

Missionary ecclesiology: a perspective from history

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Today one of the strongest impulses towards the renewal of the theological concept of the church comes from the theology of mission (Moltmann in Bosch 1991:369)

Abstract

The concept of a missionary ecclesiology is analysed according to the statement of Vatican II that the church is missionary by its very nature. The analysis is approached from the perspective of history, since the historical context is deemed to have played an important role in determining the nature of the missionary church. After World War II the concept changed dramatically as a result of decolonisation and the growth of liberation theology. The author supports Boff's conclusion that the church is "a community organized for liberation". In the context of the article the concept of "freedom" rather than liberation is preferred, and the demands this makes on our understanding of a missionary church are indicated.

Introduction

The Second Vatican Council concluded in *Ad Gentes* that, according to New Testament teaching, "the pilgrim church is missionary by its very nature" (in Bosch 1979:184). Yet this seemingly self-evident truth has been hotly contested terrain for a long time. When the modern Western missionary movement began, following the voyages of discovery and the Reformation in roughly the sixteenth century, neither the Roman Catholic church nor the fledgling Protestant churches were intrinsically organised for mission. The Roman Catholic church had managed to keep mission under the aegis of the church through the Middle Ages by creating and using missionary orders, which had originated in the Eastern church, to occupy the new-found "mission fields". The fact that mission was kept under the *aegis* of the church did not make the church a pilgrim church missionary by her very nature, however. In the young Protestant *churches* the missionary dimension was, in David Bosch's opinion, completely muted (Bosch 1979:171). The huge missionary enthusiasm in Protestant *communities* could not be denied, however, and so mission enthusiasts formed themselves into mission societies under the Pietist influence and embarked on an existence clearly estranged from the Protestant churches¹. This state of affairs existed clear through succeeding centuries, including the great century of Christian world mission (the nineteenth century), and into the twentieth century.

New initiatives in the twentieth century

The situation started changing with the birth of the ecumenical movement in the twentieth century at Edinburgh in 1910. The first two gatherings of the International Missionary Council (IMC) (Edinburgh 1910 and Jerusalem 1928) did not really deal explicitly with the relationship between church and mission, but implicitly the church was now one of the essential protagonists of world mission. In his preparatory volume for the Tambaram Conference, *The Christian message in a non-Christian world*, Hendrik Kraemer ([1938]1947:30) stated that the crisis situation in which the church found itself forced it to recapture the vision of what God meant the Christian community to be: "a fellowship of believers, rooted in God and his divine redemptive order, and therefore committed to the service and salvation of the world." This understanding was eventually incontrovertibly expressed at the third meeting of the IMC at Tambaram in 1938, where "church" and "mission" came together. At Tambaram "church" was represented in every one of the five sub-divisions of the theme, "The upbuilding of the younger churches as a part of the historic universal Christian community" (Saayman 1984:11). The conference took this engagement with both older and younger churches so seriously that the report and findings of the conference were eventually published under the title: *The world mission of the church*. For this reason I could conclude (*ibid.*) that, "after Tambaram it would be impossible ever again to

speak about *mission* without speaking simultaneously about the *Church* – and vice versa”. Tambaram therefore placed the topic of missionary ecclesiology firmly on the theological agenda. This did not, however, automatically mean that a solution was found for the estrangement between mission and church (which had existed for nearly three centuries, after all, and seemed to be working well – witness the “great century of world mission”!). Nor did it imply that the churches would suddenly all become missionary churches. What might have been some of the theological obstacles that needed to be overcome?

