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## **POST-MODERN MISSION A PARADIGM SHIFT IN DAVID BOSCH'S THEOLOGY OF MISSION?**

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In his renowned *Transforming Mission*,<sup>1</sup> David Bosch delineates what he calls “the postmodern paradigm” (349) for mission. Magnificent in its clarity, scope and depth, the book has understandably fulfilled Lesslie Newbigin’s prediction that it would become “the indispensable foundation for the teaching of missiology for many years to come” (back cover). However, without doubting its value and usefulness for teaching missiology, this paper questions, in some important respects, Bosch’s claim that his missiology is post-modern.

The weakness of Bosch’s “emerging ecumenical consensus” on mission was apparent in its very year of publication - 1991 - when the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Canberra famously failed to find a consensus.<sup>2</sup> The Assembly took a pneumatological theme with a missionary thrust based on a creation theology, “Come, Holy Spirit - Renew the Whole Creation”. Canberra was particularly influenced by the work of the Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation “process” (JPIC) - which evidenced at Canberra particular concern for feminism, ecology, and indigenous spirituality - and the “Spirit of life” theology of Jürgen Moltmann.<sup>3</sup>

In his chapter outlining post-modernity, Bosch recognises its eco-feminist dimensions when he notes briefly that it involves a “basic reorientation”:

One should, again, see oneself as a child of Mother Earth and as sister and brother to other human beings. One should think holistically, rather than analytically, emphasize togetherness rather than distance, break through the dualism of mind and body, subject and object, and emphasize ‘symbiosis’ (355).

He suggests “profound and far-reaching consequences” of such a change of worldview for the epistemology of mission but these are not worked out in his book. Creation theology and its attendant concerns at Canberra are hardly mentioned in *Transforming Mission*. As far as *feminism* is concerned, though he does allude to women, nowhere does Bosch mention feminism as a theological or philosophical movement.<sup>4</sup> Bosch hardly touches on *ecology* or on the perceived global environmental crisis which fuelled the JPIC process.<sup>5</sup> Thirdly, the related interest in “*indigenous spiritualities*” or “the spiritualities of indigenous people” is missed.<sup>6</sup> This lack of interest is surprising in view of Bosch’s own direct experience of indigenous peoples during his formative years as a missionary in Transkei (1957-71).<sup>7</sup>

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By its very nature, *Transforming Mission* is retrospective; it documents what has been already been resolved not the debates of today.<sup>8</sup> In that sense it was inevitably already out of date by the time of its publication. However, its lack of reference to these contemporary issues is remarkable when we consider that Bosch was a section leader at the San Antonio meeting of the Council for World Mission and Evangelism of the WCC at which the influence of JPIC was clearly evident. Though preparation of his book was in its final stages in 1989, Bosch does refer to the San Antonio meeting six times (389, 429, 460-61, 467, 487, 489) but never with reference to JPIC themes. When he concludes that San Antonio contained no new missiological reflections,<sup>9</sup> it is hard to avoid the conclusion that what falls outside his paradigm has simply been ignored.

### **The Spirit of mission**

The fact that Bosch passes over feminism, ecology and indigenous spiritualities raises the question of whether Bosch's paradigm can be described as a truly post-modern one, even by his own criteria above. In the light of Canberra, it reveals both Bosch's lack of a creation theology and suggests also the limited nature of his pneumatology.

Bosch has been praised for his emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit in mission.<sup>10</sup> In highlighting the Orthodox contribution to theology of mission and the theology of Luke, Bosch draws attention to *the Spirit of mission* (especially 113-115, 516-517). In various places he cites with approval the seminal work of such as Roland Allen (four times) and Harry Boer<sup>11</sup> (five times) in mission pneumatology. He uses the title of John V. Taylor's seminal *The Go-Between God* (378),<sup>12</sup> but chooses to ignore the thrust of Taylor's work, which is toward a Spirit at work in the whole creation, in the achievements of human culture, and in all relationships.<sup>13</sup> Bosch is keen to emphasise the missionary nature of the Spirit but he stops short of discussing *the mission of the Spirit*, which was the subject of Canberra. Despite his best efforts, Bosch has what William Burrows has called a "Jesusological pneumatology" in which the Spirit is an "afterthought used to explain God's activity in the church in connection with Jesus, ignoring the mystery of the Spirit as an equal modality or *persona* of the divine nature".<sup>14</sup>

