Bosch, Glasser, and Hiebert: A Reflection on their Contribution to Missiology and How Their Writing is Applicable to North American Missions Today

Joshua L. Henry

Fuller Theological Seminary
School of Intercultural Studies
Admissions Essay and Writing Sample
Doctorate of Missiology
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Introduction

David Bosch, Arthur Glasser, and Paul Hiebert are three of the most respected names in the study of missiology. Their writings have greatly advanced the art and science of mission, as well as integrating other disciplines like anthropology, sociology, and leadership development, as well as communications theory, to help equip God’s church in advancing the Gospel cross-culturally. Each considered pioneers in their own right; their seminal work has furthered the Church’s effectiveness in fulfilling the Great Commission. For example, David Bosch was one of the first missiologist to expand upon the work of E. Stanley Jones’ and Lesslie Newbigin’s consideration of the Western world as a mission field. His use of terms like “emerging ecumenicalism” and “postmodern paradigms” help set the stage for the current missional church conversation, as well as the emerging/Emergent discussion before that. In addition, Arthur Glasser advocated for an understanding of a biblical theology of mission and helped propel the concept of the missio Dei, or God’s grand mission, throughout the entire biblical narrative. Paul Hiebert continually proceeded to refine his teaching on worldviews, critical contextualization, and indigenous, incarnational ministry methods that have trained both international missionaries and local church planters for decades.

With wisdom that can only come from a combination of practical experience and academic rigor, Bosch, Glasser, and Hiebert have each written numerous books that have helped define the church’s role in the mission of God. For the sake of this essay, three of their books in particular will be analyzed. First, Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission (1997) by David Bosch will be critiqued, paying special attention to what the historical shifts in missions he recounts can teach practitioners today.
Secondly, a review of *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God’s Mission in the Bible* (2003) by Arthur Glasser, with Charles Van Engen, Dean Gilliland and Shawn Redford will show how though best molded through the incarnation of Jesus Christ, God’s mission began even before the cosmos was created in Genesis chapter one and will continue past Revelation twenty-two and into all eternity.

Third, a look at *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices* (1999) by Paul Hiebert and fellow missiologists R. Daniel Shaw and Tite Tienou, will show how an appropriate contextualization of the Gospel is not only effective in presenting Jesus to people of other religions, but is also helpful in building bridges of relationships with the current spiritually interested generations of our highly networked and globalized communities.

Finally, a short consolidation of the wisdom gleaned from these three books will be accessed with consideration to applications and implications for the North American Church in the twenty-first century as a conclusion.

**Transforming Mission**

The thesis Bosch makes, is that the practice of mission has evolved many times throughout the past twenty centuries, and at this point in history, the Church is again experiencing transformation in paradigm shifts as it enters into a new world. Bosch begins by making the case that the rapidly advancing fields of technology and science have given rise to globalization. In addition, the popular philosophy of postmodernism has impacted the process of worldwide secularization. Consequently, societies can no longer be classified in geographic or cultural sections of “Christian and non-Christian”. Therefore, the Church must embrace the current crisis of danger as opportunity which is expressed in this contemporary context. Bosch states that for the Church, mission is manifested in the areas of foundation, motives, and nature.
To begin his critique of mission’s foundations over the past two centuries, in part one, Bosch reflects first on the missional theology of the New Testament authors. He claims that because they wrote their letters as an “emergency response” to their church, their writings require being theologized in order to be interrupted, both in their original setting and in generations since. Bosch then considers mission in the Old Testament, by addressing God’s covenant with Abraham and Israel’s treatment of the nations. He then goes on to build an understanding of Jesus’ Jewish identity and thus his priority of preaching repentance and salvation, but first to his own people. However, Bosch also notices the sharp criticism of Jesus to the Pharisees as well as Christ’s constant socialization with Gentiles. In looking at the New Testament as a missionary document, Bosch pays special attention to the Gospel of Matthew, a Jew attempting to influence his community to mission. Secondly, he looks at Luke’s two volume work of his Gospel account and the Book of Acts is in order to explicitly connect Christ and His Church. Bosch then includes a discussion on Paul’s letters, as they represent the majority of the New Testament.

In Part two, Bosh considers the historical paradigms of mission by examining eschatology, Gnosticism, and Orthodox shifts in the Eastern Church, as well as the medieval Roman Catholic paradigm. He concludes this section with two outstanding chapters on the impacts of the Protestant Reformation and the wake of the Enlightenment. Finally in part three, Bosch speaks to the end of the Modern era and the world’s entrance to postmodernism. He concludes his magnum opus by offering insights to what he calls the “Emerging Ecumenical Missionary Paradigm” and focuses on topics such as the missio Dei, justice, evangelism, contextualization, liberation, theology, and Christianity’s response to other religions.

