

## Ecumenical Zealotry: Bosch's Paradigm Model of Theology

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### Introduction

Without doubt, David Bosch's "Transforming Mission" is a masterwork which literally 'transformed', if you will, our understanding of the ways in which conceptions of the Christian 'mission' have seemingly varied over the course of church history(1). The terms 'transforming' and 'mission' in the book title are not just a play on words but, rather, reflective of deeper beliefs containing ideological presuppositions and philosophical assumptions that are the foundational roots and thematic script of the ecumenical theological perspective Bosch adopts throughout the book. Bosch himself makes clear in his Foreword (as elsewhere throughout the book) that he perceives 'mission' as not only an "enterprise that transforms reality" but, more significantly, "something that is itself being transformed".

However, Bosch's theological perspective is intended to go way 'beyond' even these pedagogical functions. He points out categorically that he doesn't want his Transforming Missions book only to be "a descriptive study". Its purpose is not only to portray developments and modifications of the mission 'idea' but, more significantly, to play an essential role in **transforming social reality**, whatever that political agenda works out to be in practice(2). So, then, Bosch admits from the start that he's writing a text on missionary practices employed over the expanse of Christian church history with a political agenda in mind, namely, to effect changes in the social structures of reality.

These statements about the meaning of words in a book title are not just semantic word play, as suggested above, and its probably high time that scholars break through the mist of academic adoration to say something meaningful about it. Bosch is not only trying to demonstrate how the conception and praxis of mission have changed over the last 2,000 years or so of Christian Church history. He is making affirmative ideological statements regarding his own **political stance** towards both Christian church history in general AND the nature and development of missionary thought and activities within that history in particular even if it is from within a theoretical model uncritically and unreflexively borrowed from elsewhere a la Kung (1977; 1986; Kung & Tracy, 1984).

The *a priori* philosophical assumption built into Bosch's particular ecumenical theological perspective *prior to* description and analysis of mission in Christian church history is that the '**changes**' in missiological understandings and practices which have occurred in that history are (a) assumed to have actually occurred as described, and (b) they are fundamentally and cumulatively positive in nature. By the phrase 'positive in nature' is meant welcomed changes which have led over the long lens of Christian history as a whole to largely beneficial social effects through an 'emerging' ecumenical paradigm.

As such, then, it is essentially a theological model with built-in favorable assumptions towards social 'change' or 'transformation' viewed at a societal structural or institutional level, not just cumulatively favorable towards missiological understandings and practices. In other words, it is fundamentally a favorable political stance towards the issue of 'social change' because those missionary 'transformations' have led directly to assumed improvements or betterments in both missiology itself AND in societal structures. This is why Bosch is at pains to continually and belatedly claim that such missionary understandings and practices have yet to come to an end; the implication is that improvement or betterment continues unabated.

They are improving considerably from one historical period to another in a sort of evolutionary manner even though confronting troubles and setbacks along the way. Here there is absolutely no critical theoretical and methodological reflexivity on Bosch's part to assess and evaluate the potential weakness of ideologically embracing the culturally fashionable theological trend of 'ecumenicism'.

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For example, there is no significant consideration of its potential links to global power structures, not even any review of the extensive scholarly literature inside and outside of religious studies on the idealism and glaring practical ‘failures’ of ecumenicism on the ground (Engelhardt, 2007; Root, 2018).

In fact, so he claims, we now find ourselves at this point in history “in the midst of *one of the most important shifts* in ... the Christian mission”. And now, finally, the crux of the theological matter according to Bosch. Assuming that Bosch’s uncritical adoption of the Kungian typological model of Christian church history is accurate, valid, and reliable (and there is plenty of reason to seriously doubt that it is), the question arises as to why any or all of the other so-called paradigm ‘shifts’ in the history of the Christian mission were not at least equally “important shifts” in their own right? Indeed, the question arises as to whether these conceptually formulated and defined “shifts” have actually occurred in concrete historical reality.

The fact that Bosch hedges his theological bets for academic purposes in favor of the shift to the ‘ecumenical’ paradigm by asserting that we are only in the middle of “*one of the most important shifts*” and not “*the*” most important one makes clear again the *positivepolitical stance* towards that missionary change AND, much more importantly, the favorable societal structural changes it is assumed to effect or lead to. For example. there is absolutely no reflecting upon the possibility that structural changes in society nor social structures themselves may have long coopted ecumenical philosophies into power structures, making ecumenicism itself just one of the latest expressions of acceptance by global power structures. It is simply assumed that ‘ecumenicism’ itself is a theological movement independent of power structures, global and otherwise(3).

The point here is that Bosch a priori chose a typological model of Christian Church history and mission which allowed him to project his own philosophical assumptions and ideological presuppositions into a reconstruction of that history. Bosch chose a typological model which allowed him to reconstruct missionary understandings and practices in Christian Church history even add to them in order to suit his own a priori philosophy and ideology. This is a major reason why his reconstruction is essentially a positive view towards social change and societal structural transformation. This is the main reason why he uncritically accepts Hans Kung’s typological model and feels comfortable adding to it himself, namely, because this positive philosophical view of social change and societal structural transformation is built into the Kungian typological model itself.

So, from this perspective, adding his own components or ‘changes’ to the Kungian typology doesn’t really concern Bosch because he uncritically accepts Kung’s reconstruction of that history, just like many other scholars and theologians before and after him have done (for example: Bevans, 2002; Martin, 1987). What’s more, nowhere in his book does he provide a detailed comprehensive critical analysis and evaluation of neither the Kungian typological model of Christian church history NOR the problems involved in employing typological methodology itself in the human and social sciences, already well-known and extensive at the time Bosch wrote his book on Christian missions, at least going back to Weber’s typological treatment of various social behaviors and ideal-type models methodological models themselves (Shils and Finch, 1949, 1997; Maki, 2009)

Bosch does introduce some discussion about Thomas Kuhn’s “paradigm theory” of growth and development in the natural sciences, even adopting his concept of “paradigm shift” as used in the natural sciences. However, even though we should not “uncritically apply Kuhn’s ideas to the area of theology”, he believes nonetheless that it is “relevant to the study of theology generally, and.... forthe study and understanding of mission in particular”.

This being said even though Bosch is aware that Kuhn himself warned against the application of “paradigm theory” and “paradigm shift” to the human and social sciences(4), since it was a theory of scientific development based on the observable properties and interactions of physical entities in the material environment such as light waves and atoms. In other words, it was a methodology developed to explain the growth of knowledge in the natural sciences, not the social or human fields of knowledge.

To add further doubt to Bosch’s uncritical use of Kung’s typological view of Christian church history, it was also well-known well before the time of writing that Kung had been officially censured from teaching his own Catholic faith by Pope John Paul II as well as the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith at the Vatican and more than

five bishops of his own German-based district for holding and practicing views against the Catholic Christian faith itself such as the divinity of Christ, papal infallibility, and Blessed Virgin Mary, indeed against many more doctrines *central to the core foundational roots of Christianity itself* (for example, assisted suicide and abortion), not simply or uniquely ‘Catholic’ Christianity (Haight, 2021; Harley, 1980; Hyer, 1980; Hebblethwaite, 1980; Kiwiet, 1985; Haring and Kuschel, 1979; Vatican, 1979; and many others).

