. In some ways it is modelled on *Transforming mission*, and in other ways it deliberately goes beyond it. I cannot do justice to every aspect of this well-structured and truly impressive book; I focus only on their use of "dimensional" language in part III, that is, chapters 9-12. The macro-structure of the book, which closely resembles the structure of *Transforming mission*, looks like this:



Part I. Constants in context: Biblical and theological foundations (c.1-2)

Part II Constants in context: Historical models of mission (c.3-8)

Part III Constants in context: A theology of mission for today (c.9-12).

The four chapters comprising Part III are the following:

C.9 Mission as participation in the mission of the triune God (Missio Dei)

C.10 Mission as liberating service to the Reign of God

C.11 Mission as proclamation of Jesus Christ as universal Saviour

C.12 Mission as prophetic dialogue

Chapter 12 presents a *synthesis* of the three "strains of theological thought that grounded various approaches to mission" in the last quarter of the twentieth century. The model of mission that they propose, namely mission as prophetic dialogue, is one that "both synthesizes and deepens" these three strains and "gives them new direction" (2004:281). The "dialogue" aspect represents the faithfulness and relevance to *context*, while the "prophetic" aspect embodies faithfulness to the six theological *constants* of the Christian tradition.

2.2. From 13 "dimensions" to 6 "components"

This model (like that of Bosch) endorses a multidimensional or "stereophonic" understanding of mission, "involving a number of elements, all of which are integral to the 'evangelizing mission of the church'" (2004:350). Bevans & Schroeder then proceed to identify a set of six "essential components of God's mission in which the church is called to share" (2004:351) and which compare as follows with Bosch's 13 elements of mission:

Bevans & Schroeder		Bosch
Components	**Constants**	**Elements**
Witness and proclamation		Mission as evangelism, Mission as common witness
Liturgy, prayer and contemplation	Ecclesiology	Mission as the church-with-others
Commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation		Mission as the search for justice Mission as liberation
The practice of interreligious dialogue		Mission as witness to people of other living faiths
Efforts of inculturation	Culture	Mission as inculturation Mission as contextualisation
The ministry of reconciliation		
		Mission as missio Dei
	Salvation	Mission as mediating salvation
		Mission as ministry by the whole people of God
		Mission as theology
	Eschatology	Mission as action in hope

There isn't an exact correspondence in each row of the table but there are deep similarities. It must be pointed out that the 13 elements of Bosch's paradigm are not all at the same level of abstraction and that some of them consciously overlap. To give just one example, Bosch's view of a "realising" eschatology, embodying a creative tension between the already and the not yet, affects and shapes all the other dimensions of his paradigm. Some of the concepts of Bosch are a bit more general (not to say abstract) and those of Bevans & Schroeder a bit more concrete, closer to the actual practice of mission. Bevans & Schroeder (2004:351) do not claim that these are the only dimensions of mission, but that these six components provide a synthesis that "tries to take into account both the diversity of the elements proposed and their similarity to one another". It is an attempt to focus the wide variety of dimensions indicated by Bosch and to make them manageable and do-able "on the ground". It is also important to point out that a number of Bosch's dimensions that are not picked up by Bevans and Schroeder in their 6 "components" of prophetic dialogue are already included among their six "constants", so that they do play a role throughout their book.

How should one evaluate this shift from Bosch's 13 "elements" to the six "essential components" of God's mission (Bevans & Schroeder)? Is it a dangerous reductionism (in Bosch's terms) or a helpful concentration and focusing, which could make Bosch's encompassing missionary vision easier

to embody and implement? These two questions are not the only alternatives. The approach of Bevans & Schroeder need not be either better or worse than that of Bosch; it could simply be different - an alternative "take" on the present challenges facing Christian communities in their respective contexts, in the light of the 2000 year history of the Christian movement.