Mission as an after-thought and appendix to the church

Protestant theologians often practise their theology in such a way that one may be justified in deducing that the *real* history of the church started after the Reformation. I do not wish to create the same perception: the history of the church since Pentecost is of the utmost importance in a consideration of a missionary ecclesiology. In trying to determine the exact cause of the aberration, though, I will begin with the history of the church since the Reformation, for in my opinion it is here that the root of the problem lies. It is fairly generally accepted today that the phenomenon of “Christendom” (*corpus Christianum*) that developed as a result of the birth of the Constantinian era was not a blessing, but a bane for Christian mission.ⁱⁱ According to Bosch (1979:105), one of the main reasons for this state of affairs was that the church now lost its *pilgrim character* (italics mine), and became thoroughly domesticated in the Roman Empire. There was no longer any real, vital eschatological expectation: the church had reached its pinnacle and all important salvific events had taken place. All the church now had to do was care for its own survival as vehicle of salvation. An important misunderstanding which contributed to this sad state of affairs was the belief that the Great Commission had been fulfilled by the apostles and that no further missionary effort was necessary or warranted. Although the first Orthodox and Roman Catholic missionary orders grew during these years, they all worked within the boundaries of the empire (and therefore within Church boundaries) and amidst concepts such as mission as enculturation and mission by force, it is hard to describe their efforts at this time as participation in the *missio Dei* (Bosch 1979:110–112). So, even in the Orthodox churches and the Roman Catholic church before the Reformation – and, very important, the voyages of discovery – one could not find many traces of a church “missionary by its very nature”.

The sixteenth century witnessed two very important events with a bearing on the topic under discussion: the voyages of discovery and the Protestant Reformation. The discovery of vast numbers of human beings who had most definitely not been Christianised was the final nail in the coffin of the myth that the twelve apostles had fulfilled the Great Commission. New discoveries of unChristianised areas and peoples have been impulses for missionary enthusiasm through the ages, and this proved to be equally the case in the sixteenth century. Within the Roman Catholic church the old mission orders, as well as new ones founded expressly for the evangelisation of colonised territories (such as the well-known White Fathers in Africa), took up the challenge with papal approval. Obviously, this was inseparable from the great colonial project. Indeed, colonialism was justified in many instances by claiming that it led to the evangelisation of pagan people (Bosch 1979:117–119). The church that was to be implanted where it had not existed before was firmly held to be the one church, indivisible from Mother Rome. One is therefore justified in arguing that *new appendices were being added to the age-old church* – it was not yet a pilgrim church, missionary by its very nature, taking shape. In the Protestant churches, it was mostly lay people who took up the challenge, and pride of place was taken by the Pietists. They were by their very nature somewhat removed from the institutional churchesⁱⁱⁱ, and operated on the principle of bands of like-minded enthusiasts – *ecclesiolae in ecclesiae*. Where some of the leading lay mission enthusiasts tried to get their institutionalised churches involved, the most obvious example being the Baptist William Carey, the church refused to become involved institutionally. These enthusiasts were therefore obliged to follow the Pietist route, and created denominational mission societies in terms of which mission enthusiasts organised themselves into bands to “take the glorious name of Jesus” into the newly-discovered heathen lands (also in the wake of the colonial project). Since they had been badly disappointed by the lack of enthusiasm in their home churches, most had a fairly anti-ecclesiastical (and definitely anti-denominational) point of departure for their mission work. Indeed, some were convinced that they were going purely to “save souls for the Lamb”, and not to waste time in replicating an institution such as the Western church which had (in their opinion) proved unsuitable for mission^{iv}. Again, it is very clear that mission was regarded as at best an appendix to the institutional church, something that could be left to a small band of volunteers, and something they could do without any reference to the church. Thus, the incredible missionary awakening brought about by the voyages of discovery and the Reformation in effect had no influence on the dominant ecclesiologies in the existing European churches. They were neither “pilgrim churches”, nor were they “missionary by their very nature”. Most of the energy of both Catholics and Protestants respectively went into proving that *they*, and not the opposition, represented the true church. The very nature of the Catholic church therefore largely entailed confirming the necessity of succession to the See of Peter (something that the Protestants could no longer claim), and they defined the true church with reference to the Pope (or his representative, the bishop). The very nature of the (Reformed) Protestant churches could be discerned from the proclamation of the Word, the maintenance of discipline, and the ministry of the sacraments (which, they claimed, were lacking among the Catholics). The emphasis on both sides of the divide was basically inward looking, and aimed at securing their

own position against the *Christian* opposition. Obviously this is a generalisation, as there were extroverts in both camps. The extroverts in the Catholic church generally found their home in the missionary orders, and those in the Protestant churches found their home in mission societies; neither group played a significant role in influencing the official ecclesiological thinking. The *nature* (Latin *esse*) of the church, Catholic as well as Protestant, was untouched by the enormous release of missionary enthusiasm at the time. Mission remained an after-thought and appendix to the *true* business of the church, which had to do with the survival of the existing institution.

