Creative Tensions in Mission
Bosch 25 years on

John Corrie[1]

1. Introduction

2016 has marked the 25th anniversary of the publication of David Bosch's book *Transforming Mission* (Bosch, 1991), although there have been no special events to mark this fact. There was a 20th Anniversary Edition in 2011 (Bosch, 2011a) which had a good concluding chapter by Reppenhagen and Guder which assessed Bosch's legacy. So for this year I am making my own small contribution to recognising Bosch's abiding importance by focussing on what I consider to be one of the key themes of the book: the concept of 'creative tensions'. We might want to argue that after 25 yrs Bosch's work has been superceded by more recent missiology, but I believe this theme has abiding relevance both for theology and for mission, and as we will see, it is a theme that has been picked up by some missiologists and practicioners in more recent years. I myself have written about this previously, so this paper is building on that foundation and summarises some of its themes as a conceptual framework for the current exploration (Corrie, 2001). I then intend to bring the theme uptodate with reference to three contemporary examples of the use of creative tensions in mission.

2. Bosch's main themes

What was Bosch was setting out to do? He recognised that the world of the 70's and 80's was changing profoundly, and that in the West at least a post-enlightenment, post-modern, post-colonial, post-everything world was forming a cultural paradigm shift which was gradually becoming globalised. It meant that we could not go on doing mission as we had always done it – we needed a corresponding paradigm shift in our own thinking about mission if the church was to engage meaningfully and contextually with this new reality. In the West, Bosch's judged that our thinking about mission was too governed by modernity with its structures, its certainties and its top-down view of authority.

But if mission was to engage with the pluralistic character of the post-modern world, it must be similarly as inclusive and multidimensional. This means that nothing less than holistic or integral mission would be an adequate model, because

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that approach seeks to hold together the different dimensions of mission and argues that we need to see people as whole people in their whole contexts. Mission is about word and deed, proclamation and demonstration, in integral relationship. At the same time it is a flexible, open and provisional approach to mission, which makes it responsive to the context in which it finds itself, and does not seek to impose itself from outside the situation. We need to be holistic and integral, but *how* we do that depends on the context. So one of Bosch's key definitions of mission is as follows (Bosch, 1991:512):

> "Mission is a multifaceted ministry, in respect of witness, service, justice, healing, reconciliation, liberation, peace, evangelism, fellowship, church planting, contextualisation, and much more"

Theologically Bosch wanted to give an adequate theological basis for the new missionary paradigm, rooted in the notion of the *'Missio Dei'*, the mission of God. This sees mission as a participation in the mission of Jesus, begun in His incarnation, continued in His Church, and coming to its eschatological conclusion. To engage in mission is to be cooperating in the on-going purposes of God by the inspiration and guidance of his Holy Spirit. Again, this is a dynamic model of mission, always provisional, always moving forward, flexible and open, never set into dogmatic formulations. Bosch preferred a dialectic approach to theology which wrestles with its intrinsic paradoxes and resists the temptation to premature closure. So South African theologian Klippies Kritzinger describes Bosch as a 'missiologist on the road' (Kritzinger and Saayman, 1990:17ff). This is not about doing top-down theology 'from above', as it were from a balcony, but on the road with everyone else as we travel along it with them, sharing their pain and their struggles, doing theology 'from below'. Bosch himself refers to it as a 'Spirituality of the Road' (Bosch, 2011b). This approach is open, adaptable, flexible and provisional. Some would argue that that is the only authentic way to do theology.

So Bosch wanted to provide a rationale for an ecumenical paradigm for mission which could hold conservative and liberal emphases in dialectic and 'creative tension'. This highlights his constant concern for unity in mission. To engage with these creative tensions would enable us to move beyond present day polarisations. Bosch argued that this would be the only way by which mission could be faithful to Scripture and at the same time relevant to the modern context, thus ensuring that the Church would be credible in its witness. What is credible about a church that is polarised and divided within itself?

So for Bosch our aim is 'unity in reconciled diversity', so that the Church is a community which anticipates the coming unity of mankind under the Lordship of

Christ. 'Reconciliation' is a key word in his missiology: the Church should be God's instrument of reconciliation, building bridges wherever there are polarisations, so that we move creatively beyond entrenched positions.

So I regard this theme of 'creative tensions' as one of the main contributions of Bosch's work, and it is not surprising that a major retrospective publication on his work by Kritzinger and Saayman should have been entitled *Mission in Creative Tension* (Kritzinger and Saayman, 1990). It is therefore this theme that is the focus of this paper.

