

# FROM EDINBURGH TO ACHIMOTA: THE WORLD MISSION CONFERENCES AS A SOURCE OF MISSIOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE IN THE THINKING OF D J BOSCH

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## *Abstract*

Bosch's missiological thinking shows the extent to which he draws from the tradition of World mission conferences. The article traces how he connects with the conferences from Edinburgh 1910 to Achimota 1958. In a cursory way it is shown that Bosch's Missiology in general and the manner in which he connects with the mission conferences specifically reflect a tendency to universalism. This is shown *inter alia* by picking up on issues from the conferences which are of a contextual nature and which find no reflection in Bosch's thinking. One such issue is race, which featured in one form or another at all six conferences discussed in the article.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In developing his own thoughts on Missiology, Bosch draws extensively from the World Mission conferences which were hosted before 1960 by the International Missionary Council (IMC) and thereafter by the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

The aim of this article is to trace the manner in which his missiological thinking is informed by these conferences. What are the *topos* of the conferences in the Missiology of Bosch? In 1958, Bosch was asked by the WCC to act as *rapporteur* for one of the sections at the San Antonio conference. This honour was probably bestowed on

him in recognition of his profile as a world renowned Missiologist, and perhaps also to acknowledge the fact that he had always loved conferences and that his own missiological thinking benefited greatly from these conferences. As the result of the limited length of this article, only the six pre-1960 conferences (Edinburgh, Jerusalem, Tambaram, Whitby, Willingen and Achimota) are examined here. The aim of the article is only to illustrate how Bosch connects with the mission conferences under discussion.

The topic under discussion here could basically be approached from two angles: Firstly, I could pick up on central issues in Bosch's Missiology to see whether there was any connection between these issues and the mission conferences. Secondly, I could deal with the conferences from Edinburgh in 1910 to Achimota in 1958 individually to determine what Bosch had drawn from them. The second approach has been chosen, therefore the article is structured in a straightforward manner. Each conference and its influence on Bosch's Missiology are discussed separately.

The article describes, analyses and evaluates the issues Bosch picked up from each of the conferences. Some of the interesting and more important issues are highlighted and discussed from a contextual perspective.

However, the article does not only present a survey, but also a critical assessment of a complex issue, namely, whether the manner in which Bosch has drawn from the mission conferences has not reinforced the universalising tendency in his Missiology, and consequently undermines his quest for a postmodern Missiology.

## 2 EDINBURGH 1910

### 2.1 A flood-tide of missionary enthusiasm

Bosch (1991:336-339) connects with Edinburgh beyond Edinburgh with reference to one of the central personalities of the Edinburgh conference, Mott (1865-1955). Bosch's contention is that the tone of the 1910 conference was set in a book written by Mott in 1902,

namely *The evangelization of the world in this generation*. Informed by the abounding optimism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Mott explains painstakingly why he thinks that there has never been a more opportune time for world mission. He identifies the opportunities, facilities and resources of the Church that give rise to the possibilities of evangelising the world in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Bosch (1991:337) it is a question of “combining his faith in God’s revelation in Christ with his faith in the ‘providential’ achievements of modern science”.

In his own analysis of the Edinburgh conference, Bosch (1980:159-161) focuses on language. He shows how the use of specific terms like ‘opportunities’, ‘a decisive hour’, ‘this generation’, ‘a critical time’ and an expression like ‘there had never been an hour as auspicious for mission as the present’, have fed into the flood-tide of missionary enthusiasm that prevailed at Edinburgh. Other commentators on the World Mission conferences, like Van’t Hof (1972:33) who mentions that the “kairos signifies responsibility now” and Wind (1984:32) who speaks of “the signs of the times were seen to be very favourable for mission”, reflect on Edinburgh’s self-understanding: There was a daunting responsibility and times were very favourable for mission.

## **2.2 World conquest**

An almost logical consequence of such enthusiasm was the use of military terminology. In Bosch’s understanding the use of such terminology resulted from the notion that ‘mission stood under the banner of world conquest’. ‘World’ was, according to Bosch, not primarily a theological concept, but a geographical-historical one - world was divided into the Christian world and a non-Christian world. In Edinburgh military terminology like ‘soldiers’, ‘powers’, ‘advance’, ‘army’, ‘crusade’, ‘marching order’, ‘council of war’, ‘strategy’ and ‘planning’ featured strongly.