There were a few exceptions, of course, as there always are. One exception well known to South Africans is that of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC). At the very first synod meeting of the church in 1824 it was decided that the church itself, and not a mission society, should take on a missionary responsibility (Saayman 2007:35). Although there were mission societies at the Cape, some of which were supported and even initiated by DRC members (Saayman 2007:30–31), as soon as the church became structurally (synodically) organised, it decided that the missionary responsibility belonged to the church, and not to the societies. A number of important qualifications must be added, however. Throughout the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries, the utilisation of DRC missionary enthusiasm remained the responsibility of groups of mission enthusiasts in the church – these were either groups of ministers (such as the Ministers’ Mission Societies in the Cape and the Free State), or groups of women in local congregations (such as the Women’s Missionary Auxiliary (Saayman 2007:52–57)). The development of mission structures within the DRC followed the typical Pietist pattern (Saayman 2007:40–41; Durand 1985), as a result of which mission remained mainly the task of a group of like-minded believers, operating on the periphery of the institutional church. The rest of the congregation supported them financially and through prayer, but the DRC certainly never became a church “missionary by its very nature” because it had decided from the very beginning to make mission the responsibility of (a group within) the church. The problem of the construction of a truly *missionary* ecclesiology therefore remained a future responsibility.

The Second World War – a change in context

Tambaram 1938 stated the urgent need very clearly. Kraemer ([1938] 1947) was indeed one of the first prophets to sound the warning that the old way of being church and doing mission was no longer adequate. It was not yet clear, though, how to bring a renewal about. Barely a year after Tambaram, World War II broke out and radically changed the well-known colonial landscape. India, the “jewel in the crown” of the greatest colonial empire, became independent in 1947, a brief two years after the end of the war, and many colonies in Asia and Africa were soon to follow. The unpredictable consequences of this event were not restricted to “secular politics” only. An Indian spectator who stood watching the departure of the British Viceroy is purported to have said: “There goes Vasco da Gama” – in other words, there goes Western colonial influence, considered such a boon in the West and such a bane in the East. And if Western political and cultural influence had to go, then, of course, so did Western religious influence (mission and colonialism had, after all, been intimately intertwined (Saayman 1991:22–35)). The age of the Third Church had come (Bühlmann 1977): the church in the Third World, the previously colonised parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America, that wanted to stand on its own feet and make its own mistakes (as an Asian church leader is purported to have said at an ecumenical gathering).

A missiologist who saw very clearly that everything had changed after the Second World War was Hans Hoekendijk. He indicated that post-war human beings were radically different, and that therefore church and mission had to become radically different (Hoekendijk 1948; 1964). *Ekklesia*, Hoekendijk stated (in Bosch 1991:377), was “a theo-political category”. For this reason, “the church’s offices, orders, and institutions should be organized in such a manner that they do not separate the believer from the historical” (Hoekendijk in Bosch 1991: 378). The influence of the changed context on mission theology in the wake of the Second World War began to reveal itself very clearly at the Conference on Church and Society organised by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and held in 1966 in Geneva. This would be incontrovertibly confirmed at the General Assembly of the WCC in Uppsala in 1968 (reflecting clearly also the theological influence of Vatican II). It was inspired mainly by the ecumenical study project on “The missionary structure of the congregation”, within the parameters of the wider study project on “The unity of the church and the unity of mankind” (*sic*). As Bosch (1991:383) concludes, “the Hoekendijk approach had become the ‘received view’ in WCC circles”. Of the four traditional “marks” of the church according to the Apostles’ Creed (unity, catholicity, holiness and apostolicity), catholicity was the dominant one in these discussions (Saayman 1984:38–39). The meeting of the Commission for World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) of the WCC had stated clearly at Mexico City in 1963 that mission was to be regarded as “mission in six

continents”: there were no longer mission “sending” and mission “receiving” countries. Mission was from everywhere to everywhere. Uppsala stated that there was only one catholic and apostolic church throughout the world; there were no longer “sending” churches and “receiving” churches. If that was the case, then the whole Catholic church had to be apostolic, in other words, as Vatican II had stated, missionary by its very nature.

