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DAVID BOSCH: AN INTERPRETATION OF SOME MAIN THEMES IN HIS MISSIOLOGICAL THOUGHT

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David Bosch is an interesting blend of four worlds. First, he is an Afrikaner, indelibly marked by the white South African experience. This cultural heritage is an overarching reality which profoundly influences his world-view. Second, Bosch is an academic theologian, trained in the classic, European tradition. His missiological writings, wide in range and systematic in scope, bear witness to his continental training. Third, Bosch has been a missionary. Repeatedly in his writings, one senses a cross-cultural sensitivity born from years of missionary service. Finally, Bosch is an ecumenically-minded churchperson, with a passionate concern for reconciliation between churches, races and theological traditions. This blending of four identities (Afrikaans, academic, missionary, churchperson) makes any analysis of Bosch's thought a complex affair. Our task is to give a brief interpretation of the theological structure of Bosch's missiological thought, and highlight a few of its main themes. The reader is referred to my doctoral thesis (Livingston 1989) for a more extensive analysis of the topic.

THE MISSIONARY NATURE OF THE CHURCH AS THE THEOLOGICAL HORIZON FOR BOSCH'S MISSIOLOGY

In approaching our task of interpreting the theological framework of Bosch's missiology, we want to avoid positing any single word or concept as "the key" to understanding his theology of mission. No such word – for example, "witness" or "salvation" or *missio Dei* or "alternative community" – can do justice to the various dimensions of his thought. Bosch is sharply critical of reductionist approaches that oversimplify the issues involved, flattening out all subtle differences and creative tensions (see Bosch 1985:296; 1986a:65–79).

Bosch (1981:47) defines Christian mission as "the total task which God has set the Church for the salvation of the world." But what is the fundamental theological relationship between God, church, salvation and

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world? In response to the work of Thomas Kramm, Bosch (1984:187) has developed four theses – four points of “creative tension” – between evangelical and ecumenical missiologies. These four theses, cited below, form a provocative outline for a contemporary theology of mission:

1. Proceeding from the indissoluble unity of world history and salvation history, we shall have to say that the two are nevertheless not the same.
2. Affirming that the church is a part of the world and with it en route to salvation, we shall continue to believe that the church is, at the same time, the unique Body of Christ and as such separate from the world; after all, both the church's mission and its being are of crucial importance.
3. Affirming that we are called to a historical and worldly engagement for the sake of all people, we nevertheless avow that the world is transient and that the faithful are called to persevere in it.
4. Realising that it is impossible to speak only of a purely personal salvation since that would leave social sin untouched, we nevertheless do not speak exclusively of social salvation, because that would leave untouched the personal root of sin.

With these theses, Bosch seeks to move beyond present-day polarisations in mission theology by developing a new, alternative theological model. What is significant, I believe, is that three doctrines form the vital framework of his outline: namely *eschatology*, *ecclesiology*, and *soteriology*. Together, these three doctrines serve as a springboard into the heart of Bosch's theology. The motifs of eschatology, ecclesiology and soteriology provide three distinct “points of entry” into his theology of mission.

This threefold framework of Bosch's theology of mission stands, however, within the larger context of the missionary nature of the Church. This concept has gained increasing prominence as a result of the work of Barth, Brunner, and Vatican II, among others. Protestant missiology has reflected this understanding of the “missionary nature of the church” since the 1952 Willingen Conference. Johannes Blauw's work, *The Missionary Nature of the Church* was also influential in this regard. Lutheran missiologist James Bergquist (1981:59) goes so far as to affirm that “the widespread recognition of the essentially missionary character of the church” is “the most important development in the current theology of mission.”

Even a cursory overview of Bosch's writings convinces the reader that “the Church as a missionary community” lies at the very heart of his missiological agenda and provides an integrative centre for his thought. His writings repeatedly call attention to the Church as God's missionary community on earth. Her whole existence has such a character; she is missionary by her very nature (see e.g. Bosch 1980a:82f, 98f, 245; 1982a:272ff; 1987a:9f).

A central aim of my paper, therefore, is to show how Bosch interprets the eschatological, ecclesiological and soteriological motifs from the standpoint of the Church as God's missionary community.

First, there is the *eschatological* dimension of the missionary church – the church as the *kingdom community*. In this dimension of her existence, the church is called to act as an instrument of and witness to the Reign of God. Here we explore Bosch’s understanding of the creative tension between Kingdom, church, and world. Second, there is the *ecclesiological* dimension of the missionary church – the church as the *alternative community*. In this dimension of her life, she is set apart from the world and called to a life of costly discipleship. She is set apart, however, precisely *for the sake of the world*. As God’s alternative community, she exemplifies the radical implications of the New Age, and acts as a servant and witness to the world. Finally, we turn to the *soteriological* dimension of the missionary church – *the church as the reconciled and reconciling community*. In this dimension of her existence, she serves as a sign and agent of God’s reconciliation. She embodies in her own life and actions the costly, reconciling love of God in Christ, and thus, in a real sense, participates in the very life of the Triune God.