Perhaps the greatest contribution Bosch makes in his book is his treatment of the postmodern paradigm. As a missiologist engaged in the work of the Spirit, Bosch makes a
scholarly, practical, and scripturally sound response to tolerance and autonomy through the reaffirmation of the conviction of commitment and the retrieval of togetherness. The Church is called to be a peculiar people in the world but not of it. In times of uncertainties such as the current case, the need for interdependence, Bosch states, is the key for salvation and survival. He goes on to claim that the “psychology of separateness has to make way for an epistemology of participation” (p. 362). The pertinence is for the Church as the Body of Christ to revive community and share God’s mission for a common and eternal destiny of all peoples. A second positive is Bosch’s analysis of Paul’s letters, as a Jew commissioned to serve as the apostle to the Gentiles. He describes the apostle as the first missionary theologian and exposes Paul’s missionary strategy, including his use of evangelizing in metropolises, use of teammates, and mentoring of colleagues. One criticism is that of Bosch’s treatment on the elements of ecumenicalism. Though Bosch was very forward thinking with his insights, we are now twenty plus years past the books original publication. In the last several decades, the Western church from a Protestant perspective, has experienced a mired of changes including the decline of mainline denominations, a rise in mega-church associations, non denominational networks, multi-site movements, and the organic, emerging, and missional church conversations. In addition, the Roman Catholic Church has undergone the installment of two new Popes. Surely a more timely report on ecumenicalism would vary from what Bosch has expressed. Still yet, David Bosch significantly added to the study of missiology in his classic work, Transforming Mission. It addresses a theology of mission from a Scriptural, historical, and theological approach. The implications Bosch makes for the understanding and practice of mission will continue to greatly influence missiologists into the twenty-first century.

Announcing the Kingdom
In his highly regarded masterpiece study, *Announcing the Kingdom*, Glasser et al. declares that God’s mission, though most clearly instructed in the life and message of Jesus, actually began before creation, was constant throughout the Old Testament, and finally activated by the church for the sake of the nations in the Second Covenant Jesus brought in the New Testament. Glasser writes, “Thus although the Great Commission is the climax of the earthly instruction of Jesus, this in itself, does not make the Christian movement a missionary faith. This movement has its sources in God...” (pg. 229). Beginning with a short discussion on how and why the Bible is a missionary and holistic text for Christian living, in part one Glasser continues to expound upon the Old Testament commenting on such climatic events in Genesis, including creation, Noah’s ark and the tower of Babel, and God’s covenant with Abram. Part two testifies to God’s mission through Israel, including the Israelite bondage in Egypt and the Exodus story, as well as the significance of God’s direction and presences through the Torah and tabernacle among his chosen people. Issues such as holy lifestyle, the conquest of Canaan, and the period of the Judges are also highlighted to show God’s divinely appointed purpose for generations to come. Part three, “God’s Mission Among the Nations” captures the Israelite exile, and Jewish diaspora, as well as the prophetic foundation and Messianic expectations, setting the stage for Christ’s arrival. In part four, Glasser describes “God’s Mission through Jesus the Christ” analyzing Christ’s inauguration of the Kingdom, how Jesus’ ministry was a demonstration of the Kingdom, relevancy of Christ’s temptation for understanding humanities pitfalls in mission, and the way Jesus proclaimed a here, but not yet, style of anticipation for the Kingdom’s fulfillment. In parts five and six, Glasser elaborates on God’s mission “Through the Holy Spirit by the Church” and how it “Extends to the End of Time”. The first major positive of Glasser’s seminal work, is his upfront treatment of the Bible as a missionary book. Glasser states seven “Axioms
Linking God’s Mission in the Old and New Testaments” including: 1) God’s sovereign kingship, 2) God’s demand for personal commitment, 3) God’s constitution of a servant community, 4) Completion of an Old Testament King in the New Testament Body of Christ, 5) God’s constant mission throughout Scripture, 6) an opposition of God’s rule by unbelieving nations and unseen powers and finally 7) a futuristic direction for God’s mission, continuing until he returns (p. 23-28).