In addition, and here is the point highly significant for our purposes here, he was also censured for sacrificing core foundational values and beliefs on the altar of **'ecumenical zeal'** exactly as specified in the testimonies and documented charges against him by his own bishops. In other words, he was becoming more and more an **ecumenical zealot** who was ready, willing, and quite able to sacrifice whatever Christian doctrine to the ideologically fashionable contemporary theological trend of 'ecumenicism'.

Perhaps this is why Bosch offers little meaningful critical review and evaluation of Hans Kung's typology of Christian church history, but would prefer to simply adapt it to his own theological tasks. Like Kung's typological model, Bosch's model also leads inexorably to an uncritical theological embrace of the contemporary theological movement of ecumenicism which neglects to seriously consider both its practical failures and its built-in ideological-philosophical prejudices.

The point here is that Bosch is just as much as an ecumenical zealot as was Kung and had uncritically swallowed lock, stock, and barrel the entire philosophy of ecumenicism because he saw himself as a frontrunner in that movement, as indeed Kung saw himself to be. Up to the moment of his untimely death in a car accident in South Africa in 1992, he was a leading figure in the global ecumenical movement. Given what has been said here, that should not surprise anyone.

At the very least, however, what it SHOULD do is compel honest academics to a thorough reexamination and reassessment of Bosch's claims in the Missions book to see how this unreflexive ideological bias in favor of ecumenicism may have entered into the form and content of his book including conclusions drawn and analyses made of particular historical periods, perhaps even in the selection, organization, and structuring of historical information gleaned from Christian Church history itself.

Maybe, just maybe, that's why he titled Part 3 (the last Part) of his 'Missions' book, "Toward A Relevant Missiology" (which begs the questions, 'relevant' to what and to whom and according to what criteria?) because that's exactly where he introduces a full unashamedly venerable review of the 'ecumenical missionary paradigm', a review which quadruples in size the review of any other singular paradigm in his entire corpus of paradigms in missiology! Note here, of course, that the title of Part 3 itself is ideological (as are many other titles and subtitles in the Missions book) as it strongly implies previously described theological and missionary paradigms were largely IRRELEVANT, although admittedly important in terms of promoting the long-term trend towards the all-important 'ecumenical paradigm', of course. If that's not genuflecting to fashionable theological trends, then what is, really?

Notwithstanding its magisterial status in the secular scholarly world, there are several other irremediable flaws contained in Bosch's so-called "summa missiologica" (as the equally famous ecumenical missiologist Leslie Newbiggin wrote on the back cover of Bosch's book itself) both from a liberal and a conservative theological viewpoint, only a small proportion of which can be mentioned here as they stray from the main purposes of this essay. Among other criticisms, liberals and radicals have criticized Bosch for not including meaningful, comprehensive and adequate (if at all) post-modern discussions about black, feminist, ecological, indigenous, and queer theologies, to name just a few of the lamented theologies Bosch tends to sidestep. In other words, he's accused of not being post-modern enough.

Conservatives have criticized Bosch for, among other things: largely omitting the central place of the Holy Spirit in mission (in contrast to Newbiggin or Moltmann, for example); for being too blindly pro-Kungian in his view of Church history; and for being too much of a contemporary ecumenical zealot, leading him to largely neglect the central importance of the Old Testament and to John's Gospel as well as to completely avoid developing a creation missiology (Kim, 2000; among several others). In particular, conservative scholars and theologians are wont to ask whatever happened to the central role of the Holy Spirit (5) as Biblically conceived in Bosch's entire historical missionary project?

Although these are important theoretical and methodological weaknesses contained in Bosch's magnum opus on mission, there is simply no room here in this modest academic exercise for a detailed review and assessment of all these criticisms. They have been more than adequately discussed elsewhere, and such a thorough review would lead us astray from our main focus on Bosch's typological methodology. In reference to this last point, a much more serious flaw is contained in Bosch's uncritical employment of Kung's paradigmatic approach to reconceptualize the history of Christian theology and missionary practice, as intimated above.

This uncritical acceptance of the Kungian paradigm model of church history leads him not to seriously consider alternative ways or methods of understanding Christian history which may be much more historically grounded as actual concrete paradigmatic movements than his strictly conceptual reformulations or reconstructions of discrete historical elements weaved together in such a way as to imply a natural historical evolution of missiological paradigms towards ecumenicism.

The point here is that Bosch's conceptual reconstructions of various elements of Christian church history provides a false evolutionary picture of Christian theology and mission over history. The apparent 'evolution' of Christian history and missionary practices within that history are much more a product of his conceptual constructs than they are grounded in concrete historical reality. And Bosch's paradigmatic model takes on this feature because he is much more concerned with "transforming reality" in the present and future (as he himself makes clear in the "Foreword" of his Missions book) than he is in faithfully describing historical realities and events as they actually happened and attaching actual historical significance to them.

So, then, for the remainder of this essay, the aim will be to offer an alternative 'paradigm' (if you will) of Christian church history which involves much less post-modern conceptual reconstructions of that history to make it fit an uncritical 'ecumenical' perspective resulting from some kind of natural evolutionary process that bears very little if any relationship to real concrete empirical history in general, much less to authentic Christian doctrine in particular. The argument here will be to offer a more pragmatic, concrete, historically-based change in Christian theological and missionary practices than that offered by the Bosch 'Ecumenicism & company' historical reconstruction program.

We will argue here that the historically concrete shift in theological and missionary practices of the Christian church occurred in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD with the ascension of Constantine the Great to the pinnacles of political power, the first of many Roman emperors to convert to Christianity. The argument will be that the most pivotal paradigm shift in Christian church history and missionary theories and praxis occurred when Christianity and the Roman state forged a unique link(6).

Along the way, we will pay attention to some of the difficulties plaguing Bosch's treatment of the alleged movement out of the early 'primitive' Christian church into the Hellenistic or Greek Patristic period, and from the latter Greek paradigm to the 'medieval' Roman Catholic theological period. Throughout these 'movements' out of one theological paradigm into the following theological paradigm over historical time, it is conceptually assumed that a simultaneous change takes place in missionary doctrines and practices sufficiently distinct from the previous 'ruling' paradigm without so much as a grain of scientific empirical proof offered as verification.

Perhaps this problem is why so many components of particular theological and missionary 'paradigms' appear to be found in multiple paradigms stretching over long periods of historical time, a rather glaring methodological deficiency which also compromised Kung's typology from its inception. Before we begin, however, let's provide a brief review and analysis of Bosch's main theological and missionary contentions in the Missions book.

### **"Transforming Missions": Bosch's Main Points**

Even a brief review of Bosch's main points in Transforming Missions should make clear how its theological descriptions and reflections are thoroughly imprisoned by the modern and 'post-modern' (whatever that verbal shibboleth means) ideological and philosophical trends of relativism, pluralism, and secularism. This theological genuflection to modern secular philosophical gods is adequately reflected in Bosch's own statements of feeling "misgivings" about the "ambiguity" implied in the book's title, "Transforming Missions". He states that this "ambiguity" is to be found in the fact that "mission" is both something which effects social transformations and something which is itself constantly 'transforming' or changing.

It's interesting to note that one of the leading missiologists of contemporary Western society at the time fervently believes that God's missionary message to humankind in Christ's Incarnation is not a moral absolute but, rather, always subject to 'transformation'. For this reason, Bosch argues throughout the three main parts of his Missions book (Part I – New Testament Models; Part II – Historical Paradigms; Part III – Toward A Relevant Missiology) that there is categorically no one single macro-paradigm, no original divinely inspired nor guided-by-the-Holy-Spirit missionary message; rather, it is simply a constantly 'transforming' missionary message. It is not a message from God to humanity that is stable, fixed, divine, and absolute; rather, it's a message that is unstable, changing, contextual, and relative(7).