THE ESCHATOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF THE MISSIONARY CHURCH: THE CHURCH AS WITNESS TO THE REIGN OF GOD

Ever since his days as a doctoral student in Basel, Bosch has reflected a strong interest in eschatology. One sees its influence on Bosch’s thought most clearly in *Witness to the World* and in his presentation at the 1979 South African Christian Leadership Assembly: “The kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world”. More obliquely, however, one sees the influence of eschatology throughout his writings. It permeates his theologising, and determines his fundamental theological stance.¹

Bosch’s linkage of eschatology and mission undoubtedly reflects the influence of Oscar Cullmann, Bosch’s *Doktorvater*, whose work linking eschatology and mission in the New Testament has been so significant. Cullmann influenced Bosch in at least two ways. First, he provided Bosch with the *Heilsgeschichte* theological framework that Bosch used until the 1970s. Cullmann sharply distinguished between “salvation history” and “world history”, and saw the salvific work of God in the world as essentially contiguous with the ministry of the church. Bosch made use of the *Heilsgeschichte* approach as late as 1967 (see Bosch 1967:386–94). More recently, however, Bosch has abandoned drawing such sharp distinctions, believing that “salvation history” cannot be made a completely separate dimension of history.²

1. We believe Carl Braaten (1976:39) captured this facet of Bosch’s theological perspective when he wrote: “Eschatology cannot be isolated from other themes of faith and dealt with in a treatise on ‘the last things’. Instead it determines the horizon of all Christian understanding and is thematically structural for all the contents of faith and action”.

2. Bosch has summarised the change in his thinking: “In *Witness*, I did not distinguish in (Cullmann’s) way between ‘salvation history’ and ‘world history’. I would not do it any more. . . I now recognize God at work outside of the Church

Cullmann also influenced Bosch with regard to his concept of the “already” and “not yet” dimensions of the Kingdom. Cullmann argued that there is both a realised and a future element within the eschatology of the New Testament. In the coming of Jesus, the Old Testament promises have been fulfilled and the “last days” have begun. The Kingdom has already been inaugurated with the coming of its King, but it still awaits its consummation when Jesus returns again at the end of time. We now live *zwischen den Zeiten*, in the interim period between the “already fulfilled” and the “not yet completed” of the Kingdom, between the first and second comings of Christ. It is a time of profound tension yet deep hope. Bosch adopted this perspective after reading Cullmann’s *Christ and Time*, and admits that it is “one of the few theological insights that have remained absolutely constant in my thinking” (Bosch 1986b).

Bosch has defined eschatology as “the living hope that God, who has already intervened in history in Jesus Christ . . . is now conducting history to its conclusion” (in Bosch *et al* 1978:95). Beyond this general definition, Bosch (1980b:89–91) acknowledges the partial validity of each of the various eschatological views within the global church (including the premillennial, postmillennial, amillennial and dispensational schemes of interpretation). He pleads, however, for the church to move beyond these well-worn labels, for “a position beyond the sterile duality of pre- and postmillennialism”. He urges that Christians seek “a position where we take seriously both the present and the future of the kingdom.”³

Bosch draws a sharp distinction between eschatology and apocalypticism. All too often in the history of the church there has been a tendency toward apocalypticism, which Bosch regards negatively. By apocalypticism he means an outlook on history which is completely pessimistic, void of any hope for the historical future.⁴ In apocalyptic thought the world is evil and continues to deteriorate. The present is empty. The past is a Golden Era for which people yearn nostalgically but which is not constitutive for the present. The future comes as a *deus ex machina* catastrophically; it is the complete reversal of the present. This is how every form of apocalyptic functions, be it Christian or not. Examples include first century Jewish apocalyptic as well as countless variations of Christian apocalyptic, from

much more readily than I would have done twenty years ago. And the moment you say that God is at work *outside* of the Church, in other religions, in events of history, you have in fact given up *heilsgeschichte* as a separate, identifiable thread in history, in juxtaposition to world history. I think it is a *cul de sac* to try to unravel the two, and to try to detect where God is at work and where he is not at work, and to say that this is *heilsgeschichte* and this is secular history” (Bosch 1986b).

3. “In search of a New Evangelical Understanding” in *In Word and Deed*, p.72. In another article, however, Bosch admits to that he has moved “from a mildly premillennialist position to what could probably be called an amillennialist stand”. Even here, though, he claims not to be defending an eschatological “system” but rather emphasising the need to live in the tension between the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’ of the Kingdom (see Bosch 1982b:6).