The irruption of the Third World

Several new dimensions to the debate on missionary ecclesiology revealed themselves in the second half of the 1960s. Mexico City’s slogan of “Mission in six continents” provided the theoretical base: there were to be no more “sending” and “receiving” churches. Perhaps the first influential impulse from the former “receiving” churches in the Third World came from Latin America in the form of the Base Christian Communities (BCCs). These communities had their origins in the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America, largely as a result of the wave of renewal which swept the Catholic church after Vatican II. One of the great proponents of the ecclesiology underlying the BCCs, Leonardo Boff, described them as “signify[ing] a new ecclesiological experience, a renaissance of very church, and hence an action of the Holy Spirit on the matters urgent for our time” (Boff 1986:1; cf.:23). The main difference from earlier ecclesiologies, argued Boff (1986:2), was that the BCCs presented a new ecclesiastical system, not rotating on “a sacramental and clerical axis” (on which both classical definitions, Roman Catholic and Reformed, rotated), but on an axis of “word and laity”. Boff thus claimed (correctly, in my opinion), that the BCCs did not simply represent an attempt to adjust the earlier ecclesiologies inherited from the time of the voyages of discovery and the Reformation. Rather, they were indeed attempts to transform ecclesiology in such a way that it could deal with the apostolic (missionary) needs of the present time. Boff (1986:45–60) argued that Jesus did not will only one institutional form for the church. In particular, he emphasised that there is no justification for neglecting and side-lining the contribution of the laity, both men and women alike, in the institutional church (Boff 1986:61–95). He described the central characteristic of the Church of Christ for our time as “an oppressed people organizing for liberation” (Boff 1986:34–44). Whereas according to the age-old Roman Catholic definition the church had been characterised in terms of the Pope/clergy, and the Reformed definition had characterised the church in terms of correct doctrine, sacraments and discipline, Boff (1986:40–43) argued that the BCCs characterised the church in terms of the community and its liberation.

The rapid growth and development of BCCs in Latin America influenced Protestant churches in that continent (and other areas) as well. This ecclesiology also had a strong influence on the Protestant churches in some African countries, especially in Southern Africa, where liberation theology exercised a marked influence through its philosophical links with (South African) black theology. It influenced ecclesiological thinking in Africa especially in terms of the desire of the African church to take ownership and control of its mission to the world. However, when African churches attempted to take control themselves, they encountered a serious obstacle, as they discovered that much of the control over mission in their own countries was actually firmly vested in older churches in the Western countries (mostly on the basis of contracts and agreements entered into in colonial times, and controls exercised through the provision of funding). Very often, for example (South Africa is a case in point) they found that the ownership of church land was vested through legal title deeds in churches in Germany, America or other Western countries^v. Thus a totally new element entered the debate: unequal economic power relations as a result of the reigning political economy, which promoted the continuing hegemony of the West, and also of Western churches. This dovetailed with the analysis and arguments of liberation movements, and brought *liberation* to the centre of the ecclesiological debate. African churches could not simply break all relations with the older churches in the West; they still needed financial and staffing assistance. Therefore, in order to initiate the process, African churches called for a moratorium on mission from Western churches (Bosch 1979:5–6). The very emotional moratorium debate gave rise to numerous misunderstandings on both sides, which did little to promote the debate about a missionary ecclesiology for our time. Rather, the battle lines were drawn in a struggle for the autonomy of Third World churches – and a new era in the debate dawned.