To demonstrate the ever-changing nature of God's missionary message to humankind, Bosch briefly reviews what he perceives to be some central elements of different models of mission encountered in the New Testament, curiously avoiding contact with the Gospel of John(8). Instead, Bosch focuses on Matthew, Luke, and Paul. Bosch points out that Matthew's missionary emphasis was placed upon discipleship; Luke's missionary focus emphasized solidarity with poverty and the poor; and Paul's missionary perspective was definitely eschatological in nature.

Bosch's argument here is that each of these biblical authors 'transformed' and redefined missionary thinking and activities to suit different 'contexts' they were working within. Hence they have relativized the Bible to suit their 'contexts', in a more direct manner of speaking. Therefore, for Bosch from the beginning the contextual nature of defining mission is THE major premise upon which the study of mission is founded, extending a theological bow to then philosophy of cultural relativism. As Bosch himself makes clear near the end of his book:

“A basic argument of this book has been that, from the very beginning, the missionary message of the Christian church incarnated itself in the life and world of those who had embraced it” (p. 421).

It's interesting to note here that the moral absolute Truth held in apostolic Christian doctrine of the missionary message to all of humankind through Christ's incarnation has here been relativized to the varying contexts of “the life and world of those who had embraced it”.

In the next section on the different historical paradigms which appear to characterize Christian church history, Bosch's main goal is again to illustrate the constantly 'changing' nature of missionary thinking and activities. Here Bosch uncharacteristically offers a somewhat half-hearted assessment and evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of each historical paradigm, using both Thomas Kuhn's “paradigm theory” from his *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* and Hans Kung's six epochs of Christian church history. Bosch's conclusion is predictable, of course, even without glancing at the particular historical periods under review. What he sees in history is a pluriverse of missiology, a constantly changing and evolving process of missiological thoughts and practices.

These first two sections of *Transforming Missions* sets the stage for the final dramatic academic act where Bosch proposes a newly minted missiological coin, a newly revised definition of 'mission' which he proclaims will take us safely into the future. This new or contemporary missionary paradigm that Bosch refers to is the “post-modern” and the “emerging ecumenical paradigm”, following Kung's theological viewpoint.

At this point, what Bosch offers is not so much a relatively complete missionary paradigm as conveyed in his review of previous paradigms but, rather, paradigmatic “elements” which are too diverse many of which exist in “creative tension” with each other and, so, cannot be forcefully combined together without polarization. But the good news, so to speak, is that so long as these elements continue to be held in creative tension with each other Christians will remain faithful to Gospel and relevant to 'context'.

Bosch argues that what we should be able to recognize is a contextual mosaic rather than a meta-paradigm, very much like the different missionary models that co-existed in his brief review of New Testament missionary models. Here the argument is that different missionary theologies need not necessarily exclude each other because they tend to form a mosaic of complimentary elements that are mutually enriching and mutually challenging.

As final commentary in this brief review of Bosch's study on missionary thinking and activity in Christian church history, it goes without saying that Bosch's work genuinely deserves the wide acclaim it has received as a magnum opus of mission studies. He embraced and straddled the fields of New Testament studies, Christian church history, and missiology with magnificent skills and competence and reflection as both an academic scholar and a former practicing missionary in the hotbed of the apartheid political regime in South Africa. Bosch's work must surely be regarded as the core foundation and launching pad for any contemporary and future discussions about Christian mission, for sure.

That having been said, lavishing praise on great academic achievements should not occur at the cost of sacrificing Biblical integrity by bowing to fashionable ideological and philosophical trends such as pluralism, relativism, and secularism. Yes, sometimes 'either-or' thinking is problematic in theology as it is in missiology as it is in everyday life. On the other hand, caving in to contemporary cultural dictates and trends by always searching for 'third ways' in eschatology, evangelism and social action, contextualization, and justice has its own pitfalls and risks relativizing many of the timeless truths contained in Biblical passages and the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

As Christian scholars and especially as Christian theologians, we are Biblically duty-bound to live, think, and behave independent of time and culture as Christ commanded His spiritual ambassadors to be, not mindless robotic unquestioning slaves to academically fashionable cultural dictates or trends. Let us now move *above and beyond Bosch* to critically review some difficulties contained in his treatment of two missionary paradigms in the early Christian church, the Hellenistic and the Roman Catholic, as a way to set the stage for offering a truly historically-grounded (not conceptually reconstructed to fit fashionable theological trends) way to view Christian church history and missiology represented by the 4<sup>th</sup> century emperorship of Constantine and other key events that happened in that century to forge a Church-state relationship that marked a pivotal turning point in church history. First, we shall briefly review the essential points of these early missionary paradigm. Then we will point out some key problems that appear to put into doubt Bosch's (and by logical extension, Kung's) paradigm model of Christian church history.

### **Bosch's Early Christian Church Paradigms**

In Bosch's model, the Hellenistic or Greek church period extends from roughly the first to the sixth century AD. The first point Bosch makes, of course, is that in the movement out of the Hebrew culture into the Greek culture Roman Empire Christians had already started to engage in cultural accommodations largely out of necessity since they were an illicit religion highly vulnerable to persecution. Nevertheless, their model behavior in private and in public led to continued growth without any obvious signs of active missionary activity. Christians forged their way through that Hellenistic culture in such a way as to minimize antagonizing their newfound cultural hosts even though that culture responded in its own way to Christian doctrine. For example, the Greeks de-emphasized the fervent apocalyptic visions of an early Christianity which Bosch defines pejoratively (if only implicitly) as "primitive".

Bosch appears to attach great and honorable weight to these rational intellectual theological exercises of the Greek culture even as applied to 'mission'. To the Greek church, mission stemmed from the life of the church itself viewed as the "sign, symbol, and sacrament of the divine" (p. 212). Worship was the very core of mission as expressed in liturgy viewed as a shining light in the "darkness of paganism" (p. 207). Bosch shows great respect and admiration for the Eastern missionary paradigm even though he cites several limitations in Hellenistic traditions – the complete abandonment of eschatology, unquestioning inculturation, and nationalism. The Biblical text to which Bosch most closely associates the Hellenistic missionary paradigm is John 3:16:

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life".

In terms of the missionary paradigm that follows the Eastern church paradigm, Bosch adopts another attitude altogether not necessarily as profoundly respectful as for the Eastern Orthodox church. The missionary paradigm of the "medieval Roman Catholic" period extends formally from the late 6<sup>th</sup> century to roughly 1500 AD, although

Bosch argues it really starts with St. Augustine around 430 AD. This is exactly the historical point in time Bosch glosses over without attaching any earth-shattering paradigmatic Christian missionary significance since there were other missionary models that existed simultaneously with significant impact on missionary activities such as the arduous labors and exploits of itinerant monks. The 'monk' paradigm, really?

For this reason, Bosch illustrates his disdain for the Roman Catholic model by ***NOT attaching primary missiological significance*** in his paradigm model of Church history to the conversion of the Roman emperor ***Constantine the Great***. Let's review what Bosch has to say about Augustine and Constantine in order to demonstrate the point. Here at this point in our essay, it is absolutely crucial to note that Bosch casually rules out of consideration a monumentally significant event which occurred in Christian church history (along with many other sea-changing 4<sup>th</sup> century events) largely because of his Protestant disdain for Roman Catholicism and because it doesn't seem to nicely fit the evolutionary ecumenical conceptual model he is building. We will come back to this key point later in the essay.