3. The concept of 'creative tension'

In my previous reflections on this theme I pointed out how creative tensions work in everyday life. We hang out our washing on a line stretched between two poles. A bicycle moves under the tension created in the chain stretched between the pedals and the wheel. I play the 'cello, so I know how a beautiful sound is possible from the string in tension between both ends of the instrument, even though in my case it is often anything but beautiful! All of these examples need a genuine tension for their creative potential, with forces pulling in opposite directions. To collapse the tension, perhaps in the hope of finding a compromise, removes any hope of creativity. But the polarities need to be held together – in the case of the 'cello by the string – otherwise there is no relationship between them for an independent agent - such as the bow - to create something new. Tensions therefore are not automatically creative, and we know from experience that some tensions, be they theological, ecclesial or personal, can be anything but creative. My concern therefore is focussed on the tensions which arise from polarities which are intrinsically characteristic of the theology and practice of mission.

As an example, in relation to our interpretation of scripture there is an intrinsic tension between the absoluteness of the text and its contextuality. This is a key question for mission because it bears on how we express the gospel and how we proclaim it with confidence. On the one hand we may want to affirm the core truth of a text with its givenness and corresponding authority. At least this is unambiguous and enables us to proclaim an eternal gospel with clarity, authority and simplicity, avoiding unnecessary doubt, complexity and confusion. But from a different perspective truth is recognised as contextual, the text becomes multilayered, and interpretation is not as simple as we thought. But with this approach biblical interpretation is more relaxed about ambiguity and polyvalence of meaning in different contexts. In my previous work I applied this specifically to postmodern contexts (Corrie, 2001:105). For example, Walter Brueggemann speaks of the 'plurivocality of the text': "Christian interpretation has a deep propensity to give closure, to end the dialectic, to halt the deconstruction, and to arrive as quickly as possible at affirmation" (Brueggemann, 1997:7). Brueggemann gives due deference to the authority of the text, but at the same time recognises that we are interpreting it

in a postmodern context which has no problem with contradiction and ambiguity (Brueggemann, 1993). He works with the tension between the givenness of the text and its plurivocality, using what he calls 'imaginative construal', out of which emerges something truly creative. In this case we have a gospel which is much more contextual, but arguably speaks more powerfully in a postmodern context. The problem arises when we believe that the opposite polarity to our own position is simply wrong, or does not even exist, in which case it is tempting simply to hold our ground and let the other end go off in its own direction. Once we allow the tension to exist, it will be uncomfortable, but by letting go of the tension we are losing the possibility of a creatively new way of approaching the polarity.

It is important to recognise that creative tensions reach into the very nature of God Himself and are intrinsic to how we understand God. I have previously referred to Jim Packer's use of the word 'antinomy' in discussing the tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility, which, according to Packer "is only one of a number that the Bible contains" (Packer, 1961:24). The history of theology is replete with struggles to reconcile divine passibility and impassibility, how God is involved in the world, how the immanent and economic Trinity relate, and supremely perhaps how the divine and the human are held together in the person of Christ[2]. We may prefer a word such as 'paradox' or 'dialectic', but however we express it we are on holy ground here, so 'creative tension' is not simply a construct.

In my research I have concluded that prior to Bosch there are very few references to creative tension as a concept[3], and it is not clear what influenced Bosch's use of it. It emerges in ecumenical circles, for example, through Bishop Stephen Neill in his discussion of proclamation and dialogue (Neill, 1959), so it may well be that Bosch had heard of it through his involvement with the ecumenical movement. It also fitted with his experience of the profound divisions within South Africa at that time, so the concept must have had resonances in the struggle over Christian identity in the apartheid era (Reppenhagen and Guder, 2011:534).

4. Creative tensions in Bosch

We have suggested that Bosch's theology is a classic example of dialectic thinking. He is constantly seeking to hold together orthodoxy with orthopraxis, reflection

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[2] There is a lengthy discussion of this by Nnamani (1995)

[3] See, for example, Russell (1990). "The divine revelation comes to us more often than not as mystery, and frequently as paradox: the wholly 'other is 'God with us', the ineffable makes himself known, the God near at hand is the God afar off, the great creator is revealed in a vulnerable child, the transcendent God is immanent and incarnate, the Judge of all the earth his the Saviour of the world" (Russell, 1990: vii). Russell's tensions include: Scripture and Tradition; Jesus of History and Christ of Faith; Faith and Works; unity and diversity; work and worship; male and female; and the now and not yet of the Kingdom. Some of these I would say are not strictly paradoxical in nature.