Liberation, autonomy and freedom

The end of the Second World War signified the collapse of the post-Constantinian *corpus Christianum*. Some perceptive observers (such as Kraemer) had indeed been aware since the end of the First World War that things had changed forever. The independence of India in 1947 and the subsequent wave of decolonisation in Asia and Africa, however, made this reality crystal clear. The West’s claim as

guarantor of education, civilisation and morality was revealed as lacking merit, and consequently the Western church's claim to be the embodiment of "the only true religion established by the only true God" seemed hollow and empty (Comblin 1998:9). As the Third World embarked on a struggle for liberation instead of Western development, the Third Church embarked on a struggle for autonomy – and often the two struggles progressed in tandem. Suddenly the Western pattern was no longer the only choice; instead, the choice was determined by "what was suited to the interlocutors [of Western evangelisation, namely Third World people] and their interests, preferences or objections" (Comblin 1998:10); it had indeed become an acceptable alternative paradigm, and this embryonic new ecclesiastical paradigm was far more fluid, earthy and human in character. It was centred on the *human community* in a *certain, specific place*, and with *certain, specific needs*, not on some faraway benevolent but unfamiliar fount of authority – whether in the form of a Pope or a "paper cardinal" (a set of sixteenth-century creedal writings) – and its needs and preferences. New alliances were formed, new metaphors sought. The dominant Western Roman Catholic and Protestant ecclesiologies lost their historical authority as the search for indigenous foundations intensified. The search for *the liberation of theology*, envisaged and analysed by Segundo (1976), had spilled over to the search also for *the liberation of ecclesiology*.

A new metaphor for missionary^{vi} ecclesiology: oppressed people organising for liberation

I referred above to Boff's (1986:34–44) statement that the central characteristic of the Church of Christ for our time is its identity as "an oppressed people organizing for liberation". I would like to make use of this description as metaphor, but I would like to define the most important concepts and processes here more clearly in my own terms. In the first place I take *oppression* to encompass far more than the absence of political emancipation. I understand it to refer to any disenfranchisement, be it economic, ethnocentric/racist, sexist, or ideological. I understand *people* to refer simply to a shared humanity, not some kind of sectarian grouping ("volk" in Afrikaans apartheid ideology, the "masses" in ideological revolutionary rhetoric). Moreover, I understand *liberation* in the first place as the general Judaeo-Christian concept of comprehensive human well-being (expressed so poignantly in the Hebrew word *shalom*), with both an "already" and a "not-yet" (eschatological) dimension, so passionately described by Comblin (1998:48–61) as the freedom for which God has called his people. I see it as the missionary calling of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth to obey the call of the Creator to join him in his outreach to set human beings free in situations where the striving for his promised *shalom* is denied by conditions of oppression and disenfranchisement – and eventually to rejoice with Creator, Liberator and Sustainer where signposts of *shalom* can be erected. And where a group of human beings have formed a community on the basis of their shared humanity and shared needs for well-being to achieve this in a certain place, there we have *ecclesio genesis*. If various such communities begin to gather together with other similar human communities striving for the same freedom in other places, we get *ecclesia*.

Such an understanding makes a homogeneous, universally valid definition of missionary ecclesiology very difficult to formulate. For this reason I wish to propose that we follow Bosch's lead in *Transforming mission* (Bosch 1991:1–9) in formulating a new definition of mission, where a homogeneous definition has also become unattainable. He argues that it has become very difficult, indeed, well-nigh impossible to come up with any generally accepted synopsis of the meaning of "mission", and therefore proposes that we study history very carefully, analysing every era for its times of danger and opportunity (Bosch 1991:2–3), and establish as much as we can about the process of paradigm shift, rather than attempting to return to a romanticised era of simplicity and unanimity. We have rather to deal with our *own* period of danger and opportunity, the era of a shifting paradigm, by imaging a new vision for mission. To do this, Bosch (1991:7–8) argues with Soares-Prabu, we have to recognise that we are dealing today with "a pluriverse of missiology in a universe of mission". *Mission* is still one, still *missio Dei*, still the eternal outreach of Creator, Liberator and Sustainer to the created cosmos in which we can participate – therefore "a universe of mission". But *missiology* is so complex, incarnated in such diverse contexts, calling for such diverse approaches, that we can only work in and with "a pluriverse of missiology". Yet we have to communicate with one another as God's people about the *missio Dei* from within our diverse contexts, we have to nourish each other as members of *one* body despite our distinctions and disparities; therefore we must develop a mutually understandable language and lexicon. This we can do, he suggests, by taking as point of departure for the first part of our definition the "universe of mission", and therefore speaking to each other about "mission as ..." Then we deal with the reality of the "pluriverse of missiology" in the second part by completing the phrase with the "action-word" required by our distinct and disparate contexts. This, then, is how he