Theologically speaking, ***St. Augustine*** led the Christian church at that time which now began to shift attention from the key concept of Christ's 'incarnation' TO Christ suffering on the wooden 'cross', with a new emphasis on the concepts of 'predestination' and 'original sin'. At this point, Bosch says that there were new enterprising opportunities for the Christian church in terms of missionary activities that had already started as a result of the alliance of church with the Roman state under Emperor Constantine the Great or Constantine I.

Bosch notes that since Augustine was greatly worried about the content of spiritual training for new Christians, his main concern was for incorporating them into the church as soon as possible through the sacrament of *'baptism'*.

For Augustine, the greatest urgency was salvation of pagans through 'baptism' within the Christian church, a 'baptism' or initiation into the Christian community of Christly believers that had to be done willingly, voluntarily, submissively, reverently. Bosch says that even though Augustine resisted for many years *the idea of compelling pagans* or heretics to right belief, eventually he changed his mind and started to provide a *theology of Western missions* which justified Christian warfare, launched bloody crusades, and legitimized "forced conversions" across most of central and northern Europe (p. 226).

At this point, Bosch is so blindly critical of Augustine's Roman Catholicism here that he chooses a specific Biblical text that in his mind disdainfully conveys the Roman Catholic missionary tradition that he believed reigned in the minds of all Catholic Christian missionaries from that point onwards: "Compel them to come in" (Luke 14: 23). However, what he intentionally fails to tell his readers is that the specific Biblical text he has cherry-picked to convey the concept of *'forced conversion'* which he believes Roman Catholics illegitimately conceived, initiated, and sustained in missionary activities is wholly inapplicable and illegitimate itself. The entire Biblical chapter mainly concerns a parable which Jesus conveys over dinner at the house of one of the leading Pharisees on the Sabbath, motivated when Jesus noticed that the invited guests were jockeying and pushing each other to sit at the perceived best places of honor at the table.

Jesus describes the actions of slave and his master who had invited many people to his house to share in a big dinner and who had sent his slave to pass on this good news. However, when the slave returned to tell his master that no one would come because they all had excuses (I just got married, I need to care for my oxen, my land must be tilled, and so forth), the Master got angry and commanded his slave to go back out through the streets and lanes of the city to bring in the poor and the crippled and the blind and the lame to share a dinner feast with him, which the slave dutifully did and they came. But still the house was not filled with guests, "still there is room" (Luke 14:22).

At this point, the master said to the slave:

"Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel them to come in, so that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my dinner" (Luke 14:23-24).

Obviously, this passage is not a Roman Catholic rallying cry for "forced conversions", as Protestants and Bosch would have it, and it is ingenuous to say otherwise. Bosch provides absolutely no scientific empirical evidence to justify his insidious insinuations about the dominant attitudinal mode of conversion under Roman Catholicism by any practicing Roman Catholic missionaries. It is simply assumed that it reigned supreme as missiological strategy.

Furthermore, it is a well-known historical fact that religious conversions could be 'compelled' in a number of different ways, some intense and pressured, some not, by many different religious faiths and literally across the Christian denominational spectrum. No operational definition of what exactly constitutes a 'compelled' religious conversion is even offered, seemingly an essential prerequisite for any meaningful objective discussion of religious conversion. But again, Bosch prefers not to provide a full scientific comparative religious study of conversion to justify his implied point because it might upset the neat tidy little Protestant theological model he is reconstructing out of various elements of different historical periods in Christian church history.

Here Bosch demonstrates complete ignorance and ideological indifference about several key factors in the history of the Christian church because it doesn't fit neatly into Protestant philosophical and ideological presuppositions and, therefore, into the paradigm model he is reconstructing. Several highly authoritative historical investigations by prestigious scholars in top universities across the world such as Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Princeton, and other Ivy League educational institutions have provided a much more balanced and historically accurate review of the motivations and processes involved in the era of Christian Crusades which have debunked this particularly Protestant disdainful view, many of them emphasizing the largely reactive nature of Christian Crusades responding to terrible human atrocities by the Islamic Empire.

Still, even though highly relevant to the issue of Bosch's and Kung's questionable paradigm model, suffice it to say here that these Boschian commentaries are simply another illegitimate historical reconstruction he seems to be very comfortable with propounding.

A full review of relevant sources on this point would take us far afield from our central aim to underline the absolutely pivotal role of Constantine I in the history of missionary activity in the Christian church.

As mentioned earlier, all during the time that this is happening with Augustine Bosch claims there was another significant missionary model which he believes was much more exemplary of Christian doctrine and Christian life, namely, the “monk” missionary model. Bosch is much more impressed and shows much more respect and admiration for the arduous work and exemplary behavior of monks in spreading the Christian message than the work of St. Augustine and the Roman Catholics, in particular the Celtic monks who were committed to amazing travel exploits, a kind of traveling or itinerant mission.

Needless to say, Bosch is indeed charitable in his overall assessment and evaluation of the overall missionary decisions and activities of Roman Catholic Christians. However, he is clear that the decisions which stemmed from the conversion of Roman Emperor Constantine I were not paradigmatically revolutionary but, rather, quite logical and inexorable and do not point to any significant or major changes that would merit the label ‘paradigm shift’ in Bosch’s missiological model (p. 237). Along with Martin (1987), Kreider (1995, 1999, 2003), Walls (1996), Williams (1951), Shenk (2001), Dix (1945), Murray (2004), and several others, we must beg to differ with Bosch’s opinion on this point. First, let’s review some of the serious difficulties plaguing Bosch’s caricature of the two earlier missiological paradigms just reviewed above.

### **Bosch’s Early Christian ‘Paradigms’: Some Problems**

These problems function to aggravate already existing problems contained in Bosch’s methodology that may have led him to gloss over significant historical events in Christian church history that don’t appear to fit the neat gradual evolutionary ecumenical missionary model he was trying to build. The first difficulty already intimated at is that it is rather misleading at best to talk about a Christian church period viewed as concrete and distinct at least for the first few ‘paradigmatic’ periods leading up to the Reformation such as the Eastern Orthodox church of the “Greek Patristic period” (p. 190) or the “Greek theology of the early centuries” (p. 210). Although he states at a certain point that he’s uncomfortable with this paradigmatic label (p. 203), he adopts it fully.

The answer is obvious: this characterization provides legitimacy for imputing an evolutionary ecumenical view to his missiological project of “transforming” social reality. The Protestant ideological caricature of church history is one that ‘progresses’ from the early ‘primitive’ and ‘Orthodox’ centuries to the dark ‘medieval’ Roman Catholic ‘compelling’ ages to the early ‘modern’ advanced period (due to the Reformation and the Enlightenment) to the emerging ‘postmodern’ ecumenical missiological period – a nice and neat and tidy Protestant missiological package wrapped in theological ribbons and bows. But it is far indeed from actual concrete historical reality.

First of all, it is historically and empirically inaccurate. It is true that the early centuries were indeed characterized by Christianity within the Greek culture complete with a liturgical language of worship that was primarily Greek even up to the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century (Kreider, 2003, p. 60). But even then, there were rapidly growing Christian faith communities in the Roman Empire whose main language was Latin. Bosch himself cites the leader of one of these communities when he reviews the Eastern church, namely, Cyprian of Carthage (p. 201). However, it is absolutely astonishing that Bosch would focus on Cyprian as the model of a Latin-speaking theologian. By contrast, most religious scholars would contend that the greatest Latin-speaking theologian before Augustine was undoubtedly Tertullian, who lived and wrote one century BEFORE Cyprian.