### **The mission of the Spirit**

Debate at Canberra "concentrated on the issue of the action of the Spirit within and outside the church, and on the criteria necessary to recognise the presence of the Spirit".<sup>15</sup> In the later part of his book, Bosch does allow for the wider work of the Spirit in the world and is prepared to be surprised by the Spirit (379, 489, 494. See also 150, 517). He comes close to the language of Canberra when he writes, "[Mission] is mediating the presence of God the Spirit, who blows where he wishes, without us knowing whence he comes and whither he goes (Jn 3:8<sup>16</sup>). Mission is 'the expression of the life of the Holy Spirit who has been set no limits'<sup>17</sup>" (494). However, the broader pneumatology implied here cannot easily be integrated with earlier parts of the book, particularly the biblical foundations which owe their origin to his doctoral studies on Christology and the Kingdom in the 1950s.<sup>18</sup>

Despite his promotion of *missio Dei*, the structure of his book reveals that Bosch bases his "ecumenical paradigm" firmly on the historical activity of the second person of the Trinity and on the church. His lack of attention to the "Old Testament"<sup>19</sup> and to John's gospel<sup>20</sup> means he does not develop a creation missiology. He does not link the Spirit which descended on Jesus Christ and was poured out at Pentecost with the "breath" or "wind" of

God in the Old Testament, therefore the mission of the Spirit is bound very closely to the missionary activity of the church. Thus, when Bosch seeks to broaden mission to take account of the “comprehensive” nature of salvation, he can do so only by increasing the scope of the church’s missionary activity (393-400). Hence mission still appears as a *work* to be achieved by organisation and strategy. In this sense, his “post-modern” paradigm is very much in the mould of the Enlightenment project<sup>21</sup> and the possibilities raised by *missio Dei* for deriving mission from the very nature of God are not fully realised.<sup>22</sup>

A corollary of Bosch’s close association of the Spirit with the church is the uncontextual nature of his missiology. The “hermeneutics of suspicion” brought to the attention of the church by feminist and liberation theologies has cast grave doubt on the validity of a global theology. Jan van Butselaar has argued, in the light of Canberra, for the need of a contextual approach to theologising - “thinking locally, acting globally”,<sup>23</sup> but Bosch follows the traditional ecumenical approach of thinking globally and applying this locally.<sup>24</sup> What is more, Bosch’s hope is in the institutional church in its Western form of which he is part, despite its legacy of “missionary war”, holocaust and apartheid. He looks for another Pentecost that will transform it into the outgoing community of equals it was intended to be (384-9). The source of that wind of the Spirit will be from within, from the Bible and Christian tradition, as the outline of *Transforming Mission* makes clear. The use of extra-biblical and extra-ecclesial sources from contextual experience is not contemplated.

In his discussion of mission as dialogue, Bosch acknowledges the role of the Spirit in other faiths in *preparatio evangelica* (484)<sup>25</sup> but he hesitates to give any value to the faiths themselves. Bosch’s approach of “bold humility” which recognises an “unresolved tension” - “We cannot point to any other way of salvation than Jesus Christ; at the same time we cannot set limits to the saving power of God” - has been highly acclaimed.<sup>26</sup> Whereas this “abiding paradox of asserting both ultimate commitment to one’s own religion and genuine openness to another’s” (483) is undoubtedly a step forward in theology of religions, shelving the issue until the *parousia* (489) may be criticised as unrealistic in the context of pluralism and as not taking our responsibilities of discernment seriously as those who claim to have the Spirit of Christ. In the post-modern world and in the life of faith we are called to live with uncertainty but perhaps this uncertainty should be discussed not in relation to the question of *whether* the Holy Spirit is active in others’ experience but in relation to *where* and *how* the Spirit is active there.<sup>27</sup>

Though the Canberra documents are, on the whole, cautious about identifying the Spirit’s work outside the church, it is clear that there was substantial pressure at Canberra to do so. Despite its reticence, the creation theology of JPIC pointed to a broader understanding of the work of the Spirit than the Western missionary movement has allowed. This meant that contextual theologising had to be recognised. The Holy Spirit did not only accompany the Western missionary, the Spirit was immanent in the field. It also strongly implied that the Spirit was active not merely “among” but *in* the faith of those of other religious orientations, especially indigenous spiritualities.