with action, or revelation as given with revelation as historical[4]. He begins by recognising the tension between danger and opportunity for mission (Bosch, 1991:7) and that the church is constantly working out its mission between its 'being called out of the world and sent into the world' (Bosch, 1991:11), a theme which recurs throughout the book, and which we develop below. He discusses the tensions between text and context (Bosch, 1991:9); the personal and social dimensions of the gospel (Bosch, 1991:402); and related to that, between evangelism and social action (Bosch, 1991:403); and again relatedly, between proclamation and dialogue (Bosch, 1991:483):

> "I would like to posit my belief that we are in need of a theology of religions characterised by creative tension, which reaches beyond the sterile alternative between a comfortable claim to absoluteness and arbitrary pluralism"

He expresses it as follows (Bosch, 1991:367):

> "Both the centrifugal and the centripetal forces in the emerging paradigm - diversity versus unity, divergence versus integration, pluralism versus holism - will have to be taken into account throughout. A crucial notion in this regard will be that of creative tension: it is only within the force field of apparent opposites that we shall begin to approximate a way of theologising for our own time in a meaningful way".

Many of these tensions reflect profound differences between a conservative and liberal approach to theology and mission, and Bosch's search for an 'ecumenical paradigm' required him to seek to hold these polarities together. For example conservatives have traditionally focussed on the 'not yet' of the Kingdom with its promise of future glory, whereas liberals think of the 'now' of the Kingdom with its potential to transform this world. Bosch typically holds these in tension, so that eschatology becomes critical to the argument (Bosch, 1991:508):

> "We need an eschatology for mission which is both future-directed and orientated to the here and now. It must be an eschatology that holds in creative and redemptive tension the already and the not-yet; the world of sin and rebellion, and the world God loves; the new age that has already begun and the old that has yet to be ended; justice as well as justification; the gospel of liberation and the gospel of salvation. Christian hope does not spring from despair about the present. We hope

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[4]   "In the best of contextual theologies it is therefore no longer possible to juxtapose theory and praxis, orthodoxy and orthopraxis: "Orthopraxis and orthodoxy need one another, and each is adversely affected when sight is lost of the other" (Gutierrez) (Bosch, 1991:425)

because of what we have already experienced. Christian hope is both possession and yearning, repose and activity, arrival and being on the way"

As we journey along with our 'missiology on the road', we may have a destination, but we cannot predetermine the route. So we need to be open, flexible and provisional in our mission because we will always be making new discoveries through our involvement in our daily praxis(Bosch, 1991:427):

"We need an experimental theology in which an ongoing dialogue is taking place between text and context, a theology which, in the nature of the case, remains provisional and hypothetical".

As I have pointed out previously, Bosch suggests another dimension – that of 'poiesis' or creative imagination, thereby creating a three way polarity. As we have seen this is not so far removed from Brueggemann. Bosch thinks of 'poiesis' as the element which generates genuine creativity between theory and praxis[5]. (Bosch, 1991:431):

"The best models of contextual theology succeed in holding together in creative tension theoria, praxis and poiesis – or, if one wishes, faith, hope, and love"

So to sum up, as Bosch works towards his 'emerging ecumenical paradigm', he seeks to hold together the tensions between continuity and change, tradition and transformation (Bosch, 1991:367):

"In the case of each paradigm change reviewed so far, there remained a creative tension between the new and the old. The agenda was always – consciously or unconsciously – one of reform, not of replacement"

5. The Church and its Mission

In my previous work I have developed this theme in relation to ecclesiology (Corrie, 2001:101-103). Allow me to summarise how it works to guide the mission of the church. Bosch's starting point is a now familiar affirmation that the church cannot be the church without mission so it is "missionary by its very nature" (Bosch, 1991:372ff). To be sure the church experiences a tension in its identity between being the Body of Christ, in holy fellowship with Christ and one another, and on the

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[5]   There is a hint of an analogy with the Trinity here. It is quite acceptable to have three things in creative tension, and the Trinity could be our model for that. But I suggest that the third element could be the relational, uniting force (as the Holy Spirit might be between the transcendence and immanence of God).

other hand being involved in the world. But these polarities are held together by the fact that as the church shows itself a 'holy nation, God's own people' it will be bearing faithful witness in the world, and by so doing will 'declare the wonderful deeds of God' (1 Peter 2.9). So as the tension between exclusivity and solidarity is held, a creatively new missionary identity emerges. Creative tension is therefore built into the identity of the church as missional (Bosch, 1991:381):

> "At one end of the spectrum, the Church perceives itself to be the sole bearer of a message of salvation on which it has a monopoly; at the other end, the church views itself, at most, as an illustration – in word and deed – of God's involvement with the world".