Many religious scholars have pointed out that the most striking feature of Christianity during this period was its *itinerancy*. For example, in Gaul Greek-speaking Christians born in Asia Minor mixed with the Latin-speaking local Celtic people. This points out a key spiritual element of the Christian faith where Christians viewed themselves as *spiritual itinerants*, as resident spiritual foreigners, not being ‘Eastern’ Christian or ‘Western’ Christian from a strictly cultural deterministic point of view. It emphasizes that early Christians viewed themselves as part of a *spiritual community* first, and that this sense of spiritual community extended way **before and way after the Emperorship of Constantine I**. It is true that great controversies emerged about Christian doctrine and jurisdiction over the centuries between the Eastern and the Western Christian church, but these great divisions had not occurred during the early Christian centuries that Bosch was dealing with.

Another reason Bosch’s caricature of this period is misleading is essentially a category labelling problem which indicates strong a priori *ideological disdain for Roman Catholicism* existed prior to his review of church history. He labels the early centuries “Eastern” and the later centuries “medieval” Roman Catholic, not ‘Western’ or ‘medieval Western’. By *structuring his theological historical periods* in this way, Bosch is then permitted to *impute irenic incarnational qualities to the “Eastern” Christian church* in John 3:16 style, while attributing various “compulsion” features to the Roman Catholic church.

What Bosch fails to understand or admit, however, is that his well-respected and admired Greek-speaking Christians were just as predisposed to arm-twisting and head-bashing as he claims were the Latin-speaking Roman Catholics.

For example, in the 6<sup>th</sup> century *the Greek-speaking John of Ephesus* employed a “compel them to come in” missionary method to beat repeatedly with a thick stick heavy at one end more than 80,000 unwilling or hesitant residents of Asia Minor into the Christian faith (MacMullen, 1997, pp. 66-67). Then it was *Constantinople Emperor Justinian in 529* who legislated Christianity to be the religion of all inhabitants by making **infant baptism** legally mandatory (Walls, 1996). Many more examples can be proffered here from before, during, and after the so-called Roman Catholic church period to prove the point that **“compulsion” was not necessarily nor exclusively a Roman Catholic missiological technique nor a particularly ‘Western’ phenomenon**, for that matter. Rather, it was a Christendom phenomenon, if it was a significant phenomenon at all.

The other important point that needs to be mentioned about Bosch’s conceptual caricature of the Roman Catholic paradigm refers to the immense expanse of *time attached to that historical period in his paradigm model, roughly 1,000 years from 600 to 1500 AD*. By definition, a lot more ethically questionable human activities in the history of the Christian faith over the span of 1,000 years than can happen in the span of the first 100 years in the so-called primitive Christian period or in the span of roughly 500 years from the first to the sixth century in the Greek Patristic period. And this is just to mention the *gross disparities in the sizes of two historical periods* under examination as demarcated by Bosch, let alone subsequent historical periods. This tremendous imbalance in the demarcation of the length of historical church periods under examination itself brings into severe doubt the validity and reliability of any comparisons between them, at least from a purely scientific statistical point of view.

In any case, another difficulty plaguing Bosch’s treatment of the early Christian churches is that he *draws heavily from other theologians and then applies their theological ideas to history*; Bosch is not an authentic historian who draws from the sources himself. This is partially reflected in his theological obsession with the missionary model of the Eastern Orthodox church where he devoted 1/5<sup>th</sup> of the entire lengthy chapter (5 out of roughly 25 pages) to modern Orthodox theologians and not a single mention of any ancient Christian theologian or writer. The obvious reason for doing this is perhaps to inform readers about Orthodox contributions to the so-called emerging ‘ecumenical’ missiological paradigm of contemporary times. Nevertheless, if that is the aim then it misleads readers about the missiological genius of early ‘primitive’ Christianity in at least two senses.

In the first sense, it is true that Bosch recognizes the immense significance that these early 20<sup>th</sup> century Eastern Orthodox theologians or writers attached to the central role of liturgy in the evangelization and missionary process since “non-believers” were always welcomed to attend (p. 195, 207-8). But what does this have to do with the pre-Constantine Christian church, that is, the church that existed prior to the 4<sup>th</sup> century? Dix (1945, pp. 16, 35) pointed out nearly half a century before Bosch wrote his book that **all Christian worship during the apostolic and primitive church periods were regarded as “highly private activity, especially the Eucharist.**

Participation of strangers was “rigidly excluded”, even attendance at Eucharist. The original setting of Christian worship was *“intensely corporate”, “entirely domestic and private”, “highly exclusive”- “it was not public”* at all. Only those who had been baptized and were preparing for baptism could be admitted to the first part of worship services in the readings and sermons; and only those that had been baptized could be admitted to the second part of worship services in prayers and the Eucharist. Deacons stationed at doors prevented all outsiders from entering.

So, then, **how does such a Christian church grow?** Perhaps the answer lies somewhere in the **act of worshipping** through the *liturgy*, but not for the reasons cited by Bosch. Completely satisfied Christians formed **communities** who viewed themselves as *God’s spiritual ambassadors* on Earth and, as such, as completely **“free”** human beings who expressed **exemplary behavior** in public and in private life. It was just this simple, honest, exemplary and hard-working behavior and an open policy of **infant baptism** that moved people in local communities to request for baptism and membership, not the shining brilliance of gold and silver in the buildings or the splendor of Christian rituals at Church services. Since by the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century everyone was by law a Christian through infant baptism, there tended to be less reliance on liturgy as a missionary tool.

In the second sense in which the early church demonstrated effective missionary activity was through its prime emphasis upon the **centrality of Christian doctrine**. Bosch is continually at pains to point out, rightfully so, that the Eastern Orthodox church attached supreme value to *correct statements of faith*.

For example, the *Greeks* replaced the New Testament focus on God's direct role in saving events in human history by *emphasizing definitive statements about God*. Bosch illustrates this shift of focus by contrasting the Sermon on the Mount (concerned with human behavior) with the Nicene Creed (concerned with metaphysics), a striking contrast indeed. But curiously, Bosch fails to address how and when the church shifted from a focus on ethical behavior to a focus on dogmatics.

Bosch cannot help us here because he *doesn't do his historical homework*, but early church sources can. Many of these sources (from Justin the Palestine teacher martyred in Rome in 165, to Athenagoras writing about 25 years later in Athens, to early church Greeks and Romans) placed primary emphasis on *the importance of exemplary ethical behavior in human conduct*, to 'live as Christ, not just speak the words'; to 'show forth good deeds'; and to let Jesus' teachings transform lives in the actual living of it.

We cannot find anyone saying prior to the 4<sup>th</sup> century that the Sermon on the Mount is insignificant or irrelevant to human life nor to the order of human communities. Therefore, it appears to be the case that at least prior to the 4<sup>th</sup> century, non-believers were attracted to the Christian faith because *they perceived directly the physical behavior of Christians alone and in Christian communities* freely and happily living out Jesus' teachings in concrete reality, and so, they wanted to become a part of the faith.