4. For a full review of this subject and a critique of Bosch, see Adrio König (1980:14–18). König criticises Bosch for failing to distinguish between *Jewish apocalyptic*, which is illegitimate because of its complete denial of the world, and *Christian apocalyptic*, which is essentially positive and world-affirming. König cautions Bosch not to lump all apocalyptic theologies together and reject them all. Apocalyptic thought does not always teach there is no hope for the historical future. For Bosch’s rejoinder see (Bosch 1980:21–26).

the Montanists in the second century, up to the Millerite movement in the nineteenth century and various groups in our own time (Bosch 1980c:24). Bosch believes that when the “already” – “not yet” tension is abandoned and the emphasis is placed exclusively on the future, authentic Christian mission is paralysed (Bosch 1980c:25).

As Bosch understands it, the eschatological perspective of the New Testament focuses on the present and coming Kingdom. The present and future dimensions of this Kingdom stand in creative tension (Bosch 1980c:25):

The future. . . has been cleft in two by Christ. The future is already present. In apocalyptic the future remains entirely future. Christian eschatology, however, is future-in-the-process-of-being-fulfilled. . .

The end does not – as apocalyptic would have it – immediately come in its entirety; it is divided into two. Or even better: from now on everything is “end”. In the events regarding Jesus of Nazareth the end is inaugurated. . . The “new creation” has already begun, not merely in the personal lives of individuals, but in a cosmic sense. *Kaine ktisis* in 2 Cor. 5:17 should therefore not, with almost all the older translations, be interpreted as referring to “new creature”, but rather as the N.E.B. does it: “When anyone is united to Christ, there is a *new world*; the old has gone, and a *new order* has already begun”. This is not apocalyptic language!

Thus in the Christ-event, the future has proleptically become present. Everything should now be perceived from this future perspective, *im Blick aufs Ende*, to use Freytag’s phrase. This perspective has tremendous consequences for the church’s life and mission today.

We now turn to analyse Bosch’s understanding of the relationship between eschatology and history, which is so vital to the theology of mission in our day.

In contemporary theology, the doctrine of eschatology has broken out of the confines of an exclusively “futurist” and otherworldly orientation. Thanks to the contribution of such eschatologically-oriented theologians as Cullmann, Pannenberg and Moltmann, it has become crucial to relate eschatology to *present* history. The future still remains the focus of eschatology, but it is the future as it penetrates and shapes the present, the future as it gives guidance to the meaning and purpose of history today. This, in turn, has had dramatic implications for the church’s understanding of the nature and content of her missionary task.

Bosch affirms this basic shift in theological perspective. Eschatology relates to the historical future of this world, as well as to the meta-historical. Modern eschatology asks: How do we evaluate the meaning of contemporary historical events theologically? What does it mean when we say that God is “at work” in certain persons, events or nations? What are the criterion for discerning the work of God from the work of other forces? What constitutes a proper Christian theology of history for our day?

The polarisation in mission theology – with different groups discerning

radically different “signs of the times” – supplies abundant evidence that developing a Christian theology of history is a controversial task. Bosch criticises evangelicals and ecumenicals alike for their misunderstanding of the relationship of eschatology and history.⁵ In fact, Bosch argues, both evangelicals and ecumenicals are operating from the *same model*, even though they arrive at conflicting conclusions. All too often, both groups wrongly attribute to the providence of God what is, in fact, simply various sociological forces at work:

Both evangelicals and ecumenicals . . . are subjectivistic. There was a time, for instance, when the colonial programme of European countries was regarded as divine providence, as “salvation history”. Today, on the contrary, decolonisation is regarded as proof of God’s direct intervention. In the past, capitalism was labelled “Christian”; today the same is said of socialism. Time and again the tendency thus is to ascribe to divine providence the sociological forces dominant in a particular period. Behind this lies historical positivism (Bosch 1980a:231).

It is too easy, Bosch maintains, to read God into historical events. Whatever the event – be it a natural disaster or a human political revolution, the rise of an Adam Smith or a Karl Marx – we cannot uncritically ascribe to God what may very well be the work of other social or historical (or demonic!) forces.

While decrying such false “theologies of history,” Bosch does not mean to imply that God is uninvolved in the historical process. If this were so, the believer would be in the same sceptical position as an atheistic existentialist. Rather, Bosch criticises all *one-dimensional interpretations* of history; interpretations which evangelicals and ecumenicals are prone to make (Bosch 1980a:231f). We shall now summarise Bosch’s own theology of history.

1. Bosch believes that God acts in history, and that his acts are interwoven into secular history. Thus ‘salvation history’ (the creative and redemptive actions of God in Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit) cannot be isolated or divorced from world history (Bosch 1980a:232; 1980b:198). The God of the Bible does not act only on a narrow “spiritual” plane, nor solely among the redeemed in the church. He is concerned for and involved with the whole of humankind, in every dimension of existence. The Old Testament provides ample evidence of the universal scope of God’s concern.