Since there was such a strong emphasis on strategy and tactics, Bosch (1980:161) concludes that “the explicitly theological harvest of Edinburgh was meagre”. In modifying his assessment of Edinburgh somewhat, Bosch concedes that it would be unfair to suggest that Edinburgh merely reflected naïve optimism. On the contrary, the

enthusiasm which prevailed was grounded in faith in God's all-sufficiency.

In a draft document on Edinburgh entitled *Mission in humility and hope*, the assessment of Edinburgh 1910 is quite positive. In a meeting in Edinburgh, Scotland during June 2005, a small group of mission leaders and thinkers put it as follows:

The World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910 proved epoch making in its day, offering a first glimpse of the church as a truly global missionary community with deep roots and vibrant life on every continent.

It is beyond dispute that Mott was one of the world's foremost ecumenical leaders for 40 years. His work and the work of somebody like Oldham undisputedly led to the formation of the International Missionary Council in 1921, the World Council of Churches in 1948, the merger between the IMC and the WCC in New Delhi, India in 1961, and the foundation of the Lausanne Movement in 1974.

### **2.3 Contextual issues**

In assessing Bosch's interaction with Edinburgh, it would be fair to say that he connects with the broad and general trends of the conference. He criticises Edinburgh for the use of military language and describes Edinburgh's theological harvest as meagre, but he does not pick up on issues of a more contextual nature. Firstly, Edinburgh was supposed to be speaking on behalf of the world church and world mission, developing strategies for the evangelisation of the non-Christian world, yet the meeting was virtually lily-white. There was no representation from Africa or Latin America. Secondly, the Edinburgh documents show quite clearly the extent to which social Darwinism was still rife. The distinction between the Christian world and the non-Christian world referred mainly to social categories. In the deliberations at Edinburgh, a distinction was made between the 'more backward races of mankind (sic)' and the 'more advanced'. The strength, enlightenment and the dominion over other races of the Christian nations of Europe and

America was ascribed to the Providence of God (World Mission Conference 1910, 7:115).

Mission against this background was understood to be the bringing of civilisation from advanced peoples to backward peoples:

Theologically it represented the culmination of Western (both American and European) messianic consciousness according to which the gospel, in its 'Western Christian' robes, was the solution to the problems of the entire world. (Bosch 1980:161)

A third issue that is interesting from a South African point of view is the intriguing confrontation between Bridgman of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in South Africa and Marchand from the Dutch Reformed Church. They were divided on the land question. This was 1910 - only three years before the Land Act of 1913 would be promulgated - literally dispossessing black people of the land. As the result of this Act, 20 percent of the population of South African would own 87 percent of the land - a gross imbalance.

In Marchand's view, the Cape Colony had a most enlightened native policy and missionaries had a free hand in their work (World Mission Conference 1910, 7:169-170). In a strange division of mission and politics, he contends that there is no problem pertaining to black people in general and the land issue specifically:

I know of no such problem from a purely missionary point of view. When you come to politics there is indeed such a problem, but I hold that missions as such, so long as they can carry on their work unfettered, have nothing to do with that problem. In my humble view: the less missionaries have to do with politics in any shape or form, the better for the exalted object they have in view and the less chance there will be of losing sympathy of the Government and the financial support for educational work we enjoy. (World Mission Conference 1910)

Bridgman (World Mission Conference 1910, 7:171) colluded with the social Darwinism of Edinburgh, but he contradicted Marchand quite strongly in pointing to the existing restrictions on the preaching of the gospel in South Africa. Calling the land question as a 'bed-rock' issue, Bridgman goes on to say:

In the past it could hardly be said that the South African colonists in general have done to the natives as they would be done by. I feel in some respect that there has been a sad lack of responsibility on the part of the ruling race for the welfare of the weaker race. (World Mission Conference 1910)

A fourth issue is the emerging prophetic voices emerging at Edinburgh. As already indicated there was no African or Latin American representation at Edinburgh. It was therefore up to the Asians to speak prophetically against the superiority complex and the social Darwinism that were looming at the Edinburgh conference. At the Melbourne conference in 1980, the former General Secretary to the World Council of Churches, Potter, alluded to the fact that two Asians, Azariah and Cheng Ching Yi, "challenged the conference in ways that caused deep consternation" (Melbourne 1980:19).