Lastly, and most importantly for the purposes of this essay, as alluded to many times above, Bosch's missiological paradigm model is conceptually theological in nature, not concrete practical historical reality. After all, the subtitle to his book is, "Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Missions". Therefore, he completely neglects the centrality of the most fundamental 'paradigm' shift which occurred in the first 1,000 years of Christianity, variously described in the literature as the 'Constantinian' shift or the 'Christendom' shift (Murray, 2004, Chapter 4; Kreider, 1999; Drake, 2000; Walls, 1996; Stark, 1994; Martin, 1987). This truly historic event actually occurred right in the middle of Bosch's Eastern church historical period, namely, the Christian conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine I.

This event sparked far-reaching changes which took centuries to unfold and solidify, eventually leading to the **emergence of Western Christian civilization often described as 'Christendom'**. It can be argued with forceful confidence and convincing evidence that perhaps nothing 'transformed' missionary thinking and activity more than this pivotal event in the 4<sup>th</sup> century along with similar events like it in the same century both before and after it occurred. Even Bosch realizes the pivotal significance of Constantine's Christian conversion, however late or politically strategic it may or may not have been since he points out that the "Edict of Milan" in 313 granted legal status to all religious practices including Christianity, which changed the situation for Christian believers dramatically (p. 202).

However, it's very clear from his writing that Bosch seemed to have regretted this occurrence (p. 222). As intimated above, he does state that the reign of Constantine changed the mission situation of Christianity "dramatically" but, unfortunately, **not dramatic enough(?)** to merit a description of 'paradigm shift' in missionary activity. Evidently, Bosch in his Protestant wisdom had not come to terms with the emergence of a state-church alliance constituting 'Christendom', nor its crucial consequences for missionary thinking and activity. In terms of the title of his own book, "Transforming Missions", it's hard to believe there is actually any other factor more important and more 'transformational', literally, in the history of the Christian church nor as consequential for missiological thinking and activity, than the emergence of Christianity in both the East and the West.

This argument is even more powerful when we consider the ultimate end of the Christian faith as Biblically conceived, namely, to **subject all human activity to the divine governance of Christ**. Although in this aim Christianity has had varied and mostly laudable successes, its emergence as Christendom in the 4<sup>th</sup> century has left **some troubling issues to be resolved** such as Christian accommodation to questionable cultural values, the use of various forms of compulsion in some missionary practices, and the state-church relationship. We can argue these and other issues about the history of the Christian church until we are blue in the face using a kind of cost-benefit approach, but that is for another intellectual exercise.

Finally, what remains to be done in this essay is to review the real historically-grounded events which occurred in the 4<sup>th</sup> century in order to demonstrate the urgency and cogency of employing an **alternative** and much more authentic paradigmatic model to describe Christian church history and the 'transformations' which occurred in missiological thinking and practices within that history, NOT conceptual reconstructions of that history to fit a highly problematic and ideologically biased theological paradigm model.

Here what will be proposed is to shift scholarly attention away from an ideologically-driven conceptual 6-part paradigm model of missions obsessed with demonstrating a natural evolutionary perspective of missionary thinking and activity throughout Christian church history culminating in the unfinished business of an “ecumenical” paradigm **TO** a 3-part Christendom or Constantinian paradigm model. The argument is that in the 4<sup>th</sup> century there was indeed a ‘shift’, if you will, **not a conceptual shift but, rather, an on-the-ground practical shift** as Christian religious behavior and other forms of religious behavior started to be openly and **officially tolerated and later legalized**. After we describe some of the key specific details of these historical events that initiated the first Christian paradigm shift, we will discuss some of its major implications for missiological thinking and praxis.

### **The ‘Constantinian Shift’: Some Historical Predecessors**

What is sometimes referred to in the scholarly biblical literature as the ‘Constantinian shift’ in Christian church history actually refers to a series of historical events which occurred within the Roman Empire throughout the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD which resulted in the *increased toleration and then legalization of the Christian religion as well as other religious faiths*. This momentous historical event is most closely associated with Roman Emperor Constantine the Great (or Constantine I) because he was the first Roman Emperor to convert to Christianity. Although the timing and circumstances surrounding that conversion are still open to debate for many religious scholars, what cannot be denied historically is that the entire 4<sup>th</sup> century is filled with events that signal the unprecedented toleration and acceptance of Christian and other religious practices by the Roman state, not just by one converted emperor.

Therefore, it is perhaps more appropriate to talk about a **‘Christendom shift’** rather than a **‘Constantinian shift’** in theological and missionary paradigms. If this is true, and there is lots of empirical evidence to suggest that it is true indeed, then it is perhaps more accurate to talk about a Pre-Christendom/Christendom/Post-Christendom theological model rather than the paradigm models offered by Kung, Bosch, Bevans, and others that are more concerned with conceptual reconstructions of history rather than actual revolutionary historical events on the ground that constituted genuine ‘paradigm shifts’. If this 3-part paradigm model is historically accurate, then it goes without saying that the 4<sup>th</sup> century constitutes the very beginning of Western Christian civilization, a concrete ‘paradigm’ par excellence.

Let us begin our historical review of some of the events in question using the best known original historical documents as a helpful orienting guide along with a few modern translations and interpretations (Lactantius, 2015, 2021; Eusebius, 2015, 2017, 2021; Whiston, 1999; Frend and Stevenson, 1987; Maier, 2007; Lenski, 2017; Potter, 2013; Frend, 1982). Needless to say, there are literally hundreds of scholarly articles and books that have been written describing the details of these historical events. Obviously, in the context of a modest essay written for a graduate course we cannot hope to be as comprehensive as we might otherwise be. Nevertheless, the broad thematic outlines specified in this historical literature can be sketched out in rough form.

It turns out that the 4<sup>th</sup> century didn’t exactly start out to be a stellar century for Christianity, not exactly a stellar example of a ‘revolutionary’ paradigm shift in Christian church history nor missionary activity to speak of. In fact, if scholars today would be brought back to that time and asked to make predictions about when they thought the Christian religion would ever be politically and legally acceptable, most certainly they would never have predicted that the 4<sup>th</sup> century would become the turning point, as indeed it turned out to be in concrete historical reality.

On February 23, 303, the Roman Emperor Diocletian was engaged in a public celebratory feast commemorating the end of the Roman year, called the Terminalia feast (Smith 2013 (1842)), flanked by soldiers, various dignitaries, and subordinate government officials. Just prior to this feast, he had received a proposal from his junior emperor requesting to initiate government actions against Christian groups claiming that they represented a threat to the order and stability of the Roman state. In response to the Galerius proposal, during that Terminalia feast the ruling Emperor Diocletian issued a persecutory edict against all Christians. This edict prescribed the following:

- Destroy all Christian churches and burn the Holy Scriptures.
- Confiscate all Christian church property.
- Prohibit all Christians from initiating legal action.
- Withdrawal of all privileges from Christians of high rank who refused to recant.
- Arrest several state officials

Thus began the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the first 10-15 years of which have been variously described by historians as the most horrible period of persecution in the history of the Christian church. Even when Emperor Diocletian abdicated his throne due to ill health two years later (in 305), he was replaced by his junior emperor Galerius, who promptly continued horrifying Christian persecutions initiated and sustained by official Roman government. In fact, it was so terrible and widespread that it became known as The Great Persecution (303-311). Diocletian and other Roman emperors had previously ordered Christian buildings and the homes of Christians torn down, their sacred books collected and burned. One by one and en masse, Roman soldiers hunted down Christians, arrested them, tortured and mutilated them, burned and starved them, and through them into huge stadiums to fight Roman gladiators to the death or to be eaten alive by wild animals as a form of entertainment for thousands of adoring pagan Roman spectators (Bomgardner, 2000).