2. Yet God’s activity as revealed in the Bible, is radically particular in nature. God’s historical involvement with the world is centred on the person of Jesus Christ (Bosch 1980a:63f). The doctrine of the Incarnation

5. Evangelicals tend to *polarise world history and salvation history*. They quarantine God’s work to the realm of salvation history only. World history remains in the grip of Satan. It becomes significant only when God’s missionary church expands into the world and ‘conquers’ a segment of it. In reaction, ecumenicals have *neglected salvation history*. They have preferred to emphasise how God is at work in the realm of politics, nation-building, and other faiths and ideologies. God has sometimes been perceived to be at work everywhere except in the institutional Church (see Bosch 1980a:230f)!

stands as the supreme example of the “interweaving” of God’s history and human history. God sent his Son into the concrete historical context of first century Palestine. The radically particular nature of the Christ-event shows that God takes human history seriously. The Incarnation is God’s YES to the significance of human history; he takes humankind seriously enough to enter into its history. Yet the coming of God in Christ also represents a NO to human history. The Lordship of God in Jesus Christ relativises the claims of all other human persons, movements and nations. Through the presence of God’s spirit in the world, God’s YES and NO towards human history continues. As Bosch puts it: “In, through, and among the events of this world God is operating, in such a way that these events are deprived of all absoluteness and become as it were second-rate or relative” (1980b:198).

3. Bosch argues that mission is the focal point of God’s involvement in world history. God’s purposes in human history are ultimately missionary in nature. Out of his love, he seeks to redeem a fallen world, to save a lost world, to bring *shalom* to a world that is fragmented and alienated. All of God’s actions in the world must be seen from this redemptive, missionary frame of reference. This is most clearly seen in the person and work of Jesus Christ, who is the central figure of God’s missionary involvement with the world.

4. But what about God’s activities in the present world? How do we discern the presence (or absence) of God’s action in contemporary history? Here we come to the heart of the *missio Dei* debate of the 1960s. Bosch believes that God’s action in history is discernible only by faith. The death and resurrection of Christ, along with the guiding presence of the Holy Spirit, allows the Christian community to perceive something of the mystery of God’s providence in the midst of human confusion (Bosch 1980a:233). Yet Bosch remains profoundly sceptical of any theology which claims to discern the hand of God, fully understanding and explaining the “signs of the times”. To interpret the providential acts of God in history remains, for Bosch, an ambivalent enterprise, fraught with danger. Even for believers, the meaning of history is often hidden.

God’s activities cannot be derived directly from history. History is full of contradictions, gaps, discontinuities, puzzles, surprises, mysteries, temptations, and confusions. After all, not only God, but the counter-forces are at work in it. God’s activities in history are therefore for the eye of faith simultaneously revealed and hidden (Bosch 1980a:233).

5. Despite his deep scepticism, Bosch does not abandon the attempt faithfully to interpret the meaning of history in our day. With Hendrikus Berkhof, Bosch affirms that we cannot evade our responsibility of attempting to understand what God is doing in our history. The “signs of the times” must be discerned, but in deep humility and vigilance. Bosch urges that Christians be “very modest” in their efforts. “We may never simplis-

tically distinguish between light and dark – especially since our interpretation [of history] is easily determined by our own prejudices and predilections; we see God at work only when and where it suits us” (Bosch 1980a:233). Bosch believes the parables of vigilance in Matthew 24–5 are instructive in this regard. We must seek to interpret the meaning of history with caution, but also with a courageous confidence in the Lord who sends us into history to participate with him in his mission.

People who remain alert are those who do not know what course events will take. They continue to wait for the unveiling and do not anticipate the final judgment. They must interpret the reality in which they live, yet not so much by judging as by keeping their lanterns burning and making the most of their talents. While doing this, they develop an “instinct” which enables them to discern, however imperfectly, who their fellow servants are and who are in need of their help (cf. Mt 25:31–46). Such people interpret the facts of history, albeit fallibly. They have the courage to take decisions, even if these are relative. They know, however, that the best way of interpreting history is to allow God to send them into the world. Mission is an exegesis of history (Bosch 1980a:233f).

6. The best way to interpret history, Bosch affirms, is to become personally involved in God’s mission. It is precisely because Christians live in hope of the future Kingdom with its comprehensive vision of salvation that they can become “involved in the struggles of this world and begin to erect signs of the coming kingdom” (Bosch 1984:184f). Bosch affirms the need for Christians to seek to discern how God is working in today’s world, and to work for a better world of freedom, peace and justice. Christians, of all people, are obliged to strive alongside others of goodwill to create concrete political and social models which will enhance the vision of a more just society (Bosch 1986b; Costas 1981:289). It is precisely the Christian’s eschatological hope which drives him or her to this earthly activism.