2.3. Three types of theology

The three types of theology identified by Justo Gonzalez (Types A, B, and C) are used perhaps most helpfully in Part 3 of the book, where Chapters 9 to 11 each closely (but not exactly) resemble one of the three types:

C.9 Mission as participation in the mission of the triune God (*Missio Dei*) - Types B & C

C.10 Mission as liberating service to the Reign of God - Type C

C.11 Mission as proclamation of Jesus Christ as universal Saviour - Type A

In surveying the occurrence of these theologies in past history (chapters 3-8) it is sometimes more difficult to distinguish these trends and name the differences. It is striking that in Chapter 5 the three types of theology are mentioned in only one paragraph (2004:167f) and a diagram (:165). If these types had been referred to while the different "models" (case studies) of mission in that period were being explained, it would have made the typology more helpful and would have integrated it more organically into the flow of thought. Nevertheless, in the late twentieth century (chapters 9-11) the three theological trends were clearly evident, each with a set of documents, theologians and movements supporting it, and a whole chapter is dedicated to each. In Chapter 12 the authors then attempt a "synthesis" between these three "strains" of theological thought in their proposal of mission as prophetic dialogue.

2.4. Synthesis or "creative tension"?

Bevans & Schroeder (2004:358) make a statement that sounds a lot like that of Bosch in *Witness to the World* (Bosch 1980:18f) on evangelism as the core of mission:

> The proclamation of the person and message of Jesus Christ, or at least the burning intention to do so is what ultimately makes mission *mission*. Although the other elements that we discuss in this chapter are equally *constitutive* of the church's participation in God's mission, without the practice or intention of introducing others into a relation with God through and in Jesus, the church's missionary activity remains just that - the *church's* activity and not participation in *God's* activity.

To avoid the impression that they have one-sidedly chosen a Type A theology, this statement is immediately qualified with a "however", pointing out that proclamation should always be done "in a context of respectful dialogue". In this way Bevans & Schroeder also hold "apparent opposites" in creative tension, as Bosch suggested. A terminological difference between the two books is that Bevans and Schroeder do not call this approach *creative* tension but *synthesis*. This difference has to do with the different types of theological formation that they received: Bosch was shaped by the Reformed tradition (deeply influenced by dialectical thinkers like Karl Barth and Hendrik Kraemer) whereas Bevans and Schroeder are products of the SVD missionary order within Post-Vatican II Roman Catholic theology.[7] It should be said, however, that the intention and effect of these two approaches are very similar.

2.5. Already and not yet

In the seminar at Unisa (see footnote 1), Roger Schroeder explained that in their understanding of prophetic dialogue, *dialogue* corresponds with the *already* of the reign of God and *prophetic* with the *not yet*. I can see the logic of this connection, but wonder how helpful it is to let these two dualities "overlap" in this way. It may be more helpful to bring in an element of creation here as well, perhaps in the way that Karl Barth articulated his three "viewpoints" in the Tambach lecture "The Christian in society" in 1919: *regnum naturae* (creation), *regnum gratiae* (salvation), *regnum gloriae* (eschatological reserve).[8] Brouwer (Stichting Karl Barth 1995) points out that Barth's use of these three concepts from theological tradition represents a "radical innovation": Rather than see these three as superimposed layers in a static cosmos (as in the feudal Middle Ages) or as successive historical periods (as in the bourgeois reformation), Barth sees them as three simultaneously functioning "viewpoints" or "perspectives" on reality that have a dialectical relationship with each other.[9]

These three fundamental viewpoints that should shape how Christians live and work (and do mission) in society are as follows: God says YES to

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[7] In a seminar at Unisa on 16 April 2010, Roger Schroeder also suggested that their use of *synthesis* (as opposed to ***cr**eative tension*) may also have been influenced by Asian thought, since he spent many years working in Papua New Guinea and has many Asian colleagues in Chicago.

[8] This lecture was published in Barth (1928). See Kritzinger (2007) for further discussion.

[9] Brouwer (Stichting Karl Barth 1995) indicates that these three "viewpoints" articulated by Barth at Tambach became the basic structure of his whole later theology. In a paper on "Church and culture" presented in Amsterdam in 1926, Barth confirmed that he regarded the three "viewpoints" of his Tambach lecture as essential for addressing the relationship between church and culture, but that he had decided to call them Creation, Reconciliation, Completion (*Schöpfung, Versöhnung, Vollendung*) instead. According to Brouwer, this threefold scheme provides the basic structure for Barth's whole *Church Dogmatics.*

society (and thereby to culture); God says NO to evil and injustice in society, letting loose the power of Christ's resurrection within it; God reminds Christians that the reign of God is not what they build in history but God's gift, for which they (merely) work and hope. Christians therefore participate in God's YES to society and culture (= dialogue), in God's NO to evil and injustice (= prophetic), and they respect the coming reign of God as God's gracious gift (= hold already and not yet in creative tension). It seems helpful to use Barth's three perspectives to elucidate the "prophetic dialogue" in which Christians are engaged in society as they participate in God's mission.