It is always a temptation to opt for one end or other of the tension. In this case we may opt to see mission as essentially evangelism and church planting, and we see church growth as the main sign of the Kingdom. The danger is that we become preoccupied with numbers and church growth, with the result that the gospel loses its cutting edge in relation to the world. Or we see mission as bringing justice and humanisation to society, and it is there where we see God's Kingdom at work. The danger in this case is that we allow the world to set the agenda, we become too drawn in to our involvement, and the gospel loses its cutting edge in relation to its call to repentance and faith. Bosch's point is that it has got to be 'both/and' rather than 'either./or', so that "… the church can be missionary only if its being-in-the-world is, at the same time, a being-different-from-the-world" (Bosch, 1991:386). We keep hold of both ends of the tension as the church keeps its distinctiveness and holiness, even as it is at the same time deeply committed to changing the world. The Church thus finds itself in the dialectic tension of being counter-cultural and at the same time inter-cultural, but by holding the tension a creative mission to the world can emerge.

A paragraph which sums up Bosch's approach better than any other comes in the context of a discussion about dialogue and mission (Bosch, 1991:489):

> "We do not have all the answers and are prepared to live within the framework of penultimate knowledge. We regard our involvement in dialogue and mission as an adventure (in which) we are prepared to take risks and are anticipating surprises as the Spirit guides us into fuller understanding. This is not opting for agnosticism, but for humility. It is, however, a bold humility – or a humble boldness . We know only in part, but we do know. And we believe that the faith we possess is both true, and just, and should be proclaimed. We do this, however, not as judges or lawyers, but as witnesses; not as soldiers, but as envoys of peace; not as high-pressure sales-persons, but as ambassadors of the Servant Lord"

6. Creative Tension in practice

How has the concept of creative tension been taken up in more recent years? Here are three applications to mission which build on Bosch's principles.

6.1 Urban Mission: (Weir, 2015)

Andy Wier works as a training officer for the Church Army based in Sheffield, UK. He takes a pragmatic, experiential approach arising out of 15 years living and working on an inner-city estate, and finding himself torn between competing models of urban mission. He has found that many other urban churches and practitioners have experienced similar tensions. His proposal is for a 'both-and' Christianity, following Elizabeth Oldfield, Director of Theos, who argues that "it is increasingly obvious that we are moving into an era of 'both-and' Christianity, when neither personal conversion nor serving the needs of our community holds primary sway" (Oldfield, 2014:25).

Wier identifies six creative tensions from his experience:

1.   Between the spiritual and the practical: this is a variation on the old chestnut of evangelism vs social action. Wier argues that in his experience both sides of this tension adopt a 'tribal theology' which champions one side at the expense of the other and sets liberal and conservative models of mission over against one another. Some are 'kingdom christians' while others are 'cross christians'. At its worst it seems as though they live in parallel universes. This tension is of course resolved creatively as we have already noted through a holistic or 'integral' mission approach, as Bosch and many others have for many years pointed out.

2.   Between the collaborative and the counter-cultural: this is described by Andrew Walls as the tension between the 'indigenizing' principle of incarnation and the 'pilgrim' principle as the church journeys in a different direction from the world (Walls, 1999:17-28). Again, it is the church being in the world but not of the world. Wier sees the church as either involved in the world, partnering with secular organisations and working with communities and other faiths; or it maintains its distinctiveness as counter-cultural and prophetic. Again of course it does not have to be 'either-or' since both sides have strengths which can provide correctives to one another, and as we hold the tension we recognise that there is a way to be involved in the world which does not compromise our distinctive witness. Indeed it is only as we collaborate and build bridges with communities that we have the trusting and respectful relationships within which we can express our distinctive identity.

3.   Between the contextual and the global: this is about the balance between the energy we invest in local mission and how we develop a wider global vision. Many local

churches are inward looking, even perhaps in survival mode from week to week, locked into what they are doing locally and unable or unwilling to give global mission any priority. I know because I have tried to promote global mission in local churches and it is hard work. What many do not realise is that the global dimension can be inspiring and energising for their local commitment, and those who represent the global church can make a creative contribution to local mission if only we involve them. Bosch was passionate in affirming both the local and the global.