We live in the tension between the “already” and the “not yet”, a tension that, by its very nature, remains almost unbearable, as we seek to allow something of the “not yet” to take shape in the here and now. In practice this perspective means, *inter alia*, that anybody who believes that one day God will wipe away all tears, cannot acquiesce in tears and sorrow *now*, anybody who knows that one day swords will be turned into plough-shares and former enemies become friends, cannot but work for peace and reconciliation *now*. Precisely our faith in the Coming Kingdom leads to our involvement in the world here and now (Bosch 1982b:9).

Characteristically, Bosch affirms the need to live in a creative tension. We should neither despair about this world by placing “all our stakes in the Coming Kingdom”, nor give up all hope in a Coming Kingdom by trying “to build utopia here and now with our bare hands.” We must live in the tension between the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’ in order that “something of the ‘not yet’ may take shape in the here and now” (Bosch 1982b:9).

THE ECCLESIAL DIMENSION OF THE MISSIONARY CHURCH: THE CHURCH AS GOD'S "ALTERNATIVE COMMUNITY"

The church is called to be "in the world but not of the world." All too often, however, the church forgets one of these dimensions of her existence, and breaks the delicate tension between them. "One group", Bosch claims (1980a:221),

stands *against* the world at the risk of not being *in* it, irrelevant and isolated. The other group stresses being *for* the world yet risks being *of* the world – being absorbed and liquidated into it, thus losing the Church's transcendental dimension).

Bosch admits the difficulty in finding a balance in this regard, yet it is only as the church remains faithful to the double relationship – distinguishable from the world yet in solidarity with it – that it can truly exist as a missionary community (Bosch 1980a:222). In this context, Bosch has made use of the concept of the Church as the "alternative community."

Life in the "alternative community" involves a new openness in our relationship with other persons and groups, because the old barriers have been torn down through the life, death and resurrection of Christ; it involves a new evaluation of the present moment as the *kairos* of God, because the New Age of the Kingdom has invaded the Old; it involves a continual conversion to Jesus; and it promotes a costly discipleship marked by compassion for others, even to the point of suffering and death (see Bosch 1982c).

Although Bosch has not written explicitly of the "alternative community" in recent years, we believe that the substance of the concept remains vital to his missiological approach. The "alternative community" (AC) concept serves at least two functions.

First, it is an attempt *to resolve the proper theological relationship between the church and the world*. At first glance, the AC concept appears to be very ecclesiocentric. Bosch (1980b:25–27) acknowledges that the Church is in constant danger of shifting away from its concern for the world, and gravitating to selfish concern for self-enhancement and institutional survival.

Bosch, however, believes that it is vital – for the sake of the world – that the church exist as a self-consciously distinct "alternative community." Indeed, the whole AC idea flows out of a deep concern and love for the world, as Bosch made clear in 1982 (1982b:9),

In my understanding . . . we have to work consistently at the renewal of the church – the alternative community – and precisely in that way at the renewal of society. It is for this reason that so much of what I have written in recent years in fact concentrates on the church. *It is not a concentration on the church merely for the sake of the church but, rather, for the sake of the world*. If the "alternativeness" of the church is not apparent, the world

loses its point of reference. I am not saying that the world can or even should copy the church – it remains, by definition, unable to be copied – and yet the church is called to be a permanent challenge to the world and its values.

This approach is not unique to Bosch, of course. Many theologians in recent times have argued that if the church is to remain true to her nature as the Body of Christ and have a redemptive impact on society, she must maintain a distinct identity within the surrounding culture. The church is continually tempted to adopt the *Zeitgeist* of the culture in which she lives. This was the burden of the provocatively titled work by Peter Berger and Richard Neuhaus (1976): *Against the World for the World*.

The 1952 Lund meeting of the WCC's Faith and Order Commission stated the issue with beguiling simplicity: "The Church is always and at the same time called out of the world and sent into the world." The dilemma has been how to live out both these affirmations simultaneously. Bosch has found in the concept of the church as "alternative community" a valuable resource with which to hold together these two affirmations.

J.J. Kritzinger has made the valuable suggestion that Bosch's use of the AC concept is an attempt to reconcile two very different ecclesiologies. On the one hand there is the traditional approach of the church as a divine institution, focused on God and called out from the world. On the other hand, there is the newer emphasis of the church as a pilgrim people sent into the world, in order to be "the church for others." The former emphasised the church's central role of mediating God to the world. The latter viewed the church merely as a "hyphen" between God and the world. Bosch's AC ecclesiology emerges out of a dialogue between these two approaches, seeking to integrate the abiding truths of both – another "creative tension" (Bosch *et al* 1978:182).

The AC idea also functions in Bosch's writings *as a conceptual and practical strategy in the struggle for justice and peace in South Africa*. The AC represents a particular – and distinctly Christian – socio-ethical stance in relation to the social transformation of South Africa.