## **2.4 Give us friends!**

In speaking on the issue of race relations in the Indian Church, Azariah (World Mission Conference 1910, 9:306,311-312) draws attention to the close relationship between Christian mission and social problems and issues:

Race relations are one of the most serious problems confronting the church today. The bridging of the gulf between East and West, and the attainment of a greater unity and common ground in Christ as the great Unifier of mankind, is one of the deepest needs of our time ... In India, the relationship too often is not what it ought to be, and things must change, and speedily, if there is to be a large measure of hearty co-operation between the foreign missionary and the Indian worker ... The official relationship

generally prevalent at present is that between a master and servant ... There can never be real progress unless the aspirations of the native Christians to self-government and independence are accepted, encouraged, and acted upon.

Azariah's Asian colleague, Cheng Ching Yi, is equally vocal on some issues. Addressing himself to the unity of the church, he contends "that the church is universal, not only irrespective of denominationalism, but also irrespective of nationalities" (Potter in Melbourne 1980:19).

There is no indication that the issues raised by the Asians were entertained any further at Edinburgh. However, Bassham (1979:18), however, suggests quite strongly that the voices raised have proven to be prophetic for later developments. There are indications that the Edinburgh Continuation Committee under Mott did take up the challenge for missionaries to give up their racist and paternalistic attitudes, and instead practise love and friendship: "You have given your goods to feed the poor. You have given your bodies to be burned. We also ask for love. Give us friends" (Potter in Melbourne 1980:19).

### 3 JERUSALEM 1928

#### 3.1 Christian mission unnerved

The world in which the Jerusalem conference took place in 1928 was fundamentally different from the world of 1910. Bosch (1980:161) points to two events, namely, World War One (1914-1918) and the Russian Revolution (1917), which "shattered Edinburgh's confidence of sure victory".

Bosch arrives at a more extensive engagement with Jerusalem than with Edinburgh. There are three areas in which he interacts with Jerusalem, once again connecting with the type of obvious and broad trends of the Jerusalem conference.

Firstly, in the light of the devastation caused by especially World War One, Bosch points to the reality that Western civilisation proved itself to be bankrupt. For the first time, says Bosch (1980:161), “there was the realisation that Christianity was no Western religion and that the West was not Christian in its entirety”. As the result of this realisation, the Jerusalem conference was far less confident than Edinburgh. The point of departure of the Jerusalem conference was not the royal office of Christ, as at Edinburgh, but his priestly role.

Secondly, Bosch engages critically with the very negative view on religions other than Christianity that emerged at Jerusalem. The Jerusalem conference saw other religions as “perfect specimens of absolute error and masterful pieces of hell’s inventions which Christianity was simply called upon to oppose, uproot and destroy” (in Temple Gairdner 1910:137).

However, this was only one side of the story. Bosch picks up on some American delegates at the Jerusalem conference, who, led by Hocking, contradicted the notion of Christianity being in opposition to other religions. Instead, they pleaded for “an imaginative alliance with non-Christian religions, an alliance in which neither Christianity nor the other religions were to lose anything” (Bosch 1980:162).

Just as the viewpoint on Christianity in opposition to the other religions had been challenged at Jerusalem, so was the relativistic position of forging an alliance between Christianity and other religions. Strong opponents of the relativistic approach included Heim and Kraemer, who were critical of the American approach. Today the notions of greater cooperation between religions and a deeper interreligious encounter are no longer so strange.