4. Between the institutional and the informal. This is about the structures and professional practices that are necessary for effective social action on the one hand, and building informal, flexible and relational communities on the other. It is possible for the church to become a 'service provider' of projects that meet needs in the community but which focus on policies, procedures, management, funding, monitoring and evaluation, all of which leave little time for relationships, experimental mission, and discipleship – in other words being church.   Both the formal and the informal, doing church and being church, are both important. As we hold this tension, creative ways of being church may emerge, valuing the structures but not being bound by them. It enables us to create new spaces within which open-ended relationships can flourish.

5. Between continuity and change. This is related to the previous tension, and in fact they are all related one way or another. Wier treats it theologically: the tension is between faithfulness to a tradition of biblical interpretation and new ways of looking at the text which arise from experience of the context. His years of experience of urban mission have caused him to read the bible differently, much as the liberation theologians discovered. Again as we have already noted we need to affirm both an authoritative text with a supracultural truth and the new insights which come through the lens of the context.

6. Between the heroic and the mundane. This is a more personal tension for Wier, but one that anyone in ministry faces. It is really the tension between success and failure. We like to think we are being heroic and transformative if we are leaders or pastors, building successful and large churches; but the reality is that the majority of the time ministry is mundane and very ordinary, even sometimes a failure. Weir admires what he calls 'mundane holiness', which sees God at work in the everyday reality of life.

Weir recognises that it is necessary for us to feel these tensions pulling us in opposite directions in order to generate the energy for fresh alternatives which nevertheless hold the polarities of the tension in place. Many of these tensions we have already identified from our study of Bosch, and they are not particular to an urban context, although they arise out of Weir's experience. But he demonstrates that we are not just speaking about a theoretical concept.

6.2 Prophetic Dialogue (Bevans and Schroeder: 2011):

Many of us will be familiar with this concept of 'prophetic dialogue', which first appeared in a book which many have put alongside Bosch for its importance: *Constants in Context* (Bevans and Schroeder, 2004). Of all the riches of Roman Catholic missiology in recent years, this book is surely one of the most valuable. It is debatable in fact whether the concept of 'prophetic dialogue' can be seen as a 'creative tension' and Bevans and Schroeder never quite set up the relationship between prophecy and dialogue as such. They come close to it in discussing the relationship between gospel and culture: they argue that there is a continuity in the way in which gospel values are found in all cultures, but there is at the same time a discontinuity in the challenge which gospel values bring to all cultures. So they conclude: "this tension between continuity and discontinuity presents the same dynamic that this book refers to as 'prophetic dialogue" (Bevans and Schroeder, 2011:74). Elsewhere they speak of prophetic dialogue as a "double-sided, dialectical spirituality" (Bevans and Schroeder, 2011:90). But for Bevans and Schroeder dialogue has a certain logical priority: dialogue is the way in which God does mission, so mission is first and foremost dialogue, and the prophetic arises from within the dialogue because we need to earn the right to speak, and that requires a relationship of mutual trust and listening. Nevertheless they do think of prophecy as not simply speaking *forth,* or even speaking *out*, but also speaking *against*. The prophetic mediates the voice of God, and while that is a voice of hope, encouragement and love, it is also a voice of challenge and yes judgment and condemnation. This is the radical discontinuity between gospel and culture, and it requires the Church to be what Bevans calls a 'contrast community' (Bevans and Schroeder, 2011:46), so that simply *being* the Church is in itself being prophetic. There is sometimes a need to speak truth to power especially in relation to social injustice, corruption and the integrity of creation.

But that is not a default position for Bevans and Schroeder, as if the church is always and by nature counter-cultural. The question is: when is it more appropriate to be dialogical and when is it more appropriate to be prophetic? They must go together, and so in seeking to hold them together I contend that they must be held in tension, since in their absolute forms they are pulling in different directions. The integrity of their polarities needs to be maintained, so that they are not diluted or compromised by each other. The creativity comes in working out how to appropriately inculturate the gospel, and this is a dynamic, on-going journey; or as Bevans and Schroeder put it 'a dance' in which God invites us to be partners with him as he "moves through the world , inviting the world – material creation, human beings – to join in the dance" (Bevans and Schroeder, 2011:10). Startlingly, "God is a verb", that is, always and everywhere in movement, creative, liberating, incarnational. I

suggest that God is working out as he goes along the creative tension inherent in his own relationship with the world.