Bosch credits his adoption of the AC concept primarily to Mennonite theologians such as John Howard Yoder. Yoder passionately believes in the church's capacity to contribute to social justice and peace in the world as she lives out the implications of being the Church – God's "alternative community". In Yoder's words (1972:157), "the primary social structure through which the gospel works to change other structures is that of the Christian community." While Yoder would hasten to add that the social transformation of the world order is not to be the church's primary function it is nonetheless one of her essential functions. With all this, Bosch would seem to agree.

Bosch acknowledges, of course, that there are other legitimate strategies for social change besides the AC model. He has discussed the possibilities

of peaceful reform through such tactics as negotiation, political action and civil disobedience.⁶ He would undoubtedly agree with ethicist Stephen Mott (1982:139):

The creation of an alternative community has validity in itself, but is inadequate to express fully the biblical images of executing justice in the gate and breaking every yoke. The demonstration of Christian community is a fact of social change, but as the single expression of social justice it is inadequate.

But Bosch would hasten to add that the AC concept is a legitimate Christian strategy for social transformation. The reality of the Church as God's new community – and not merely pragmatic political considerations – have determined the shape of Bosch's socio-political vision. It is from this standpoint that we should understand Bosch's leading role in the 1979 SACLA gathering. SACLA provided a concrete embodiment of the AC concept in action.

Bosch's view of the church as God's alternative community is a compelling vision. It provides a credible paradigm with which to interpret the vexing theological issue of the proper relationship between the church and the world, and gives the church a biblically-grounded model for confronting social injustice in South Africa. Some criticisms of the AC concept have emerged, however, around its implicit *pacifism*. The question of violence, both revolutionary and institutional, is a deeply troubling issue for Christians in South Africa and elsewhere.⁷ We have already argued that the AC concept, in Bosch's thought, is a legitimate Christian strategy for social transformation. A central dimension of the AC, however, is its emphasis upon non-violence.

There are some who would ask whether the implicit pacifism of the AC is not merely a pragmatic response to social pressures in South Africa. They would point out the apparent inconsistency among the English-speaking churches. Why, they ask, have these churches, who have traditionally stood in the "just war" tradition, recently been making quasi-pacifist statements, particularly since the rise of Black liberation movements? Is the growing pacifist stance of these churches, and also of Afrikaner reformers like Bosch, indicative of a genuine change in theological convictions or as a pragmatic response to social pressures, as English-speaking Christians attempt to withdraw from the violent social conflict between a militarised South African state and the Black liberation movements? (see de Gruchy 1988:174). Seen in this light, the *Kairos*

6. He discussed non-violent civil disobedience in two unpublished addresses: "Violence", (n.d., 14 pp.) and "Burgerlike Ongehoorsaamheid" (July, 1985, 4pp.).

7. Beyers Naudé has noted that: "In South Africa we have never yet had a thorough discussion of the issue of violence or nonviolence. It is vitally important to form a legitimate theological position regarding that question" (as quoted by Walter Wink 1987:vii).

Document rightly perceived the pseudo-pacifism and neutrality of these churches as a flight from their Christian social responsibility.

We do not believe, however, that Bosch's adherence to the non-violent lifestyle of the AC is grounded in such pragmatism. The non-violent stance of the Anabaptist tradition – and of Bosch, we believe – is deeply rooted in their theologies. As John de Gruchy (1988:182) puts it, the Anabaptists' pacifist position

arose out of a Christology and ecclesiology which took seriously the fact that the church is a community which has been called out of the world to bear witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ . . . For . . . the Anabaptists, the prime issue is not one of obedience to rules or principles, but the following of Jesus the suffering Messiah.

De Gruchy notes that the early Anabaptists made no overt attempts to change the social order. Instead, they devoted their efforts to keeping their own fellowship alive. "Their witness to the world, and therefore their testimony to God's order for the world, derived from their struggle to be the church" (de Gruchy 1988:183). In time, the social stance laid the Anabaptists open to the criticism that they were simply "neutral" with regard to the things of this world: their refusal to become involved in the political arena sometimes meant an escape into an "alternative society" that resembled the ancient Essene community more than the community of Jesus Christ. Some critics have maintained that Bosch's AC model is similar; it serves as a retreat from the active struggle for social justice in South Africa into mere "neutrality."

Yoder and other Anabaptist theologians, however, do not condone this view. Instead, as de Gruchy (1988:183) has summarised it,

the Anabaptist vision *requires socio-political engagement, but a way of engagement which derives from the gospel rather than secular-norms, values and pragmatism*. In particular, the Christian and the church are called to take sides with the oppressed in the struggle for justice, but in ways which are consonant with the cross of redemptive suffering. The "enemy" is always to be regarded as a human being for whom Christ died, and therefore the goal for Christian witness is not only justice for the oppressed but also redemption for the oppressor. The Christian's position in the struggle for justice is therefore not neutral; sides have to be taken, but in taking sides Christians may well find themselves caught in the crossfire of opposing forces. It is a form of radical peacemaking through a willingness to suffer for the cause of the right (my emphasis).