### **The Spirit and spirits**

This approach might be taken as another example of the liberal tendency to unite all faiths, in this case by making them all responses to one Spirit, if Canberra had not also held the seeds of a different approach. At the same time as broadening the work of the Spirit, discussion at Canberra also began to break down the monopoly the Holy Spirit has held in the West by

talking in terms - albeit vague - of many spirits in this world, thus setting the Spirit in a pluralistic context. This development was prompted by what became the most talked-about aspect of the Canberra Assembly, Prof. Chung Hyun Kyung's provocative plenary presentation.<sup>28</sup> Somewhat superficially, Chung employed the spirit-language of Korean shamanism to inspire feminist action to bring about the renewal of creation.<sup>29</sup> Although Chung called on other spirits, she rather romantically identified them with the Holy Spirit, and thus justified the widespread accusations of syncretism. Chung's presentation was significant not so much for its content as for the ensuing discussion of the relationship of the Holy Spirit with what were termed "the spirits" of the world" becoming the focus of debate.<sup>30</sup> Thus a truly pluralistic theology of spirits was glimpsed in which a variety of spirits interact and interpenetrate one another.

Bosch's work, as most contemporary Western Christian theology, conceives of only one spirit - the Holy Spirit. Similarly post-Enlightenment philosophy, influenced most notably in this area by Hegel, has recognised only the spirit of the West. However the experience of the twentieth century has been of the reality and durability of other spirits and the dangers of all totalitarianism. Furthermore, the rise of pentecostal/charismatic movements, with their interest in exorcism and spiritual warfare, and of New Age spiritualities, which borrow from indigenous spiritualities, is associated with post-modernity (and formed an important part of the background of Canberra). Both these movements recognise in some sense the "excluded middle" of cosmic forces which have been disregarded, even eliminated, by the scientific mind-set of modernity.<sup>31</sup> It could be argued that to be truly post-modern, the Holy Spirit must be couched in the pluralistic context of a multiplicity of spirits. This very kind of pluralistic spirit-language began to emerge in the debates at Canberra.

At the same time the reality of other spirits seemed to be in some doubt since it was found necessary in the Canberra documents to refer to them in quotation marks.<sup>32</sup> The ease with which Chung summoned "spirits" (clearly demythologised in her theology<sup>33</sup>) alarmed those participants for whom spirits were a supernatural reality.<sup>34</sup> In "Pluralism and the Problem of the Discernment of Spirits", a pre-Canberra article which was prophetic of the debate, Justin Ukpong discussed the use of Spirit and spirits in the Bible, pointing out that spirits are both good and evil entities.<sup>35</sup> He applied the biblical language of Spirit and spirits to three contemporary pluralistic contexts - radically secular ideologies, other religions, and the Christian community.<sup>36</sup> The potential of the spirit-language of Canberra lies in its use by groups which conceived of "spirits" differently and invested them with varied levels of reality, and therefore in its wide applicability.

This theology of Spirit and spirits made discernment of spirits an urgent necessity. In his very helpful article, Ukpong had laid the biblical foundations for this, taking 1 Corinthians 12.10 as his starting point. Here discernment is a charism of the Holy Spirit for "recognizing the genuineness of inspirations", "taking right decisions in accordance with God's will", and "recognizing God's action in the world at large".<sup>37</sup> The Orthodox expressed "alarm" at Chung's lack of discernment and insisted that pneumatology must not be separated from Christology and the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>38</sup> The report of Canberra pointed out that "[The Holy Spirit] is distinct from other 'spirits' in this world, whether benign or demonic".<sup>39</sup> Two criteria for discerning the Spirit were suggested: (i) the Holy Spirit "points to the cross and resurrection and witnesses to the Lordship of Christ"; and (ii) the biblical list of the fruits of the Spirit.<sup>40</sup> Thus Ukpong's article and the discussion at Canberra suggest a theology which could link the Spirit of creation firmly with the Spirit of Christ - at least in Christian belief -