6.3 Mission Partnership (Samuel Cueva: 2015)

Samuel Cueva's concern is the partnership relationship between the west and the rest, (in his case between Britain and Latin America). We know how this relationship has historically been characterised by paternalism, dependency, inequality, rigidity, and top-down decision making. Cueva believes that we need new models of partnership that are flexible, innovative, spontaneous, genuinely mutual, and 'bottom-up'. The question is: how are we going to find these more appropriate models of partnership? The tensions generated by issues of control and power, use of finances, decision-making, expectations etc etc are familiar enough from the history, and quite possibly from our own personal experience, and have often been anything but creative. There is another, related, creative tension, and that is between the local church and the mission agencies. Related, because agencies have historically been western, but now that there are many indigenous mission agencies, the problem becomes one of relationships within the Latin American context between local churches who want to take on responsibility for mission themselves, and mission agencies, who have their own agendas.

Cueva's proposal in both cases is for what he calls a 'reciprocal contextual collaboration' understood as, in his words, "reciprocal relationship of harmonious freedom in creative tension" (Cueva, 2015:390). This means a mutual exchange of gifts and resources; a respect for, and affirmation of, both contexts, their realities and their needs; and a collaboration which implies interdependence, reciprocity, and co-participation in God's mission. The tensions are spiritual, economic and cultural, but to maintain the tension requires that both contexts, Latin American and Western, maintain their cultural and spiritual distinctiveness and are both affirmed in what they bring to the relationship. What acts on the tension to create something new is what Cueva calls a 'prophetic contextual imagination' by which he means imagining together innovative ways to do mission, and then working in partnership as the Body of Christ combining our gifts to make prophetic and contextual the new ways of doing mission which emerge from the dialogue. Models of mission need to be contextual for a meaningful engagement of the gospel, and they need to be prophetic to speak relevantly to the whole context in a holistic manner. Cueva calls on the non-western reflective practitioners of mission to play their part in creating a missiological space within which reciprocal freedom, sharing of gifts, resources and dialogue can take place out of which new and more appropriate models of mission can emerge. This may even be multi-polar, rather than simply bi-polar, so that the partnership is extended beyond the simple two-way traditional model of

mission agencies with national or local churches to include a number of stakeholders working together.

It is helpful to see mission partnerships in terms of creative tensions. What has so often happened is that the tensions have been collapsed by one side or the other; if by non-westerners they simply accept the inherent inequalities, think of themselves as the poor and needy partner, and throw all the responsibility for the partnership onto the western agency, resulting in a perpetuation of the traditional model. If the tension is collapsed by westerners, they fail to recognise what the other partner can bring to the relationship, they misunderstand the cultural differences, and they assume that they will need to do all the running with all their resources of finance, expertise and organisational structures. A creative tensions approach demands that we maintain the tensions that exist in any mission partnership through mutual respect and affirmation, what Cueva calls 'reciprocal contextual collaboration', so that creative new relationships can emerge and new models of mission can be imaginatively developed together.

7. Conclusion

What has happened in the last 25 years to Bosch's ecumenical mission paradigm shift which he believed was necessary if we are to engage meaningfully with the pluralistic, postmodern world which influences one way or another every corner of today's globalised world? In the intervening years there have certainly been many changes in mission; but do they amount to a paradigm shift? We must not confuse a change with a paradigm shift. Or should we talk in terms of paradigm shifts (plural), which will be different in different contexts? Reppenhagen and Guder even suggest that we should be thinking in terms of 'multiple paradigm shifts' (Reppenhagen and Guder, 2011:547). Certainly paradigm shifts do not happen overnight, so we need to take the long view of recent history. Positively from my western perspective there has been a growing acceptance of holistic/integral mission, there is increasing demand for a 'both-and' Christianity which avoids polarisations, there are new ways of being church, there is something of a consensus around what has been called 'generous orthodoxy', and there is renewed interest in the concept of 'creative tensions', as I have documented in this paper. Sometimes this is expressed as 'third way' theology, or is related to the notion of 'critical realism', so there is a family of ideas which contribute to the consensus. However, not so positively, divisions between conservative and liberal approaches seem as wide as ever in some contexts, the church is often slow in responding to the new challenges presented to mission, (by for example the recent migration crisis), the west continues to exercise a disproportionate influence in world mission, and the challenges of building intercultural and inter-religious relationships remain as strong as ever. Bosch did

not leave us a universally valid way of doing mission, or even a single definition. But he did leave us a way of thinking about mission: 'mission as' rather than 'mission is', and in our case, mission as the outworking of creative tensions characteristic of a particular context in the manner of 'bold humility and humble boldness' (Bosch, 1991:489). I suggest that this approach is every bit as relevant today as it was in 1991.

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