This summary of Anabaptist social strategy could well be describing Bosch's own position. In the church's prophetic witness, she must indeed stand on the side of justice. Socio-political engagement is an obligation for the church. She must not, however, resort to worldly methods and means but must adopt the way of the cross, which suffers rather than causes violence. As Bosch (1976:184) puts it:

And what if the powers that be reject the church's prophetic witness? Does she then try to force her ideas upon the world by applying the means and methods of the world? Does

she try to conquer where she has failed to persuade? Does she attack the world on its own terms? If she did, she would become thoroughly worldly and therefore utterly redundant. Triumphalism is an ever present temptation for the Church. So what must she do? If her prophetic witness is rejected, she has only one way to go; on the road of the Cross. This will be the new form of her prophetic witness, characterised by silence rather than garrulity. But will this have any effect? That is, in the last analysis, none of her business. She is called to be faithful, not effective. Success and failure are in any case very relative concepts in the Kingdom of God.

This firm position regarding non-violence helps explain Bosch's criticism of the *Kairos Document* in particular, and of liberation theology in general. While Bosch affirms much of what *Kairos* declares, he believes it is wrong in "laying a psychological basis for hatred and its tacit support for revolutionary violence, or at least suggesting that responding with violence to violence is inevitable" (Bosch 1987b:15). To advocate or condone such an approach will inevitably contaminate the church itself with the same hatred that characterises the oppressor. Bosch (1987b:17) believes that the church must declare and exemplify an *alternative to violence* in her quest for the liberation of South Africa:

The church will always be tempted to follow the ways of the world but . . . it is called to resist this temptation. Unless the church in South Africa does this, it will just, with the rest, sink deeper into the quagmire and find it even more difficult to be a symbol of better values. *It is called to find a way of resolutely showing solidarity with the poor and oppressed while at the same time preaching and practicing a transcendent love.* Unless it follows this course, the spectre of violence and ruin and hatred will always be with us, both now and after liberation.

This desire to work for social change without compromising the non-violent character of the gospel lies at the heart of Bosch's approach.⁸

In the final analysis, the efficacy of the non-violent ethos of the AC will be proved not by the *words* of its advocates, but by their *deeds*. In reference to people like Bosch, John de Gruchy (1988:184) has made this point clear:

For those who do adopt [Yoder's] position and seek to be the "alternative community" in South Africa, it must be said that the proof of their position will not be made primarily in argument but in example and witness. Even if not all Christians are willing to espouse such pacifism, it is surely of vital importance that there be such communities of Christians in South Africa who can point to an alternative witness and way to justice in which violence is overcome not only as an end but also as a means.

For David Bosch, and for countless other South Africans, the cost of being

8. Bosch made essentially the same argument in 1972 to the (Indian) Lenasia congregation of the Reformed Church in Africa. In his unpublished lecture "Violence", Bosch argues forcefully that, when faced with a situation of social injustice, various non-violent strategies for social change (following the example of Jesus and as practised by such men as Gandhi and Martin Luther King) are preferable to violent, revolutionary change. See also Bosch's unpublished text prepared for a July 1985 television interview, "Burgerlike Ongehoorsaamheid" (Civil Disobedience).

a member of God's alternative community is witnessed daily in the choices they make and the actions they take.

*THE SOTERIOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF THE MISSIONARY
CHURCH: THE CHURCH AS A SIGN AND AGENT OF GOD'S
RECONCILIATION*

At the heart of mission is the concern to make known the gospel of salvation to all the world. The church is called to announce and embody this "good news", as a reconciled and reconciling community. She is called to express, in her own life and actions, the costly salvific love of God in Christ.

There are many ways in which the church is called to express God's message of reconciliation. But a central way in which this message must be expressed in South Africa today, according to Bosch, is for the Dutch Reformed "family" of churches to strive unceasingly for a visible, structural unity across racial lines. According to Bosch, apartheid threatens the very nature of the church as a community of reconciliation, and it is on this level in particular that he has attacked apartheid most severely.

Bosch has long been active in the quest to bring together the four branches of the Dutch Reformed Church family. We note in particular his leadership in the promotion of the 1982 *Open Brief*⁹, his impassioned addresses at the 1982 Conference on the Church in the Eighties, and the 1986 Pretoria Conference on Church Unity.