2.6. An implicit missiological method

Chapters 3-8 reveal an interesting structure, not explained or reflected on by Bevans & Schroeder, which embodies an implicit missiological method that can be characterised as contextual or praxiological. Unfortunately this structure is not used in chapters 9-12, or at least not as visibly as in the earlier chapters. The structure of the historical chapters is as follows (using c.3 as an example):

- Brief historical overview (The eastward expansion of Christianity; Mission in the East, pp.74-80)
- Context analysis (Mission within the Roman Empire: The socio-political context, The religious context, The institutional context, pp.80-83)
- Agency (Models of mission: Secondary models; the primary model; women in mission, pp.83-92)
- Theological interpretation (6 constants in context, pp. 92-97)
- Reflexivity (Implications for the theology of mission today, pp.97-98)

It is a pity that the authors did not follow this structure in chapter 12, in order to sketch the *context* of Christian churches in the 21st century, and the primary agents ("models") of mission in this period.

Furthermore, whereas the theory behind the 6 constants that are traced in various contexts is given in the Introduction (Gonzalez and Sölle), one doesn't find any reflection on this consistent (and very helpful) theological method that is used throughout the book. What makes this even more surprising is that the discussion of the six constants takes up relatively little space in each chapter, making it much less visible and central than one would expect from the prominence given to this aspect in the Introduction.

3 Understanding Schreiter and Langmead

Mission as reconciliation is an important emphasis in contempoary missiological debate. A number of scholars have proposed that this should

become the key focus for mission in this first half of the 21st century. I refer only to the work of Robert Schreiter (1992; 1997; 1998), Bill Burrows (1998), Kirsteen Kim (2005) and Ross Langmead (2008) as a representative sample. The title of Langmead's article expresses this well: "Transformed relationships: Reconciliation as the central model for mission". He explains: "What I am suggesting is that rather than Paul's call in 2 Corinthians 5 for the church to be the servant of reconciliation merely being an isolated metaphor or a fleeting image, it has the potential to be a governing metaphor, a model that shapes our whole approach to mission and resonates on many levels" (Langmead 2008:7). Schreiter (1997:14f) paints the bigger picture when he says that whereas the mission model most common in the 19th century was "expansion", and the most common model in the second half of the 20th century was "accompaniment", the model of mission most needed at the beginning of the 21st century is "reconciliation". I am personally not in full agreement with this view; I am convinced that we should keep on emphasizing the multi-dimensionality of God's mission, within which mission as reconciliation has a valid place alongside mission as evangelism, mission as liberation, mission as earthkeeping, and many others. But I agree that it is a key dimension of Christian mission today.

If the 13 (or more) dimensions of mission (as set out by Bosch) are too complex to manage, I would much rather go with Bevans & Schroeder into a concentrated selection of 6 "components" than to go with only one (like reconciliation). But let me move to my conclusion, to pull all the threads together of what I am trying to say.