Then suddenly, in 311, Galerius had an apparent change of heart and formally issued an edict which granted Christians 'forgiveness', freedom of worship, and an **implied** legal status – *Edict of Serdica*. Since this edict did not explicitly legalize the Christian faith, it is better known as the *Edict of Toleration*. It has been argued in the historical literature that Galerius suddenly reversed his long-standing policy of Christian persecution due to pressure from one or both of his co-Caesars, Constantine and/or Licinius. More importantly, it is absolutely essential to note that the Galerius edict was promulgated not just in the name of Roman Emperor Galerius himself but, as well, in the name of most of the other official members of the Roman Tetrarchy at that time, which included Constantine I who was Caesar in the Roman West and Licinius who was Caesar in the Roman East. At that time, the Roman Empire was ruled by a 4-emperor model, called a 'tetrarchy' – two in the East of the Empire and two in the West. Each region had a ruling 'Augustus' emperor or senior emperor as well as a 'Caesar' emperor or junior emperor. In other words, the Galerius Edict of Toleration (Serdica) effectively marked the end of persecutions against Christians in the Roman Empire from East to West. It was also followed relatively quickly by a series of edicts or 'letters' from most of the remaining regional Roman emperors at that time, some of them granting only toleration while others granted toleration and restitution for lost property.

The timing and wording of these statements or 'edicts' or 'letters' by Roman emperors, whatever the case may be, is essential in our understanding of the monumental change that had occurred mainly in the 4<sup>th</sup> century of Christian church history. Let us be more specific. Emperor Galerius (in full deliberation and agreement with the other emperors of the Roman Empire at that time except Maximinus in the East) had officially posted his Edict of Toleration on April 30, 311. That 'edict' granted an 'indulgence' (forgiveness) to Christians who had:

“...followed such a caprice and had fallen into such a folly that they would not obey the institutes of antiquity...Wherefore, for this our indulgence, they ought to pray to their God for our safety, for that of the Republic, and for their own, that the commonwealth may continue uninjured on every side, and that they may be able to live securely in their homes”

However, as intimated above this edict or letter of toleration was not an explicit legalization of Christian religious practices nor was it restitution for Christians materially harmed by official Roman persecution through property confiscations and other damaging state actions. Confiscated property was not restored until two years later in February 313 AD when Western Roman Emperor **Constantine I** and Roman Emperor **Licinius** who controlled the Balkans agreed to follow-up the Edict of Toleration proclaimed by Emperor Galerius in Serdica two years before by meeting in modern-day **Milan** (then known as Mediolanum) to *discuss if it was possible to treat Christians benevolently within the Roman Empire* (Frend, 1982, p. 137). At this meeting, the emperors formally issued the *Edict of Milan* as they agreed to **grant full tolerance to Christians** as well as all other religions in the Empire without oppression, effectively **removing penalties for professing Christianity**. Several clauses were added to make sure that all confiscated **churches** would be returned as well as other **properties and provisions** for previously persecuted Christians.

Within one year after that meeting, in **February 313**, **Constantine I** posted an official letter to the governors of all provinces in the western Empire which formally granted Christianity legal status, a reprieve from persecution, and restitution of property. For his part, **Licinius** posted an official letter of toleration and restitution in the state capital on **June 13, 313**, a delay mostly caused by a civil war he fought and won against the recalcitrant Maximinus earlier in the same year. It was a time of intense **civil war battles** when as many as eight Roman generals were struggling against each other to be sole ruler of the Roman Empire. In fact, such civil war battles substantially delayed Constantine's emperorship. He would not become the 'augustus' or sole ruler of the Roman Empire until 324 AD.

However, *between the Edict of Milan until his death 337 AD*, Constantine initiated policies in the Roman Empire that would lead to sea-changes in Western civilization and the world for centuries and millennia to come. The official policies did not only entail the granting of tolerance and restitution of property. For example, he supported the Christian church *financially* and built magnificent *basilicas* at state expense. He granted numerous *privileges to clergy* such as tax exemptions and political appointments of Christians to high office.

He engaged in stupendous *building projects* that were challenging even for the talented builders of his time. For example, he built the *Church of the Holy Sepulchre* (over the purported tomb of Jesus Christ), and the *Old Saint Peter's Basilica* which included the engineering challenge of constructing it on a hill where it was believed St. Peter rested (a construction project that would take 30 years to complete). He *legislated that Sunday should be venerated as a day of rest* for all Roman citizens, following the creation sequence specified in Genesis of the Old Testament. In 323 AD, Constantine issued a decree which sought to *ban participation in state sacrifices by Christians*. Soon pagan gods disappeared from his *coinage* to be replaced by Christian religious symbols on his image and on the coin itself.

What's more, Constantine's reign established a firm precedent for the Roman Emperor to exert great influence and authority in the early *Christian councils*, especially the dispute over Arianism which posed risks to societal stability and caused controversies. So, Constantine preferred to establish an orthodoxy by influencing Church councils to clarify and enforce *doctrine*, identify and eliminate *heresies*, and maintain *ecclesiastical unity and authority*. According to Constantine, the Church's proper role was to *determine worship, doctrine, and dogma*.

Often times, Constantine would step in to *resolve disputes* between different Christian factions. For example, in one case the *bishops in North Africa* were struggling against the Christian bishops who had been ordained by Donatus in opposition to Caecilian from 313 to 316 AD. Since the African bishops could not agree, the Donatists requested Constantine to act as a judge in the dispute. Before Constantine's involvement, three regional councils and an official trial had all ruled against Donatus and the South African Donatist movement. When Constantine looked at this case in 317 AD, he issued an official edict to confiscate Donatist church property and exiled Donatist clergy.

Much more significantly, Constantine summoned the *First Council of Nicaea in 325*, famously known for how it dealt with Arianism and for the *Nicene Creed*. When the Council issued a prohibition against celebrating 'the Lord's Supper' on the day preceding the Jewish Passover, he enforced the Council's decision which itself marked *a decisive break of Christianity from the Hebrew tradition*. After this, the Hebrew lunisolar calendar within the Christian churches of the Empire was subjugated to the *solar Julian calendar*, and Constantine made some *new laws regarding the Jews* some of which were unfavorable but not harsher than those of his predecessors. For example, Jews were not allowed to seek converts or to attack fellow Jews who had converted to Christianity; and they were not allowed to own Christian slaves nor to circumcise any of their slaves. On the positive side, Jewish clergy were afforded *the same tax exemptions as Christian clergy*.

There is much more that Constantine did to ensure the protection and growth of Christianity in the Roman Empire. But it should be abundantly clear from this brief sketch of Constantine's Christian biography that he did set into motion powerful forces that would have immense consequences for Western civilization and humankind all over the world. Just about the only thing he did not do to promote the growth and development of Christianity is to make it a *state religion*. But in the same 4<sup>th</sup> century of Constantine's life and achievements, Christianity became the official state church of the Roman Empire in 380 AD with the *Edict of Thessalonica* by three reigning Roman Emperors.

### Paradigm Shift: Pre-Constantine to the Constantine Period

Kreider (2005) and several other reputable high-profile biblical scholars have argued that the relationship between Christianity, society, and the state changed so dramatically starting in the 4<sup>th</sup> century reign of Roman Emperor Constantine the Great that it must be viewed as an authentic historically-based paradigm shift. Christians moved rapidly from the margins of society to the core centers of power and respect, from illegal to legal, and then from legal to a state church. Harassment by neighbors and persecution by officials were banned. Suddenly, it became increasingly appealing to become a Christian especially when emperors declared themselves as such, as well as other attractive social, financial, and political incentives. The previous apostolic Christian church that depended upon perceived divine power for its strength now shifted reliance to human power. God's power now came to be experienced in human institutional ways rather than in solely esoteric spiritual ways.

