

DAVID J. BOSCH, THE KOREAN CHURCH AND WORLD MISSION

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I. Introduction - The Past and Present of Korean World Mission

Various mission theologies provided the background to the rapid progress shown by the Korean church in the field of world evangelism during the last twenty years. It is, however, the field-oriented American mission theology rather than the progressive theory-oriented mission theology that took the initiative in providing the basis, backdrop and direction to the Korean church mission. Among these, the 'Church Growth' theory by Donald A. McGavran in the eighties and the theory of 'Spiritual Warfare,' by Peter C. Wagner, competent evangelism and intermediary prayer approaches in the nineties were the influential mission strategies for the Korean church.

Such American mission theologies went hand in hand with the evangelical passion of the Korean church and missionaries to dispatch the 2nd largest number of missionaries in the world. Such mission work suffered, however, from the lack of a theological foundation so that Korean mission had to endure criticism as being "unguarded, unprepared, and undirected."

Most of the Korean churches that took a leadership role in world mission were conservative in nature. Missionary work also initially displayed remarkable success, expanding its area of activities, by utilizing traditional missionary activities such as the creation of new churches, Bible study and literature service. Nevertheless, underlying conflicts at mission sites rose to the surface in the 1990s as Korean missionaries to the Philippines, Indonesia and Russia (among others) encountered cultural conflicts with the natives. As a result, mission theologies that are ecumenical in nature became the center of attention.

The trend towards ecumenical mission theologies is an important indicator for the establishment of mission direction in the 21st century. Progressive mission theologies provide fundamental factors and solutions to various internal conflicts that arise from the diverse nature of mission fields as well suggesting future directions for mission work. For example, in his book *The Coming of the Third Church: an Analysis of the Present and Future of the Church*, Walbert Buehlmann attempted to create a new mission theology, while in *Partners in Dialogue*, Arnulf Camps examines the exclusivism of Protestantism, traditionalism, relativism, and the Scriptural fallacies of Catholicism. Further, Rodger C. Bassham's *Mission Theology, 1948-1975: Years of Worldwide Creative Tension--Ecumenical*,

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Evangelical and Roman Catholic is a historically based explication on missions that argues for a movement towards “true and common mission studies”. His argument is being touted as the answer to the problems related to the mission field.

Alternative Approach to World Mission by the Korean Church

While the conservative Korean church was reacting to the ecumenical mission theologies with dismay and rebuff, South African mission theologian, David Bosch appeared on the scene with his moderate approach towards missions. Bosch’s emphasis that “the gospel of Christ retains the dream and hope of realizing fundamental aspects such as social reform, justice, freedom and peace. A living church cannot exclude itself from prophetic and realistic activities relating to social problems” (WTW, 198). This opened a new chapter towards understanding evangelical mission theology in contrast to the previous uniform approach.

Bosch’s influence was opportune in that it enabled the Korean church and its traditional mission to overcome the limitations that were coming from the polarizing effects of two extreme positions, that it was suffering from despite its remarkable success and growth and helped to solve many of its difficult problems. From this perspective, efforts to examine and determine the mission theology of Bosch gives us a unique and important opportunity to support and to transform the world mission of the Korean church towards a progressive social mission work. Fortunately, an attempt was made to reevaluate the academic perspective of Bosch in 1996 by Willem Saayman, professor of theology at the University of South Africa, in his *Mission in Bold Humility* (ed. Willem Saayman and Klippiess Kritzinger) which serves as an important source for this paper.

II. David Bosch and the Korean Church

Theology can be described as a milestone that serves to awaken the church and mission and give them new direction. It must not be unilateral, however, in its instructions or attempt to reign over the church. It must always remember that it is only one part of evangelism. Theology must serve the church and present it with the mission-related motive, direction and policy as well as bestowing it with God’s message.

According to J. Verkuyl, “a single theology cannot fully express the perfect essence of God’s nature in Christ. Furthermore, an eternally useful and timeless theology for all people does not exist in this world” (459). Thus, theology can and should only perform its role when it is in a tense but mutually complementary relationship with the church and missions. It is thus that the mission theology of David Bosch created a “Copernicus-like conversion” for the Korean church in its mission field.

Within the Korean church can still be found evidences of conflict and hostility between the evangelical and ecumenical camps. It is within such a context that Bosch raised a sense of self-awakening on both sides, increasing self-consciousness of themselves as well

as of the rationale for mutual cooperation towards the work of evangelizing North Korea.

II-1. Bosch's theology opened the eyes of the Korean churches to a dualistic consciousness, enabling them to move beyond the moralistic, doctrine of atonement, hellfire and brimstone dominated unitary consciousness.

Bosch emphasized that "the meaning of mission is the admission that Christians are those who are called upon to live together in Christ with the poor, oppressed and suffering as well as non-believers and that it is their duty to do so in their mission field." Such an argument helped the Korean church to a deeper understanding of its common undertaking towards evangelism and church, towards believers and unbelievers.