builds his elements of an emerging ecumenical (=belonging to the whole inhabited earth) paradigm: Mission as the church-with-others, mission as *missio Dei*, and so on.

I would argue that it would be a waste of time to try to formulate a single, universally valid synopsis of the characteristics of a missionary church – a new paradigm is calling for various new metaphors. In order to describe and verbalise this new reality, let us work with an understanding of “a pluriverse of ecclesiologies in a universal *ecclesia*”. The church can never be anything else but the Body of Christ on earth – hence the universal *ecclesia* remains God’s covenant people, the new eschatological community. If it can no longer be recognised as such, it has lost the right to call itself “church”. It is not a situation of “anything goes,” but this community of people nevertheless has to be incarnated in many different contexts so that it can serve as the *oikos* of Jews and non-Jews, Greeks, Romans, slaves, everybody (1 Cor 9:19–23). It is clear from Paul’s discourse here that these incarnations will differ in various places and among various groups in order to truly reflect the missionary context, which is why we have a pluriverse of ecclesiologies. In order to properly verbalise this reality, let us speak of “church as ...” just as Bosch speaks of “mission as ...” If we follow Boff, for example, in Latin America, we can speak of “church as community of freedom”; in a situation of alienation, such as in some industrialised First World areas, we may perhaps speak of “church as human fellowship”; in other industrialised areas of both the First and Third Worlds, it may be necessary to speak of “church as earthkeeper” (cf. Daneel 1998); and in many areas in Southern Africa amid the ravages of HIV/Aids and non-existent health services, we may speak of “church as healing community” (cf. Landman 2008:187–201). This brings about a real correlation between mission and church, reflecting Bosch’s reality of “mission as the mother of Theology” (1991:15–16), and therefore also as “mother of the church” (cf. also Haacker 2005:249–262). But does this not leave us open to the reproach (I paraphrase Stephen Neill) that if everything is church, then nothing is church? I am very aware of the possible validity of this reproach, and therefore I wish to conclude with what I consider to be abiding characteristics of a truly missionary church that set it apart from other human communities.

Conclusion

What characteristics would be essential to enable one to recognise the universal *ecclesia* as the body of Christ in a pluriverse of ecclesiologies? In the first place, it must be the *one* universal church, body of Christ, being given life through its connection to its head, Jesus Christ himself. This body is identified in the Apostles’ Creed as both one and catholic. The reality that it is *one* signifies the bonds that keep believers together, while the reality that it is *catholic* signifies that *one* does not simply mean homogeneous, but presupposes diversity. Since the time of the events described in the parable of the tower of Babel, which provide an explanation for the multiplicity of human cultures and languages, the human community has never been homogeneous; there is diversity and differentiation. This needs to be reflected in the **one, catholic** body of human beings, the Bride and the Body of Christ; hence the pluriverse of ecclesiologies, which does not negate or abrogate the unity of the universal church. But this is not simply any body of heterogeneous human beings either; it is a *specific* community of human beings, the *new eschatological community*, which comes into being in response to the missionary invitation of the gospel and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. For this reason it is the **holy, apostolic** community of human beings renewed by their faith in him (Jesus of Nazareth, the new human being) who calls them to be *new human beings* (Ephes 4:11–14; Saayman 2007:138–139). These new human beings have been called first of all *for freedom* (Gal 5:13; Comblin 1998:21–47). This freedom cannot be equated simply to political liberation, economic autonomy, and so on (*ibid.*); it is more than all that, for it is the freedom offered and guaranteed in Jesus Christ. Captivity can take many guises in different contexts. In some contexts we may be captive to Mammon, or to alienation from each other, or to disease and a lack of well-being, or to sexist oppression. The call for freedom may therefore differ in different contexts – but it will always be rooted in Jesus Christ. So, if the true Church of Christ is the community organised for liberation (called for freedom), the task for which the missionary church is called may differ in different contexts, which is why we are able to speak meaningfully only about a pluriverse of ecclesiologies in a universe of *ecclesia*.