and at the same time make room for other “spirits”. These may be discerned, in a way described in the Christian Scriptures, as either co-operative or uncooperative with the Christian mission without having to be co-opted or subsumed into Christianity. Those of other persuasions could, just as legitimately, claim ultimacy for another “spirit”.

In actual practice, it was clear that discernment of spirits was an area fraught with difficulty, as the discussions at Canberra on the Gulf War demonstrated. These difficulties were compounded by the power question of who defines the criteria for discerning the Spirit.<sup>41</sup> As Saayman has pointed out, Bosch’s espousal of “bold humility” is a sign that he speaks as a representative of a group that is conscious of being powerful.<sup>42</sup> His is a theology from above not from a context of minority status or oppression. Bosch’s Holy Spirit is not free from its splendid isolation to interact with the other spirits of a pluralistic world. The Canberra documents frequently stress the free and unbound nature of the Spirit (often alluding to John 3.8), which may suggest that a pneumatology for the twenty-first century needs to begin from the experience of spirits below rather than from the assertion of one Spirit from above.

### Conclusion

Bosch’s work represents a considerable achievement, it has been rightly acclaimed, and remains indispensable but, as Bosch himself points out, no paradigm is the last word in missiology (511). It may be that in retrospect Bosch’s work will be seen not as setting out a new paradigm but as summarising the old. In the words of Robert Schreiter, *Transforming Mission* “tells us where we have come in mission at the end of the twentieth century”.<sup>43</sup> This is no mean achievement but in view of (a) his lack of attention to essential post-modern issues - feminism, ecology and indigenous spiritualities, and (b) the church-centredness of his pneumatology, it must be questioned whether Bosch’s paradigm is as post-modern as he claims and therefore whether his missiology is appropriate for the twenty-first century. The post-modern paradigm will take into account not only the Spirit of mission but also the mission of the Spirit, a mission which takes place in the context of other spirits. In any truly missionary encounter, these spirits need to be recognised and their natures discerned by the Spirit of Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991). Page references in brackets are to this book.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Kinnamon (ed), *Signs of the Spirit: The Official Report of the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Canberra Australia, 7-20 February 1991* (Geneva: WCC, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> Moltmann’s book *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (London: SCM) was published in English in 1992. His contribution to the Canberra theme, “The Scope of Renewal in the Spirit” was published in 1990 in Emilio Castro (comp.), *To the Wind of God’s Spirit* (Geneva: WCC). In this connection it is interesting to note that though Bosch refers to Jürgen Moltmann’s work at least twenty times this is only to works published in the 1960s and 70s and, with one exception (see note 22), not to his pneumatology.

<sup>4</sup> Bosch does set the record straight regarding the involvement of women in modern mission (328) and pleads for their representation as part of the recognition of the “apostolate of the laity” (470-2). He also includes a discussion of Paul’s attitude to women (151-52) from which it would seem that his own position is not unlike the Apostle’s: Paul’s preoccupation with the relationship of Jews and Greeks almost excludes the slaves and freepersons, male and female of Gal 3:28 (151).

<sup>5</sup> In a short monograph published posthumously, Bosch mentions ecology as a topic with which a missiology of Western culture must deal but it is not included in his ingredients “of crucial importance”. David J. Bosch, *Believing in the Future: Toward a Missiology of Western Culture* (Leominster: Gracewing, 1995), 55-56.

<sup>6</sup> In fact, in an article reflecting on the conference, Bosch questions why the life of indigenous peoples should be addressed in connection with ecology at all. David Bosch, “Your Will Be Done? Critical Reflections on San Antonio”, *Missionalia* 17 (2 Aug, 1989), 126-38.