### **3.2 A comprehensive approach**

The third area refers to Bosch’s judgment that it is unfair to write off the Jerusalem conference on the basis of the relativistic attitude of some towards religion. Bosch goes as far as to say that Jerusalem has surpassed Edinburgh in theological depth as regards the motive of mission. He finds that Jerusalem has taken significant strides in its definition of mission. Two issues seem to be important here: (1) The



centrality of the cross; and (2) the understanding of mission in terms of a comprehensive approach. The application of the cross was regarded differently in Jerusalem than in Edinburgh. In Edinburgh the cross was seen as a “symbol of conquest, in Constantinian terms. In Jerusalem the cross again became the symbol of service, responsibility, and sacrifice” (Bosch 1980:163). The view that mission is the Kingdom’s servant showed that Jerusalem concerned itself with the social dimension of the gospel.

Bosch is nevertheless quick to indicate that Jerusalem’s comprehensive approach has not gone far enough. He says, for example:

In no sense, however, did Jerusalem criticise the overall structures of society; it expected social renewal to be achieved by the improvement of micro-structures. (Bosch 1980:164)

### **3.3 Contextual issues**

There are some issues of a more contextual nature that are very interesting from a South African point of view. The first are, issues like race relations or racial conflict, industrial problems and rural problems, which were regarded as important enough to be part of the Jerusalem agenda. Reasonably extensive reports on these issues were compiled. There was some urgency in dealing with the issue of racial conflict. It is interesting to note that, like the Edinburgh conference, the Jerusalem conference refrained from identifying the problem as white racism and used euphemisms like race problems, racial conflict or race relationships instead. Socio-analytically this creates the problem of equating different parties in race based conflict, rendering them equally responsible for the conflict, which is similar to equating male and female in dealing with gender issues.

Be that as it may, Jerusalem’s intention to deal with the issue is well captured in a statement by Mott (Report of the Jerusalem Meeting of the International Missionary Council 1928, 8:26):

(The Jerusalem Meeting) has greater opportunity than any world meeting ever held to lead into the very heart of the solution of that most alarming problem - one of world-wide concern - the problem of race relationships.

The issue of race featured strongly in a number of individual presentations at Jerusalem. Yergan (Report of the Jerusalem Meeting of the International Missionary Council 1928, 4:218-219) attempts to show the connection between race conflict and politics, economics and social change. He attributes race conflict to European imperialism in Africa and the economic penetration into the continent for its mineral wealth, oil, rubber and cotton. The substitution of chiefs with white magistrates, were amongst the social changes.

In his very brief input, Bocobo (Report of the Jerusalem Meeting of the International Missionary Council 1928, 4:228) mentions how American capitalists' lust for land to cultivate rubber has resulted in the oppression and exploitation of the Filipinos. In his own words:

American capitalists are demanding land for the planting of rubber on a large scale. They want the abolition of the law limiting the holding of public land to 2000 acres. The Washington government is backing the plan of the capitalists. Since we have protested against these proposals, our autonomy, granted in 1916, has been largely withdrawn.

In an equally brief contribution, Jabavu, a South African member of the African team of delegates to Jerusalem shows the connection between and the economic, political and social basis of racism (Report of the Jerusalem Meeting of the International Missionary Council 1928, 4:228-229). Addressing himself to the issues of land segregation, social segregation and 'all sorts of laws enacted against black men, just because of their colour', Jabavu was pre-empting what would later be called racial capitalism, that is, a brand of capitalism with a strong race determinant.

#### 4.1 Christ as prophet

Bosch's (1980:167-175; 1991:295-296,369-370) treatment of Tambaram is more extensive than his discussion on Jerusalem. He connects with six issues from Tambaram. These issues cannot be clearly distinguished from one another because they overlap. The six issues are mentioned here, but owing to the limited length of the article only three will be discussed in detail: The six issues are: emphasis on the prophetic office of Christ; witness; a theological evaluation of 'non-Christian' religions by Kraemer; the relation between church and mission; and eschatology. The last issue was forced onto the Tambaram agenda by the German delegates. Once again, Bosch's pattern of picking up on the general trends of the conference and not dealing with matters of a more contextual nature continues.