Does this negate the old definitions of the church as “there where the Pope is”, or “there where the Word is proclaimed correctly”? Were the mothers and fathers in the faith therefore mistaken in their definition of the church? I truly do not think so. They were human beings of their time and of their place, responding to the call for freedom as they heard and understood it. There were many temptations along the way, many voices claiming to offer freedom when in fact what they offered was seduction. There were others who wanted to define the church after their own nature, in order to gain control over the faithful. And there were always powers and princes who wanted to rule over a compliant institution that could be used for selfish or nationalistic purposes. In that context, where charlatans attempted to

mislead the faithful, to guarantee orthodoxy they emphasised that the church was where the Pope was. And where they sincerely believed that the Word was no longer proclaimed faithfully, they emphasised that the church could exist only where the Word was authentically and freely proclaimed. But this is not what is necessarily impinging on our freedom as the new eschatological human community today, called for freedom in the twenty-first century. For that reason we have to determine what it is that we have to emphasise today in order to remain true to the teaching of the apostles, to establish communities of people organised for freedom. There are still charlatans wishing to mislead the faithful. There are still false apostles proclaiming a false gospel in an attempt to enslave our consciences, so the need to be watchful and faithful is still valid. How do we remain both watchful and true to our missionary calling? Comblin (1998:22) has a possible answer, which I find satisfactory:

In the New Testament the gospel is always a simple formula that has an impact, the proclamation of a good that can be identified immediately ... Now Paul's gospel is the proclamation of freedom. He announces the move from a way of life characterized by slavery to a life in freedom ... only that which builds freedom is Christian. "For you were called for freedom brothers" (Gal 5:13).

We can remain true therefore only *in relationship*, as members of the body relating to the Head (the-church-with-Christ), and as members of the body relating to each other (the-church-with-others), and to the environment around us. If any of these relationships can be seriously questioned, there the authenticity of the missionary church will be at stake. In the end, therefore, I believe that this is how we can give shape to David Bosch's primary element of the new emerging ecumenical paradigm as being "a church-with-others" (Bosch 1991:368–388).

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Endnotes

- 1 Confirmation for this claim can be found, for example, in the well-known Reformed axiom that the true church can be identified in the purity of doctrine, the ministry of the sacraments, and the maintenance of discipline. In the Catholic church, the teaching stated that where the Pope/bishop was, there was the church. In both cases this did not imply any missionary dimension to the nature of a true church; in both cases the nature of the church was defined in such a way that it could protect the church's existing interests.
- 2 See Bosch 1979:104–116 for an extensive analysis.
- 3 The mainline churches were not in favour of the existence of numerous smaller groups not clearly under the control of the church; and as the answer to Carey implied (I paraphrase: “Sit down, young man, if God wants to convert the heathen he can do so without your help or mine”), there was some intolerance (possibly even enmity) towards the upstart activists.
- 4 “The LMS stated its ‘fundamental principle’ in the following terms: ‘Our design is not to send Presbyterianism, Independency, Episcopacy, or any other form of Church Order and Government ... but the Glorious Gospel of the blessed God to the Heathen’” (Bosch 1991:330).
- 5 Schultze (2005) has written an excellent doctoral thesis to describe and analyse this state of affairs in relation to the Berlin Mission Society and ELCSA in South Africa.
- 6 I am aware of the move to the term “missional” rather than “missionary”. I prefer the older term; my reasoning for this choice is to be found in an unpublished paper: “Missionary or missional? Probably only time will tell”.