<sup>7</sup> Bosch, an Afrikaner, has been criticised for lack of engagement with the religious experience of black Africans. See Frans J. Verstraelen, “Africa in David Bosch’s Missiology: Survey and Appraisal” in Willem Saayman & Klippies Kritzinger (eds), *Mission in Bold Humility: David Bosch’s Work Considered* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996); T.A. Mofokeng, “Mission Theology from an African Perspective: A Dialogue with David Bosch” in J.N.J. Kritzinger & Willem Saayman (eds), *Mission in Creative Tension: A Dialogue with David Bosch* (Pretoria: S.A. Missiological Society, 1990). Cf. J. Kevin Livingston, “The Legacy of David Bosch”, *IBMR* 23/1 (Jan 1999), 28.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Robert J. Schreiter, “Transforming Mission”, Review Article, *IBMR* 15/4 (Oct 1991), 181.

<sup>9</sup> David Bosch, “Your Will Be Done? Critical Reflections on San Antonio”, *Missionalia* 17 (2 Aug, 1989), pp126-38.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Wilbert R. Shenk, “The Mission Dynamic” in Saayman & Kritzinger, *Mission in Bold Humility*, 89.

<sup>11</sup> Harry R. Boer, *Pentecost and Missions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961).

<sup>12</sup> John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission* (London: SCM, 1972).

<sup>13</sup> Taylor states at the outset that “the Spirit who is central to Paul’s theology is the same being whom the Old Testament knew as the Spirit, or Breath, of God” (Taylor, *The Go-Between God*, 6 - a statement he justifies in his second chapter, 25-41), and argues on this basis for a broad understanding of mission in keeping with the activity of the “Creator Spirit” (Taylor, *The Go-Between God*, 38). Harry Boer has also more recently pleaded, taking Allen as his starting point, for an integration of creation and redemption in evangelical missionary theology. Harry R. Boer, “The Holy Spirit and Church Growth” in Wilbert R. Shenk (ed), *Exploring Church Growth - a Symposium* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 249-259.

<sup>14</sup> William R. Burrows, “A Seventh Paradigm? Catholics and Radical Inculturation” in Saayman & Kritzinger, *Mission in Bold Humility*, 129. Burrows argues that this is because Bosch missed a seventh paradigm, “a Catholic Inculturation Paradigm” (122.), which emerged only at Vatican II and is “marked by a radical vision of what is entailed in interfaith and cross-cultural dialogue that leads to the contextualization and inculturation of Christianity” (130f - italics original).

<sup>15</sup> Emilio Castro, Editorial, *ER* 43/2 (April 1991), 163.

<sup>16</sup> A text frequently used at Canberra and quoted by Bosch here but strangely absent from his scripture index.

<sup>17</sup> Bosch gives the source of this quotation as G. Rosenkranz who attributes it to G. van der Leeuw.

<sup>18</sup> Bosch’s doctoral work was on the teaching of Jesus on the Gentile mission under Oscar Cullmann. See David J. Bosch, *Die Heidenmission in der Zukunftsschau Jesu: Eine Untersuchung zur Eschatologie der Synoptischen Evangelien* (Zurich: Zwingli Verlag, 1959). Verstraelen notes that, by Bosch’s own admission, his theology developed in the 1960s and has not essentially changed since then. Verstraelen, “Africa in David Bosch’s Missiology”, 10.

<sup>19</sup> The OT is dealt with in less than five pages (16-20). In the new paradigm, pride of place and by far the most attention is given to Mission as the Church-With-Others” (368-389). The other “elements” are also activities of the church.

<sup>20</sup> Bosch considers the mission theology of Matthew, Luke and Paul. Cf. Philip H. Towner “Paradigms Lost: Mission to the *Kosmos* in John and in David Bosch’s Biblical Models of Mission”, *Evangelical Quarterly*, 67/2 (1995), 99-119.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Schreiter, who finds the post-modern paradigm for mission less convincing than the others: “It looks more like an extension or fulfilment of the Enlightenment paradigm than any new one”. Schreiter, “Transforming Mission”, 181.