II-2. Bosch also warned the ecumenical bloc of the dangers arising from the temptation to indulge in eschatological humanism and to turn one's back on God. He emphasized the foolishness of man's efforts towards self-reliance as well as his attempts to construct his future on his own. He reemphasized that it is the original duty of the church to reconcile the contrasting demands between the otherworldly, Godly state and the practice of a new social morality.

II-3. As a result of Bosch, the two sides were able to realize the need for mutual cooperation and unity towards the problem of unification of the two Koreas. This led to actual acts of collaboration and mutual trust between the two camps.

III. David Bosch and the Korean Church's Mission

Among the works by David Bosch that are translated into Korean are *Witness to the World*, *Transforming Mission* and *Classic Texts in Mission and World Christianity*. From the 1990s onward, works by Bosch started to appear in Korean theological papers. As a result of analyzing 260 mission related articles produced at Seoul Theological University, I have discovered that Bosch is cited in more than 100 articles and he is cited without exception in all papers relating to the unifying trend between the evangelical and ecumenical camps.

III-1. Bosch's work presents a coordinated direction for the mission theology of the Korean church. The subjects of mission include togetherness with others, liberation, indigenous movement, preaching of the Gospel, salvation through mediation, communal witnessing, realization of justice, evangelism, field-mission, dialogue and witnessing to other living religions, among others.

III-2. He was responsible for fostering a creative environment amongst the ecumenical and open mission work. David Bosch defined mission as an active participation in God's work

rather than individual salvation or Shalom. He also cited Moltman's view that "evangelism is missions but missions go beyond evangelism." In the Asian mission field where diverse and multiple religions exist, he created a ministry that recognized universal specialty over Christian absolutism, approaching missions through a relative approach. Arguing, "intolerant and radical fundamentalism is an obstacle in the Asian field which absolutely needs dialogue between the religions," Bosch argued for a multilateral mission theology.

III-3. His approach emerged as an alternative mission theology in the Asian mission field.

David Bosch, a member of a Reformed Church from the Netherlands, experienced firsthand racial discrimination in South Africa during the heyday of Apartheid. In 1980, he presented a paper, "Bearing fervent witness to their suffering borne for the Kingdom of God" during the Commission for World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) in WCC. In the paper, an expression of the conflict between religion and politics, he emphasized the universal responsibility for being sympathetic to the suffering, refusal to force suffering on others, and reconciliation between various Christian groups. For Asia, with its many social problems and religious conflicts, such a message can be a good guide-book for a theology of love and reconciliation.

IV. The Korean Church Mission and its Role in World Evangelism

Due to David Bosch, the Korean church can find answers to the criticism that it is without policy and strategy. There are three major problems related to world mission work. First is the conflict and suffering arising from economic exploitation and political oppression in the mission settings. Second is the need to respond to developments in the mass media. As a result of the world being linked together by a network, the mission field can share worldwide information in real-time. Thirdly, mission work can no longer be maintained without missionaries holding to a cooperative spirit that they belong to the kingdom of God. By means of Bosch's progressive mission theology, the Korean church can restore its faith and passion for missions and become a new leader in the field of world missions.

IV-1. The eschatological mission spirit of the Korean church and its ardent participation in mission work.

IV-2. The expansion of the mission field capabilities of the Korean church by energizing the creativity of its mission work. What the Korean church mission gained from Bosch is an enhanced awareness of the political and economic situation of the mission field and a renewed sense of direction.

IV-3. The steadfast and tenacious nature of faith in the Korean church. Bosch also became a major cause behind the conversion towards a communal spirit and heightened religious

policy for the perfection of God's kingdom.

Conclusion

David Bosch is responsible for unifying the divisiveness of the Korean church as well as providing the textbook type guideline for the Korean church and for Asian evangelism through his work *Transforming Mission*. Also, in his other work, *Witness to the World*, he did a good job of explicating the controversial problems relating to missions and proclaiming that working for the Trinity of God is the goal of world mission as well as its true subject.

Evangelists need to realize that preaching the gospel of God is a reality that cannot be neglected in numerous mission and pastoral settings. Bosch, who preached that doing missionary work is to participate in Christ's work of liberation and, through its means, living up to the Word made into flesh, paved the way for the Korean church to break out of its shell and step into the broad world stage in the area of world mission. In other words, Bosch is the very author who made "Korean church and the Globalization of Mission" possible. Bosch can even be described as the motor that acted as a driving force for supplementing the work of world mission by the Korean church and thereby allowing it to participate in evangelical work even more actively.

By showing the work of global evangelism by the Korean church as evidence, Bosch, who combined eschatological faith and a broad approach to mission work, demonstrates beyond a doubt that the globalization of the Korean church is in fact to be truly Korean.