Whereas Edinburgh and Jerusalem emphasised the royal and priestly offices of Christ, Tambaram accentuated his prophetic office. Like Van't Hof (1972:101, 125), Bosch argues that we need to interpret the emphasis on the prophetic office of Christ against the background of the dictatorships and fascism of Hitler in Germany and Mussolini in Italy, Marxism in Russia and State Shintoism in Japan. According to Van't Hof (1972):

zij was kritisch, niet conformistisch. Tegenover de oorlogsdreiging van de dictaturen stelde zij ... de broederschap der Christenen, tegenover het uniform, het boetekleed en tegenover de uitdaging van het ideologisch getuigenis plaatste zij het bijbels getuigenis.

Van't Hof thought that the preference for the prophetic at Tambaram was probably related to the constellation of 1938. Dictators masquerading as prophets were witnessing to their own ideologies. Tambaram aimed at stating true prophecy over and against false ones.

#### 4.2 On witness

Overlapping with the emphasis on Christ's prophetic office was the focus on witness. Bosch traces the strong emphasis on witness back to Barth's theology. He makes specific mention of the booklet written by Barth in 1934 entitled *Der Christ als Zeuge (The Christ as witness)*.

However, Tambaram did not consider witness solely to be oral proclamation, but rather to present Christ to the world. A Tambaram report on 'The place of the church in evangelism' contains a statement that clearly explains the comprehensive nature of witness:

The Gospel of Jesus Christ carries with it the vision and hope of social transformation and of the realization of such ends as justice, freedom and peace. A living church cannot dissociate itself from prophetic and practical activities in regard to social questions. (Tambaram 1938)

#### 4.3 Church and mission

The third issue emerges in the area of the theology of mission, with particular reference to the relation between church and mission. Bosch (1980:169-171) alludes to the fact that theological reflection on the relation between church and mission is absent in Protestant missionary thinking. Also, Reformation definitions of the church are silent as far as the missionary dimension of the church is concerned. At Tambaram (1938) the situation found correction:

Tambaram spoke of ecclesiastical mission within the context of an ecumenical meeting, a fact which militated against delegates thinking only of their own denominational missionary programmes.

The truly ecumenical nature of the Tambaram conference is well captured in a statement in the *Dictionary of Mission* (p 504), which describes Tambaram as the "first really and truly worldwide ecumenical conference of Christianity in its almost 2000 years of history".

For Tambaram (1938) the Church was “the divine society founded by Christ and His apostles to accomplish His will in the world”. At Tambaram there was an emphasis on the witnessing church, pointing towards the Kingdom.

#### **4.4 Contextual issues**

A significant portion of the *Findings and recommendations* (1938a) of Tambaram deals with a number of social, political and economic issues. Like its predecessors, Tambaram also spent some time on the issue of race, with specific reference to racial discrimination. This can be seen as progress, since Edinburgh and Jerusalem spoke euphemistically of race relations, the race problem or racial conflict. At Tambaram racial discrimination as issue constitutes a difference in language. Yet, like its predecessors, Tambaram avoided the term ‘racism’.

Tambaram’s distinct contribution concerning the issue of race lies in two areas:

Firstly, the church is exposed as being racist:

In many countries, denominational differences and the existence of deep racial divisions within the Churches themselves, obscure the Church’s witness to the Gospel and paralyse its efforts to win men for Christ. (Tambaram 1938a:130)

Secondly, in developing a theological perspective on racism, Tambaram identified racism as a ‘national idol’ and a ‘household god’. The theological rationale for the renunciation of racism is twofold: The Gospel is the Word of God for all humankind and the church is by definition a fellowship for all races. Tambaram draws an illuminating parallel between racism, cultural chauvinism and sexism, indicating that the prophetic notion of the reign of God excludes all three (Tambaram 1938a:130).

#### **4.5 A note of perfect beauty**

Hogg waxes lyrical about the presence Mina Tembeka Soga at the Tamaram conference. She made a lasting impression on the delegates: "A note of perfect beauty" Hogg (1952:292) writes about her.

Mina Tembeka Soga, a teacher, social worker and church leader from South Africa's Eastern Cape, was a member of the African team of delegates. Utuk (1991:202) writes that she was the first African woman to represent Africa at a major world conference. He mentions the prophetic nature of some of her statements at Tambaram and the way in which she almost anticipated and pre-empted feminism and womanism. Utuk (1991) writes:

Visionary and determined, Soga was, interestingly, articulating, though in the language of her period, some of the things contemporary feminism is emphasizing: equal opportunity to all in all areas of life, irrespective of sex, race or nationality.