4 Mission praxis

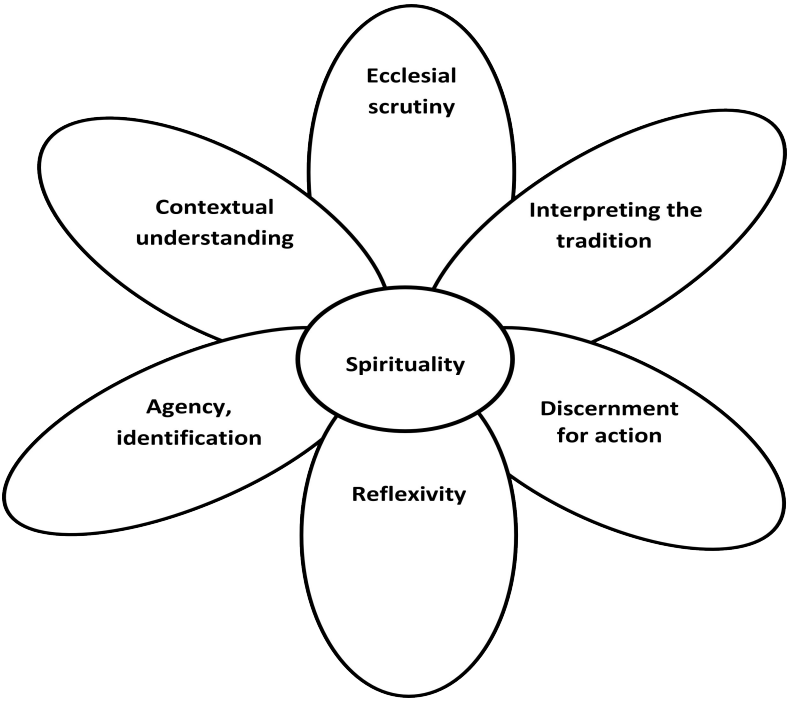
4.1. A praxis approach

When Stephen Bevans explains the "praxis model" in his book *Models of contextual theology* (Bevans 1992:63ff), he points out that it arose in the circles of liberation theologies, but also that it has a wider application: "It may well be possible, for instance, to do theology within a particular context where structural injustice is not really rampant. In this instance, one could still theologize by acting reflectively and reflecting on one's actions" (Bevans 1992:66). Acting reflectively and reflecting on one's actions: that neatly sums up what a praxis approach is about. So praxis is not the same as practice or action. It is the constant interaction between theory and practice, acting and thinking, praying and working. It is also:

- *Transformative*: i.e., thinking-and-acting *for change*
- *Communal* thinking-and-acting: i.e., not an individual matter.[10]

[10] For a more detailed treatment of these features of praxis, see Kritzinger (2002:149f).

It is my proposal that we view every form of mission - any of the dimensions of God's mission indicated above, from evangelism to earthkeeping to liberation - as a form of praxis: i.e. as a communal venture intended to bring about some form of transformation in a specific community, made up of a complex of ideas and practices that interact constantly and so give shape to that particular mission praxis. I further argue that certain features are always present in intentionally transformative ventures, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly, if such a venture strives to be faithful to the Christian tradition *and* relevant to a specific context. These features are sometimes construed as a "pastoral circle" or a "praxis cycle", to show how the three (or four or seven) dimensions of praxis interact with each other.[11] I prefer to speak of a "praxis matrix" with seven dimensions, as indicated in the diagram below.[12]



[11] This matrix with 7 dimensions developed out of the three-dimensional See-Judge-Act approach into the classical four-dimensional "pastoral circle" of Insertion-Analysis-Reflection-Planning (Holland & Henriot 1983). Cochrane, De Gruchy & Petersen (1991) developed this into a seven-dimensional circle, which I follow to a large extent in this paper.

[12] For details of what each of the seven dimensions means in my praxis matrix, see Kritzinger (2008) and Kritzinger & Saayman (2011).

In its origin, this praxis matrix is a mobilising framework, intended to help a committed group of Christians to contribute to transformation in their context. It is also possible, however, to use it as an analytical framework, to do research on the transformational attempts of others.

Dimension	Mobilising framework	Analytical framework
Agency	Who are we? How are we related to (inserted into) the community? Who are the other key actors and interlocutors? What kind of encounter(s) is taking place?	Who are they? How are they related to (inserted into) the community? Who are the other key actors? Who are their interlocutors? What kind of encounter(s) is taking place?
Spirituality	What are the underlying spiritualities of our group? How do our inner motivations, religious visions and worldview guide our actions in relation to the community?	What are the underlying spiritualities of their group? How do their inner motivations, religious visions and worldview guide their actions in relation to the community?
Contextual understanding	What is going on around us? What is good or bad about our community? What are the problems we need to address?	How do they understand their community? What do they see as good and bad around them? What are the problems that they seek to address?
Ecclesial scrutiny	What have churches/religions been doing in this situation? How does that affect our present encounter(s) in the community?	How do they view the prior role of churches/religions in that community? How does that affect their present encounters?
Interpreting the tradition	How do we interpret our own religious tradition, read the Bible, and reflect theologically on our situation?	How do they interpret their own religious tradition, read the Bible, and reflect theologically on their situation?
Discernment for action	How do we plan, strategise and make decisions for action that could be transformative in our context?	How do they plan, strategise and make decisions for action that could be transformative in their context?
Reflexivity	Do we reflect on our actions, learn from our experiences, and grow in maturity or wholeness? Are we being transfor-med by the encounters?	Do they reflect on their actions, learn from their experiences, and grow in maturity or wholeness? Are they being transfor-med by the encounters?