In Part four “God’s Mission through Jesus the Christ”, Glasser identifies the miracles of Christ and his use of parables to point to God’s eternal purpose. Not shying away from the cross, Glasser explains the significance and totality of Jesus’ death as the only path for finding eternal life with God. In expanding upon the classic Old Testament roles of Jesus as Messiah in prophet, priest, and king with the addition of a fourth, servant, Glasser goes on to add three new functions demonstrated by Christ in the New Testament for mission; evangelist, apostle, and teacher-trainer. In addition, Glasser presents the primary sending passages of the four Gospels and particularizes them each within their uniqueness to the Kingdom.

Glasser’s explanation of the incarnation in Jesus as an example of God’s cultural awareness, in part four would be better understood through the writings of Paul Hiebert on the topic of “critical contextualization”. While this is by no means the focus of Glasser’s work, Hiebert, who happen to write the forward for Announcing the Kingdom, remains the distinguished source for learning how to cultivate communication cross-culturally. Still yet, through a biblical theology of mission and reading with a missional hermeneutic of Scriptures’ narrative, Glasser addresses the fall, God’s plan for redemption, and presents arguments for both the cultural and evangelistic mandates. By in large, Glasser presents a comprehensive missiological view of Scripture that outlines principles for the church to partner with God in
ushering in the Kingdom. More than successful, Arthur Glasser has been faithful in presenting the overarching story of God’s mission in the Bible, and why it matters for the Church and Kingdom today.

**Understanding Folk Religion**

The premise of *Understanding Folk Religion* is to teach ministry leaders and churches about the underlining belief systems people have, and why for some, after a profession of faith people return to their old ways of not walking with the Lord. Though the term “folk religion” may conjure topics of mythology, superstition, demon possession, animism, and power encounters, the text’s subtitle, “A Christian response to popular beliefs and practices” may be a more accurate description of the content contained. Essentially, the authors claim that when new people groups are converted to Christianity, Christ must fully encompass all three levels of culture through behaviors, beliefs, and worldviews in order for syncretism not to take place. If indeed spiritual matters are mixed in a context of religious pluralism, it is much easier for newly reached people groups to revert to previous false beliefs and worldly practices. While other religious systems are assessed, ordinary issues like finding meaning in life, understanding well-being and misfortune, guidance, ethics, and everyday rituals are also evaluated.

Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou recognize what they call the “split-level” of Christianity that can lead to spiritual schizophrenia. They write that an adequate missiological response should be one of critical contextualization. This process includes a four step sequence that begins with studying the local cultural phenomenologically. This means understanding a new culture’s belief systems and assumptions. Secondly, an ontological critique is needed to prevent cultural relativism. This, the authors claim, needs to consists of both strict theological criteria and reality testing. Third, new churches and missionaries need to evaluate responses. Hiebert et al. writes
that “the gospel is not simply information to be communicated. It is a message to which people must respond…Leaders may share their convictions and point out the consequences of various decisions, but they must allow the [converted] people to participate in the final decisions in evaluating their past customs” (p. 27). Finally, the establishment of transformative ministries is needed to “help people move from where they are to where God wants them to be” (p. 28). The authors continue their work in four subsequent sections that deal with the four steps process of critical contextualization, all the while maintaining a four part definition of mission that values people over programs, principles over pragmatic answers, addressing the particular rather than the universal, and seeing mission as a process instead of a task to check off. In order for true, biblical transformations to take place, a person’s conversion to Christ, Hiebert argues, should result with a point of decision and a process for developing into Christlikeness. Conversion, both individual and corporate, calls for repentance which leads to commitment to Jesus and the sanctification of that person with the community of believers. The authentic renovation of how a Christian convert interprets their context, or how they view and respond to their world, is known as establishing a biblical worldview.

Hiebert declares that when we seek evangelize people of different cultures; we should look for some specific physical evidence of their decision to accept the gift of salvation. Though behavioral changes, like the abstaining of ancestral rituals might be more easily observed, they are not rooted deep enough to determine a genuine understanding of the person’s relationship with Christ. At the middle level of culture, Hiebert affirms beliefs influence life’s actions. He goes on to warn against the preference of simply imparting information for transformation, as was done by previous Protestant missionaries. Instead, Hiebert advocates a complete overhaul of
how people groups interpret their reality and how they respond to it accordingly by the life of Jesus Christ.