## 5 WHITBY 1947

### 5.1 Mission embarrassed

According to Bosch (1980:175-178; 1991:379,451,466,511) the Whitby Conference took place in an "atmosphere of embarrassment". During the time of the conference "the shadow of the catastrophic war years still brooded over the world".

The conference itself saw the world of 1947 as "a world in agony, a revolutionary world" (Ranson 1948:185).

Against this background it was almost logical that the question at the Whitby conference was not so much whether the preconditions for mission was present in the world, but rather whether they were present in the Church. The aim of the conference was the "rejoining of severed threads and lines of communication and the reaffirmation of the bonds of fellowship established at Tambaram" (Bosch 1980:175). Bosch goes on to say that the emphasis was on the

Church as embodiment of mission, the Church as *koinōnia*, rather than on mission as Church activity.

## 5.2 Partnership in obedience

Reflection on the relationship between older and younger churches brought about the following: Firstly, there was a rediscovery of the local church, and the younger churches as equals of the older ones. Secondly, in reflecting on the cooperation in mission between older and younger churches, the striking concept of 'partnership in obedience' was coined. The concept would come under scrutiny in years to come and in some circles it would be criticised as just as hollow and meaningless as other slogans and phrases aimed at giving credence to the relationship between churches in mission. The story is told of an Indonesian delegate who remarked, "Yes, partnership for you, but obedience for us."

Perhaps one of the biggest gains of Whitby was the attempt at summarising the understanding of mission in terms of the concepts *kerygma* and *koinōnia*. Hoekendijk, a Dutch Missiologist, added a third element, namely *diakonia* (Bosch 1991:511).

## 5.3 Towards a revolutionary church

Once more, an analysis shows that Bosch looks at the general trends which emerged at Whitby, but avoids the Whitby conference's interpretation of the post-World War Two context as a revolutionary context. Other commentators on the mission conferences, like the Dutch scholars Van't Hof (1972:139) and Wind (1984:167), pick up on the issue of revolution. In fact, Van't Hof argues that Whitby came very close to Rosenstock-Huessey's understanding of revolution as *eine Totalumwälzung*, which refers to the total and radical transformation of structures and the break-up of the underlying structures of contemporary culture. Stephen Neill (Ranson 1948:64) also perceived the church as revolutionary. His views as expressed at Whitby are reported as follows:

'From the beginning', Neill argues, 'in its essential nature the Church has been revolutionary. Christ sent it out as an

explosive, corrosive, destructive force'. Neill goes on to say that the only way for the church not to become too closely integrated to the status quo was for the church to be revolutionary, meaning that 'it has been appointed by God as prophet, critic and judge. It is the instrument in His hand of the permanent revolution'. (Ranson 1948:71)

The theological content of the revolution, in Neill's understanding, contains two elements. It is the will of God that wherever there is injustice or oppression of the weak, the order of society should be reformed. Secondly, the Church's leadership in the revolution is inextricably linked to the mission of caring for the poor and the oppressed.

Van Dusen (Ranson 1948:185-197) also introduces the category of revolution. He regards the world of 1947 as a 'revolutionary age', and says the mission of the Church is revival and reform.

Mackay's (Ranson 1948:200) use of the term 'frontier' shows that he sees the Christian missionary movement as faced with 'a flaming, revolutionary frontier'. Within this context, Whitby formulated its understanding of mission and evangelisation in a declaration entitled *Christian witness in a revolutionary world*. In the declaration, evangelisation and social involvement are connected and they give rise to creative tension. The declaration says:

As Christians, we are pledged to the service of all those who are hungry or destitute or in need; we are pledged to the support of every movement for the removal of injustice and oppression. But we do not conceive these things, good in themselves, to be the whole of evangelism, since we are convinced that the source of the world's sorrow is spiritual, and that its healing must be spiritual, through the entry of the risen Christ into every part of the life of the world. (Ranson 1948:215)

## **6 WILLINGEN 1952**

### **6.1 Mission and the Chinese revolution**



The second post-World War Two conference in Willingen, Germany, took place in the context of dramatic occurrences in China. Bosch (1980:178-181) draws attention to the success of the Mao revolution in China in the time between Whitby and Willingen. The revolution dealt mission a heavy blow in China - most of the Western missionaries who had flocked to China during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were either dead or gone or in jail. Bosch points out that Western missionary agencies were still staggering from the blow delivered by events in China when the Willingen conference was held.