For me, spirituality is at the heart of the mission praxis cycle or matrix.[13] The *epiklesis* at the centre from which it flows - and which holds it together - is what makes it *Christian* mission, distinguishing it from political propaganda, business entrepreneurship, or other forms of persuasive activism, even though the principles guiding all such intentionally transformative projects (= praxis) are quite similar.[14]

4.2. Mission as transformative encounters

Mission as praxis is about concrete transformation; it is specifically about transformative *encounters*: among people, and between the living God and people, leading to people being called, sent, healed, and empowered. It is about the Reign of God that has entered into this broken world as a transformative power in Jesus; that continues to be manifested transformatively in our midst by the work of the Holy Spirit; that takes hold of our lives and transforms us so that we too may encounter other people, thus creating the church as the community of the kingdom, working for and waiting for the coming Reign of God. God's mission, the arriving of the Reign of God, is about transformative encounters. That is why missiology - which critically reflects on mission - is "encounterology", the scholarly study of such transformative encounters.[15]

An example will help to explain this: In the theological exercise often called the "theology of religions", scholars have set up a threefold typology of exclusivist, inclusivist, and pluralist approaches to other religions.[16] That is interesting and helpful, but if that is all you do, it may be acceptable as systematic theology but not as missiology. Missiology is interested in the actual *encounters* between people of different religions in specific contexts, about what *happens* when they encounter each other. For a missiologist it is not enough to know what a person's theory of salvation (soteriology) is. To find out what her *interfaith praxis* is, you need to ask what her language is, her personal attitude to people of the other faith, her social position in relation to them, her prior experiences of that religious tradition, her analysis of the context, her spirituality, the concrete faith projects she is

[13] In this respect I give recognition to my former colleague at Unisa, Dr Madge Karecki (2005:162), who convinced me of this. She developed a five-dimensional "cycle of mission praxis", with spirituality at the centre.

[14] One could say that these seven dimensions, constructed here as a 'praxis matrix', is a 'common sense' approach to transformative action: any group of people wishing to bring about any form of transformation in a community needs to give attention to these dimensions.

[15] For an explanation and development of this term, see Kritzinger (2007). In this regard I am in complete agreement with the view of Wickeri (2010), which I explained above.

[16] There are numerous publications on this. One of the first, which perhaps established this threefold typology in distinction from other typologies, was Alan Race (1983). For a survey of these approaches, see Kritzinger (1998).

involved in, etc. Missiologists are interested in the *praxis* (i.e. the whole matrix) of interreligious *encounter*, not only in drawing up and refining soteriological "types" or models.

4.3. Must we choose?

Evaluating the three missiological designs discussed above (Bosch, Bevans & Schroeder, Schreiter) in the light of this praxis approach, I wish to make the following concluding remarks:

4.3.1. Writing a history of mission praxis?

Even though Bosch explains the content of *Transforming mission* in his sub-title as paradigm shifts in "theology of mission", there is more than just theological *reflection* in his magisterial book. He regularly discusses a number of other dimensions of the praxis matrix (agents, contextual understanding, ecclesial scrutiny, spirituality, strategy) but this is done unevenly and without reflecting on the fact that these dimensions play a role (and why they are being considered). As I have pointed out above, Bevans & Schroeder have intentionally structured their historical chapters according to key dimensions of praxis (Context analysis, Agency, Theological interpretation, Reflexivity), but they have not made explicit this implicit missiological method or reflected on it.

Robert Schreiter, in his publications on reconciliation, has given attention to all the dimensions of praxis, since he has limited himself to this one dimension of God's encompassing mission. The larger the canvas on which you paint, the smaller are the figures you paint. What you gain in breadth you lose in depth. One cannot expect a book that covers 2000 years of Christian history to give a detailed description of all seven dimensions of mission praxis for each person or group that is discussed, but if the "constants" to be traced throughout Christian history were the seven dimensions of the praxis matrix, the net effect would be that the dynamic mission encounters that have taken place over the past 2000 years would perhaps have become more clearly visible. It would have been a missiological writing of Christian history. But that would have made the six doctrinal "constants" of the present book into sub-constants of the dimension "Interpreting the tradition" in the larger praxis matrix. And that would have removed one of the key purposes of the present book, namely to be "a historical systematic *theology"* as well as "a systematic theological *history*" of the church's missionary practice" (Bevans & Schroeder 2004:1). The first aspect of this dual purpose may have been compromised if the seven dimensions of a praxis matrix were to have been the constants that structure the book.