The first major strength of Hiebert’s work is the emphasis to draw a correlation between divine revelation and human knowledge in order to convey the objective Truth of Jesus, among a culture that accepts diversity and embraces relativity. Secondly, considering the current postmodern philosophical state of Western society and the declining situation among the American church, Hiebert’s discourse on how the themes that emerge in the Old Testament as they are fleshed out in the New provide grounds for a lovingly Christian response to other religions and even rejections in grace and humility. Such incarnational representation is essential for forming a spirituality holistic worldview and a complete Scriptural theology of mission. On the other hand, a critical observation lies in Hiebert’s neglect to address the conversion of people groups in North America. His writing throughout the book tends to favor expressions of missionaries to other countries, without explicitly recognizing the United States as a potential field for Christian mass movements. Still yet, to encompass change at every level of culture, missionaries, pastors, and church planters can strive to reach the cognitive desires of knowledge for the head, the affective emotion of the heart in worship, and the evaluative transformation observed in the hands of morality, holiness, and decision making. Overall, Hiebert’s teaching that when a biblical worldview of conversion is grasped in terms of repentance, as in stopping and then proceeding in a new direction back towards God, the church can work in partnership with the Spirit to bring cultural transformation.

Conclusion

While all three books at some point address a biblical theology of mission, the church’s role in the mission of God, and the need to contextualize the gospel, each text is better suited to
respond to one of the three questions individually. In terms of understanding a biblical theology of mission, *Announcing the Kingdom* is the best book suggested on the topic. Glasser, Van Engen, Gilliand and Redford do an incredible job at tracing God’s mission from the very beginning of His story through creation, Israel, the nations, Jesus and finally, the church into the end of time. Though not as practical as other missiological books, such as *Understanding Folk Religion*, Glasser’s *Announcing the Kingdom* has been the standard foundational work for years in courses that teach a missional hermeneutic of Scripture and the *missio Dei*.

In terms of answering the church’s role in the mission of God, David Bosch’s book, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology* definitely sets the bar. Bosch’s reflection on the models of the New Testament, specifically through the lens of Matthew, Luke, and Paul, lays the base for a first century ecclesiology influenced by Christology and missiology. Part two address the historical paradigms while part three looks “toward a relevant missiology”. Both reflective on the past and anticipant of the future, Bosch provides invaluable wisdom and suggests biblical action for the church to take as She lives out Jesus’s mission.

Lastly, as stated earlier, Paul Hiebert is one of the pioneer voices and defendants of critical contextualization. His writing on why contextualization of the gospel is needed is supported not only by scholarly research but also field experience. *Understanding Folk Religion* offers theoretical comprehension with practical steps in order to follow Jesus command “to make disciples of all nations” (cf. Matthew 28: 18-20). Hiebert, Shaw, and Tienou provide academic and applicable advice to incarnate the gospel and communicate Christ effectively. Their book teaches how to embody Paul’s admonishment in Romans ten. The Apostle’s words ring just as true today, “how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Good News!” Proclaiming the message of salvation is needed perhaps more than ever in our current hurting and seeking world.
Bibliography


Their close ties with Gates Foundation projects, with the WHO, and with the UN suggest we may soon face a far more sinister world after the covid19 pandemic fades. Strategic Intelligence, Strategic Partners, and Event 201. The Great Reset graphic details how everything from drones, blockchain, the future of energy, LGBTI inclusion, and 3D printing will play a role in the New Normal. Once again, I encourage readers to take a dive into this graphic to gain clarity on what the WEF and their partners have planned for the coming decade. These partners “shape the future through extensive contribution to developing and implementing Forum projects and championing public-private dialogue.” The WEF’s Strategic Partners include Johnson & Johnson, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Flashcards: Learn. Write. Spell. Test. According to Glasser, which of the following is an inherent need all humans require for emotional health? the need to belong. the two types of motivation. extrinsic and intrinsic. can a students cultural background affect his or her learning. yes because people learn from the world around them. Which of the following are common barriers a new English language learner might run into? breaking down words to their root parts is a great way to help students understand english. true. students learning english for the first time should not be able to use translations in their native language. false. Which of the following are basic skills that students need to master to have English fluency? reading and writing. Now let’s explore how he contributed to various fields of literature: Chaucer’s Contribution to Language. Chaucer’s second and prominent contribution to the English language & literature is his contribution to the English poetry. In the age of Chaucer, most of the poets used to compose allegorical poetry. Grierson and Smith are of the opinion that Chaucer’s pilgrims “are all with today, though some of them have changed their names. The king now commands a line regiment, the squire is in the guards, the shipman was a rum-runner, while prohibition lasted and is active now in the black market, the friar is a jolly sporting publican, the pardoner vends quack medicines or holds séances, and the prioress is the headmistress of a fashionable girl’s school.”