Other developments at the time of the Willingen conference included processes of decolonisation in Asia and Africa, and the revival of Eastern religions. Commentators like Van't Hof (1972:157) add to the list of major developments the population explosion in what has become known as the Third World, the issue of racism in apartheid South Africa and the Cold War. To this list Wind (1984:216) adds the crisis of faith in the West, secularism and the concomitant challenge to the legitimacy of Western mission. All these developments gave rise to an atmosphere of uncertainty at the time of the Willingen conference.

## **6.2 Mission under the cross**

Bosch (1980:179) connects with the Willingen theme, namely *The missionary obligation of the church*. He regards it as a logical outcome of developments since the Tambaram conference. The theme strongly suggests an ecclesiocentric understanding of mission against which Hoekendijk reacted passionately. Bosch refers to the paper presented by Warren at Willingen, which is entitled *The Christian mission and the cross* (1953). He regards the paper as a catalyst for the different views on mission that were touted at Willingen. In essence Warren's presentation makes clear "that the starting point for a theology of mission was not to be found in the Church, but in God himself. To put it differently: mission should not be based on ecclesiology, but Christology".

## **6.3 *Missio Dei***

Willingen did not conform to Christological foundation of mission, but referred specifically to a Trinitarian grounding of mission. Bosch indicates how the “mooring of mission to the doctrine of the Trinity” resulted in the introduction of the expression *missio Dei*. The technical term was not used *expressis verbis* at Willingen, but it was coined soon afterwards. All indications are that Hartenstein should be regarded as the *auctor intellectualis* of the concept, which in its simplest form gives expression to the idea of God’s mission.

At Willingen itself, there was a clear understanding of the Trinitarian basis of mission. Not the Church, but God was the author and initiator of mission:

The missionary movement of which we are part has its source in the Triune God Himself. Out of the depths of His love for us the Father has sent forth His own beloved Son to reconcile all things to Himself, that we and all men might, through the Spirit be made one in Him with the Father, in that perfect love which is the very nature of God. (Willingen Report 1952:189)

In concluding the very brief discussion on Willingen, we reflect on issues from Willingen which were of a contextual nature.

#### **6.4 Evangelisation and social action**

In his analysis of the Willingen conference, Bassham (1979:35) relates Willingen’s dialectic of evangelisation and social action to the recognition that radical political, economic and social changes were taking place throughout the world of 1952. The conference itself radicalised the comprehensive understanding of mission that was introduced at Jerusalem and extended at Tambaram. Evangelisation and social action are kept in creative tension in this comprehensive view on mission in the following manner:

Faced with the task of Christian witness in such a world, we are called to hear anew and accept once more our Lord’s commission, ‘Go ye therefore’; to realize the Church as the instrument in God’s hand; to face the problems of

Communism and secularism; to raise a prophetic voice against social, economic and racial injustice. (Willingen Report 1952:216)

There are some interesting interpretations of why the Willingen report was not published as *The Missionary obligation of the Church*, but rather as *Missions under the cross*. One interpretation is that the staurocentric character of Willingen should be seen as a response to the context in which the meeting took place. Wind (1984:221) interprets this as follows:

In het licht van het Kruis kon men de duistere betekenis der tijden onderscheiden en de zendingstaak interpreteren als zelf-verloochende, lijdende solidariteit met een wereld van radicale sociaal-politieke veranderingen.

Mission was consequently not only understood to be solidarity with the incarnate and crucified Christ, but precisely for that reason also as solidarity with the world. In his address to conference, Warren (Willingen Report 1952:33) explains that solidarity from a missionary perspective dialectically reflects two sides. On the one hand solidarity means that the Church should “accept involvement in the world and so in the Spirit of Christ incarnate and crucified”. On the other hand solidarity is supposed to be “another kind of solidarity, the tragic, frustrating solidarity of a common need”.