4.3.2. Researching mission encounters

The intentional encounters in which Christians are involved are the "stuff" of mission. Too often we create the impression that Christians are the only actors on the stage, by describing only their praxis as "change agents" who "go out" or "reach out" to bring about change, or (worse still) to go and "convert" people to the Christian faith. At the same time, however, there are other forms of praxis taking place, as the "others" take the initiative and develop their own forms of faith praxis in their interaction with Christian mission praxis. And it is precisely those *encounters* that we need to examine, thus giving equal space for the "receiving" or "rejecting" *praxis* of those who are called "target groups" or "mission objects" by some missiologists. No human person, group or community should ever be called or treated as a target, unless of course one is making war. Mission "objects" are in fact subjects, active agents, deciding on the basis of their interaction with us whether (or to what extent) they wish to accept what we have presented to them. And invariably people adapt what they adopt, integrating impulses from outside into their worldview and into the constellations of meaning already present in their community. Robert Schreiter (1985) has called attention to this years ago, suggesting that a "contextualization" approach to "constructing a local theology" (as opposed to translation or adaptation), takes "the perspective of the 'receiving' culture rather than that of the incoming church" (1985:152); it "begins with the needs of a people in a concrete place" (1985:13). In chapter 7 (on syncretism and dual religious systems) Schreiter then traces the dynamics of the encounter between the "receiving culture" and the "incoming church" or "invading sign system", giving attention to issues like power relations and agency. My suggestion is that we should develop this framework of Schreiter's as an encounter between two forms of *praxis*, which could possibly be characterized as the respective praxes of the "inside advocates" and "outside advocates" of change or transformation.

It is extremely difficult to find adequate sources for examining the actual encounter between these two encountering forms of praxis ("incoming church" and "receiving culture"), since often only the one side of the encounter has been written down. This lack of sources becomes more difficult the further one goes back in history,[17] but for more recent encounters one should explore oral histories and read the archival sources "between the lines" or "against their grain" to try and discern what happened in the encounter, giving full attention to all the interacting forms of praxis in that particular situation.

[17] See Kritzinger (2011) for some reflection on the use of this praxis matrix in archival research.

This comment is not so much a critique of the books of Bosch and Bevans & Schroeder, but more of a rallying cry to myself and others to pursue such research projects in the future.

4.3.3. Participating in the missio Dei

Our participation in the *missio Dei* as God's action on earth is often interpreted as saying that God is (only) "behind" us, blowing on us, filling our sails, sending us "out into the world". However, such an interpretation often gives rise to triumphalist approaches. There are other aspects to participating in God's mission: God calling us to follow where God has already gone before; God coming towards us, often in the persons of those we call "strangers", questioning and confronting us, challenging us (for example, Adam, where are you? Cain, where is your brother, Abel? *Quo vadis*? Who do you say that I am? Why do you persecute me?). The trinitarian basis of the *missio Dei* in the eternal encounter between Father, Son and Holy Spirit (or Fountain, Wellspring and Living Water[18]) suggests that those who go obediently (like sheep among wolves) to do God's will in contexts of empire, selfishness, opportunism and injustice may well experience Gethsemanes and Calvaries, where God encounters us also as the absent or silent one, where God's will becomes a painful mystery, and where mission is *not* "plain sailing" in the power of the Spirit. All three of the approaches that I have discussed (Bosch, Bevans & Schroeder, Schreiter) have built in protection mechanisms against triumphalist mission, highlighting not only the ambiguities of human motivations and actions, but also the agonizing difficulty of discerning God's will in complex situations. This frailty and vulnerability of mission - in all its dimensions or components - are highlighted in all three of the books, and for this we need to be deeply grateful to their authors.

4.3.4. Living epicletically

All of this underlines the need of a sound pneumatology, since it is the Holy Spirit who establishes that delicate correlation between God's work and human work, God's gracious initiative and our faithful participation in it. Mission flows not merely from an external command (like the Great Commission), but from the outpouring of Spirit, which sets in motion an ongoing movement of people living in the power of the Spirit and by the guidance of the Spirit.[19] The church in mission - and the church as mission - lives epicletically. In other words, our lives are lived with empty hands and characterized by an *epiklesis* prayer: "Come, Creator Spirit! Come and make our human work to be part of God's work on earth." This requires of us to put down what is in our hands - even our good theologies of mission, our praxis cycles and matrixes, our plans and strategies - in order to be

[18] David Cunningham (1998) has creatively developed this vivid image for the Trinity.