<sup>22</sup> From his section on *missio Dei* (389-393), it appears that Bosch’s reaction to the use of the concept to by-pass the church in mission prevents him from fully embracing the idea of the mission of the Spirit “that includes the church” (390 - a quotation from Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (London: SCM, 1977), 64) and indeed rejecting the pneumatological definition of mission that he finds in, for example, *Gaudium et Spes* (391).

<sup>23</sup> Jan van Butselaar, “‘Thinking Locally, Acting Globally’: The Ecumenical Movement in the New Era”, *IRM* LXXXI/323 (July 1992), 363-373.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Saayman, “A South African Perspective...”, 50-51; Verstraelen, “Africa in David Bosch’s Missiology”, 12-14; Mofokeng, “Mission Theology from an African Perspective”, 173-5.

<sup>25</sup> Citing the work of D.T. Niles, Max Warren, and Kenneth Cragg.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. the title of Saayman and Kritzinger, *Mission in Bold Humility*.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Stanley J. Samartha, "The Holy Spirit and People of Other Faiths", in Castro, *To the Wind of God's Spirit*, 59.

<sup>28</sup> Chung Hyun Kyung, "Come Holy Spirit - Renew the Whole Creation" in Kinnamon, *Signs of the Spirit*, 37-47.

<sup>29</sup> Her theological approach is spelt out in Chung Hyun Kyung, "Ecology, Feminism and African and Asian Spirituality: Towards a Spirituality of Eco-Feminism" in David G. Hallman (ed), *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North* (Geneva: WCC, 1994), 175-178.

<sup>30</sup> Kinnamon, "Canberra 1991: A Personal Overview and Introduction" in Kinnamon, *Signs of the Spirit*, 15.

<sup>31</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle", *Missiology* 10/1 (Jan 1982), 35-47. Cf. Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990), 71-74.

<sup>32</sup> For example, p15, p112, p254. The "Reflections of Orthodox Participants" referred to "a 'private' spirit, the spirit of the world or other spirits" as the subjects of debate at Canberra (Kinnamon, *Signs of the Spirit*, 281).

<sup>33</sup> See Chung Hyun Kyung, "'Han-pu-ri': Doing Theology from a Korean Women's Perspective", *ER* 40 (Jan 1988).

<sup>34</sup> Robeck reports one Pentecostal saying to him after Chung's presentation, "I was so afraid I sat shaking through the entire presentation, pleading the blood and interceding in tongues". Robeck, "A Pentecostal Reflects...", in Bong Rin Ro & Bruce J. Nicholls (eds), *Beyond Canberra: Evangelical Responses to Contemporary Ecumenical Issues* (Oxford: Regnum, 1993), 112. See also Raymond Fung, "The Spirit World", in Ro & Nicholls, *Beyond Canberra*, 60-3.

<sup>35</sup> Justin S. Ukpong, "Pluralism and the Problem of the Discernment of Spirits", *ER* 41/3 (July 1989), 418-20

<sup>36</sup> Ukpong, "Pluralism and the Problem...", 421-24.

<sup>37</sup> Ukpong, "Pluralism and the Problem...", 417. While bearing a similar title and also thoroughly surveying the biblical material, Eduard Schweizer's "On Distinguishing Between Spirits" (*ER* 41/3 (July 1989), 406-415) concludes that everywhere in the New Testament the Spirit is linked to Jesus and states a conservative position that links the Spirit so closely with Christ that even the "breath" or "wind" of God must be distinguished from the Holy Spirit.

<sup>38</sup> "Reflections of Orthodox Participants", 279-282.

<sup>39</sup> "The Report of the Seventh Assembly", para 81, Kinnamon, *Signs of the Spirit*, 254.

<sup>40</sup> "The Report of the Seventh Assembly", para 93, Kinnamon, *Signs of the Spirit*, 256.

<sup>41</sup> Castro, Editorial, 163. Chung argued that it was time Third World women had a go at discernment instead of Western male theologians - Kinnamon, "Canberra 1991", 16.

<sup>42</sup> Saayman, "A South African Perspective...", 50-1.

<sup>43</sup> Schreiter, "Transforming Mission", 181.