At the root of the matter is the meaning of the Gospel itself. True reconciliation with God simultaneously includes incorporation into the church, the community "where people find their identity in Christ rather than in their race, culture, social class, or gender" (Bosch 1982d:35). On this basis Bosch (1982d:34ff) declares that

any church which closes its doors to worshippers from other ethnic backgrounds is placing cultural distinctives above the cross of Christ, and is falling captive to a non-Christian ideology . . . It is perpetuating "nothing but a heresy".

In the present South African situation, Bosch believes that unity within the DRC "family" has become the touchstone for the church's witness to the world. Does loyalty to Jesus Christ really break down racial and ethnic barriers, or not? Is the fellowship of Jesus Christ to be a non-racial Church, or a separate collection of so-called "national" churches? Bosch believes that an open, non-racial church is precisely the point at which the heart of

9. The "Open Letter", signed by 123 DRC pastors, linked together a concern for the church's unity across racial lines, her prophetic calling, and her witness to the world - and grounded all three in the doctrine of reconciliation (see Bosch *et al* 1982).

the gospel is at stake for Afrikaner Christians today (see Bosch 1987c:45–73).

A final point, and then I shall close. Bosch's theological emphasis upon reconciliation has been a long-standing concern. We note for example, that he currently serves as Chairman of the National Initiative for Reconciliation.

But some have criticised Bosch for emphasising "reconciliation" instead of "liberation" in the struggle for justice in South Africa today. And there can be no doubt that "reconciliation" is a problematic word in South Africa, because of its frequent misuse (see e.g. Boesak 1982:63). Although it was not aimed at Bosch in particular, the *Kairos Document* criticised "Church Theology" because of its superficial talk about reconciliation and non-violence. In the interests of social liberation, *Kairos* rejected the call for the church to be a reconciling "alternative community" (de Gruchy 1986:239). At Unisa's 1986 Institute for Theological Research (devoted to the theme of reconciliation), a major paper expressed doubt that the symbol of reconciliation can play any meaningful role in transforming South African society (Smit 1986:79–112).

In response to this scepticism about the efficacy of the "reconciliation model" for the social transformation of South Africa, we would affirm, with John de Gruchy, that reconciliation and liberation do not necessarily have to be in conflict. They have the power to be *complementary helpmates* in the quest for justice in South African society. After comparing and contrasting the *Kairos Document* and the *National Initiative for Reconciliation Statement*, de Gruchy (1986:240f; cf also Lochman 1980) summarises his conclusions as follows:

- (1) In the struggle for a just society, the church cannot be neutral, but there are different, complementary strategies.
- (2) The church must be the church, but this does not mean that it has its own political program alongside that of the struggle for liberation. It must participate in critical solidarity.
- (3) The gospel of reconciliation and liberation, as well as the political strategies of negotiation and confrontation, are not antithetical but two sides of the same coin.
- (4) The suffering witness of the cross, and therefore non-violent redemptive action, remains the paradigm for the Christian, even though there is an honoured Christian tradition which supports the idea of a just revolution.

From this perspective, Bosch's approach (focusing as he does on the church as a reconciling, "alternative community"), is to be valued as an essential contribution to South Africa as it struggles to be a society of justice and peace.

DAVID BOSCH: "MISSIOLOGIST OF THE ROAD"

Almost fifty years ago, John MacKay, President of Princeton Theological

Seminary, wrote a book entitled *A Preface to Christian Theology*. One chapter was called “Two Perspectives: The Balcony and the Road.” MacKay was concerned to contrast two ways of approaching life. The “Balcony Approach” is a symbol of those who seek to know the truth about life by standing as a spectator on a balcony, watching from the sidelines. The person on the balcony betrays an aloofness towards the people below, unaffected by what was happening down in the street. It is an immobility of the soul.

MacKay (1942:44f) contrasts this with the other approach to life, the pilgrim way of “The Road”:

The Road is the symbol of a first-hand experience of reality where thought, born of a living concern, issues in decision and action. When a man squarely faces the challenge of his existence, a vital concern is aroused within him. He puts to himself the question, what must I do? He is eager to know, not so much what things are in their ultimate essence, as what they are and should be in their concrete existence. He asks insistently such questions as these: How can I be what I ought to be? How can I know God? . . . How can a better order be established than that which now exists? . . . The deepest truths about reality can be known, therefore, only by people who start from a deep concern about life and who are prepared to commit themselves irrevocably to the full implications of the truth that satisfies their concern . . . Religious truth is obtained only on the Road.

What is David Bosch’s vision and vocation as a missiologist in South Africa? Why has he stayed in South Africa and within the Dutch Reformed Church, when he has had opportunities to go elsewhere? We believe that David Bosch embodies a “missiology of the road”. By staying in the land of his birth, and by attempting to integrate his theology and practice in a contextually relevant fashion, Bosch provides an authentic *martyria*, a witness to the world, which is profoundly evangelistic. We believe Bosch’s example as a “missiologist of the road” serves as a creative and redemptive contribution of this Afrikaner Christian to the world church.

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