[19] Harry Boer (1961) helpfully developed this insight decades ago.

graced by God as we lift up empty hands to receive from God and from one another what we need for mission.[20] This shows the deep connection between Eucharist and mission, since epiklesis is first and foremost a Eucharistic prayer. We learn to do mission at the Table or Altar, where we receive God's grace with empty hands, having presented ourselves and our gifts to God, praying that God's Spirit would transform our gifts (and us) into vehicles of Christ's saving presence - thus making us the Body of Christ on earth. Christian mission is not mere human (or even Christian) activism, but the work of grace - in us and through us. It is, in the words of Phil 2:12-13, the way in which we "work out our own [collective][21] salvation with fear and trembling, *for* it is God who is at work in us, enabling us both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (NRSV, adapted from 2nd person to 1st person). God is "the Great Energizer, the one who is effectively at work" in our mission (Hawthorne 1983:100).

4.3.5. Must we choose?

Yes, we must choose, but not between these three designs. We should not run a "beauty contest" to judge which of them is the most attractive, or the most carefully crafted, or even the most useful. We must choose our specific form of praxis in our specific community, facing its unique challenges, in the light of our unique gifts and strengths. We need a process of discernment to develop the specific attitudes and actions we adopt in the particular context where we find ourselves. The three approaches I have discussed (Bosch, Bevans & Schroeder, Schreiter) are very helpful in this complex process of discerning what it means to live the good news here and now. In different ways they guide us in answering the questions contained in the seven "petals" of the praxis matrix. It is particularly in the "petal" of "interpreting the tradition" that their insights are helpful, since they set before us the wide scope of *theologies* of mission that have been developed in 2000 years of Christian history. They also give us numerous illustrations of the praxis of churches, organisations and individuals, even though they could not give much detail on the full scope of praxis (as explored by the seven fields of the praxis matrix).

Bevans & Schroeder have moved towards a more systematic exploration of (some of) the seven dimensions of mission praxis, in the different periods of Christian history, by explicitly analyzing the contexts and focusing on the agents of mission in each. A very important advance of Bevans & Schroeder over the approach of Bosch is the inclusion of histories and theologies of churches in the East and the South.

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[20] I am indebted to the publication *Empty hands* (WCC 1968) for this image.

[21] Both Hawthorne (1983:100) and Witherington (1994:320) point out that this verse should not be read in an individualist way, since the verbs are in the plural, which means that it addresses the church as faith community.

When asking whether *prophetic dialogue* is the most appropriate term for expressing what mission should be in the first half of the 21st century, I tend to gravitate back to the multidimensional "force field of apparent opposites" of David Bosch, without a single "handle" to give access to it. However, I do believe that it is necessary to complement Bosch's set of multidimensional *theologies* of mission with a praxis matrix, so that his wide-ranging and stimulating theological insights may become fruitful for the discernment of actual mission praxis here and now. However attractive the choice of "prophetic dialogue" is to embody the underlying spirituality of mission and to give a manageable "handle" to the wide, undefinable field of mission sketched by Bosch, it limits and narrows the options for mission in an unnecessary way

Robert Schreiter, by focusing on only one dimension of mission, namely reconciliation, was able to touch on all seven fields of mission praxis. Particularly in his two books (Schreiter 1992; 1998) he gave detailed attention to the questions of agency, context, ecclesial scrutiny, interpreting the Christian tradition, discerning strategies for action, and reflexivity, even though he did not use all these concepts. This provides an example of how a choice for a specific mission priority in a particular context at a particular time can unfold into well-developed mission praxis. However, as I pointed out already, I do not believe that it is wise to make reconciliation the overall theme for what mission should be and do at the present time. In that respect my friendly critique of "mission as prophetic dialogue" - as the key characterization of mission for now - would apply even more to "mission as reconciliation".

Let me conclude by saying that all three of these approaches contribute significantly to the understanding of Christian mission today. For that life-long journey of encountering God's people - that journey of transformation, learning and embrace - all three of these designs have given us much to think about, much to celebrate, and (looking at the dark pages of Christian history) much to lament. May we be faithful and creative in how we live and act as those sent, called, guided, blessed, empowered and challenged by the living God, as we risk doing mission in God's name today.

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