## **6.5 A staurocentric ecclesiology**

Another very intriguing presentation at Willingen was that of Von Thadden (Willingen Report 1952:53-60), who had survived Russian imprisonment and World War Two. In his address entitled: *The church under the cross*, Von Thadden develops what could be regarded as a staurocentric ecclesiology. For him, a Church under the cross is a servant Church, where the concern for the poor, the miserable and the sick finds concrete expression. It is a Church that is “the mouth of the dumb and a help for the tormented and oppressed” (Willingen Report 1952:53). Von Thadden understands the Church in the German context as a Church of brotherhood and as an obedient and suffering Church in the face of national socialism.

## 7 ACHIMOTA, GHANA 1958

### 7.1 On integration

The issue with which Bosch (1980:180-181; 1991:370,379) connects as far as the Achimota conference is concerned, is the explicit purpose of the meeting to prepare the IMC for integration into the WCC. He alludes to the questions raised by Warren and Winter, amongst others, about the advisability of merging the IMC and the WCC. They saw the merge as yet another structural magic formula, and felt that the structural anomalies between the IMC and the WCC would cause problems.

Once again, Bosch focuses on the obvious and general trends of the Achimota conference. The fact that he refers only to the issue of the merger between the IMC and the WCC can quite easily create the impression that Ghana did not produce much as far as theological reflection on mission was concerned.

One has to revert to the individual contributions at Achimota to get some notion of the theological thinking as far as contextual issues are concerned. A few examples must suffice. In his presentation Mackay (Ghana 1958:101) develops a historical perspective on Ghana. He points out that this was the first IMC conference in Africa and that Ghana was one of the youngest independent states at the time, having gained its independence on 6 May 1957.

In his attempt at analysing the world of 1958 somewhat, Thomas (Ghana 1958:23-27) reflects on the Asian social revolution and the emergent national selfhood and urge for social development.

In his commentary on Ghana, Van't Hof (1972:180) draws attention to the irony that many African states gained political independence around the time of the Achimota conference, while economic power blocs were created at the same time. According to Van't Hof this marked the emergence of neo-colonialism, dividing the world into the

rich North and the poor South. Political independence did not bring economic welfare to Africa at all.

## 7.2 Adoration and repulsion

A very noteworthy analysis of the world in which the conference took place is contained in a booklet by Van Randwijck and Blauw, entitled *Naar nieuwe wegen van gehoorzaamheid* and published in 1958. In chapter two the authors show two intermingling developments that influenced the Ghana conference. The first was the enormous technological and scientific advancement of the Western world, enabling it to dominate the largest part of the world. The second was a tremendous upsurge in mission towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The imperialism of the West appeared to be favourable for mission. The West was blissfully unaware of the rather ambivalent situation of “niet alleen bewondering, maar ook weerzin” (Ghana 1958:11).

## 8 CONCLUSION

Without attempting to force the issue, this article argues that Bosch's tendency to ignore a number of crucial contextual issues in his treatment of the World Mission conferences is attributable to a radical universalising tendency in his Missiology.

By not dealing with context, in one way or another, Bosch deals with the mission conferences in a timeless fashion as if the missiological knowledge produced at these conferences are timeless truths that are equally applicable to all times and in all circumstances (Nolan 1988:15).

The universalising tendency mentioned by Nolan is based on the assumption that nothing is true or valuable unless it applies to all people, at all times and in all circumstances. An analysis of Bosch's treatment of the mission conferences shows the complete absence of any critical reflection on South Africa, even though the issue of racism or, to use the euphemisms of the conferences themselves, race problems, race relations or racial conflict, appeared on the agenda of every conference since Edinburgh. In picking up on social, political and economic issues as they featured at the conferences, I entered into a polemic with Bosch concerning the omission of such issues in his engagement with the conferences.

The avoidance of context has serious implications for any attempt to develop a postmodern Missiology, since postmodernism is about shifting from the universal, general trends, from the grand narratives, to the contextual, the little stories. There is more than enough evidence that the conferences under discussion dealt with context in a decisive manner.

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