What's more, Christianity now shifts from being an individual voluntary membership to a compulsory institutional obligation. Prior to the 4<sup>th</sup> century, there were tremendous disincentives for individual Christian believers to enter the Christian faith and to be baptized. Believing or not believing was much more a matter of free choice without force or compulsion. Suddenly, the sanctions had shifted and not becoming a Christian became problematic. Christianity became compulsory, no longer voluntary. Previously rare infant baptisms become everyday routines, and people in power positions in society now start converting to Christianity in larger numbers.

Whereas previously Christians were not at home in society and treated poorly as resident 'aliens', now Christians feel at home in that society and begin to be treated with utmost social respect. In other words, Christians become culturally domesticated by adapting themselves to societal culture, thereby reducing their capacity to make distinctive contributions to that society. In pre-Constantinian Roman society, Christian believers were viewed as 'foreigners' or 'aliens, so not being fully at home wherever they were located, pilgrims in society. In Constantinian society, indigenizing pressures start to take over.

As well, the role of Jesus starts to undergo a transformation process from the Good Shepherd born in a manger to become the teacher of all Christians to a Sovereign or exalted Lord whose teachings can only reach perfect Christians. Jesus as the Good Shepherd, the teacher, the healer, the master of eternal salvation, is replaced by the exalted emperor or ruler of all. Consequently, the act of worshipping becomes transformed from humble personal gatherings of small numbers in families and homes to large assemblies in grand structures built and designed to evangelize non-believers. Pre-Constantinian worshipping was small-scale, largely domestic, ritually unsophisticated, restrictive or exclusive, verbally unpolished, since the aim was to worship God, not to impress the masses.

The aim was to give Christian believers spiritual food, to nourish their spirits or souls, so that they could live out their faith properly as individuals in their families and communities and so that they could live out their faith in Jesus in a dangerous world. After Constantine enters the picture, the social function of worshipping changes. Worshipping becomes largely compulsory glorious public affairs in highly decorated basilicas with awe-inspiring rituals, grand liturgies, gifted orators, imperial symbolism, and adornments in gold and jewels— all aiming to dazzle, persuade, and convert the mostly half-committed and uncommitted masses.

Last, but not least, the Constantine shift moved the Church's missiological identity and emphasis on living out Christian beliefs and values faithfully in order to be good Christian ambassadors or role models for neighbors, family members, and acquaintances. The missionary style was personal or individual-oriented as believers labored with good deeds and model behaviors to persuade others about the wonders of the Good News, not necessarily just words. The faithful were never admonished to evangelize cultures in large numbers. Christian believers just lived out their faith naturally to be alert to the needs and concerns of their neighbors, and then act accordingly consistent with their Christian beliefs. So, then, they didn't need to be lectured about mission. When imperial law made everyone a state-sanctioned Christian, mission was relatively unnecessary.

All this having been said, it should be abundantly clear that the 4<sup>th</sup> century of imperial Rome constituted a monumental sea-change for the Christian faith so profound and radically different from what it had previously been that it surely merits the label 'paradigm shift'. The Constantinian 4<sup>th</sup> century brought the early resident alien Christian church to a fairly rapid end and ushering Christian civilization onto the human historical stage. What the Post-Constantinian paradigm will be is anyone's guess, but it doesn't look good. In many parts of the world, Christianity has been dying for decades if not centuries as sacrifice on the altar of fashionable modern trends of pluralism, relativism, secularism, and human rights, just to name a very few of the profane pagan religions worshipped by modern societies and cultures.

### **Footnotes**

1. The words "seemingly varied" employed right at the outset of this essay are more than simply rhetorical in nature. No one in their right mind seriously doubts that ways of persuading non-Christians to recognize and accept Jesus Christ as Savior of humanity have varied over time from the first Christian 'paradigm' of His appearance on Earth as recorded in the Bible – in many Christians' minds, the only truly authentic 'paradigm shift' to have occurred that actually merits the nomenclature because it profoundly changed the course of human history in ways that secular-constructed missiological paradigms cannot hope to compare.
2. What is at issue here is to what extent theologians are justified in neglecting or downplaying or even selectively cherry-picking valid concrete historical resources in their evaluation and review of theological models and missiological paradigms in Christian history. To avoid attaching primary significance to reliable empirical historical resources which bear directly upon changes or 'transformations' in missiological activities and how these 'changes'

are identified, organized, and themselves pieced together or constructed to convey anthropomorphic meanings that may have nothing or very little to do with the Christian mission of saving human souls as repeatedly emphasized by Christ himself in his Words and teachings as specified in the Bible is not only unscholarly and irresponsible but nefarious. Here in this essay the argument is that using conceptual models as primary resources to build yet more conceptual models to supposedly comprehend Christian church history 'better' as well as missiological thinking and activity is not at all the same intellectual exercise as relying upon the available dependable concrete historical resources about those events. Worse yet, it could be argued with great merit that using conceptual models instead of concrete historical materials constitutes historical reconstruction or reformulation of Christian history.

3. After all, it is simply zealously assumed to be part of the frenetic quest to bring the so-called 'Kingdom of God' down from Heaven to Earth, naively viewed and treated in theological practice as if that quest in itself is independent of or apart from existing power structures at all levels (local, national, regional, global). This is curiously surprising, to say the least. For all the disheartening criticisms many theologians, religious scholars, and other secular professionals have laid against political-economic power structures, it seems absolutely appalling and hypocritical for them not to consider the extent to which religious movements themselves, such as the ecumenical movement, for example, itself cannot help but emanate from and operate within existing power structures, not from outside of them. In other words, theologians may be fond of 'contextualizing' the theological thoughts and activities of various Christian groups viewed as existing within power structures but, somehow, they don't consider their own theological thinking and activities as emanating from and operating within those same power structures, and that includes East Asian theologians. Fascinating turn of theological events, to be sure.

4. In his famous book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, as well as in many lectures and writings afterwards, Kuhn was constantly at pains to warn against the serious methodological pitfalls involved in the inapplicable and therefore invalid use of his "paradigm" model in the human and social sciences, that is to say, inapplicability and illegitimacy when used outside of the natural sciences. Physical phenomena like light waves and atoms are not entities that behave like conscious human beings in social activities and social institutions. Conscious human beings creating social systems of interconnected institutions are not comparable to various atoms responding under heated pressure, for example. Basically, Kuhn's point in this regard was that he developed his theoretical model specifically to help explain changes in the growth and development of natural scientific knowledge, knowledge in the natural sciences concerned with relations between physical properties in nature, some of those changes turning out to be quite 'revolutionary'. Therefore, it is largely misleading and patently misguided to extend the paradigm model to explain 'transformations' in the human world particularly when it is used as a replacement of or justification for avoiding dealing with available concrete historical resources that are valid and reliable.

5. It is interesting to note here that most, if not all, types of East Asian theology and missiology, as well as those extending from influence by liberation theology and other radical-liberal theologies pay little more than lip service to the role of the Holy Spirit in theology and missiology. For example, in the application of their 'typological models' to review Christian church history, it is telling that neither Bevens (as a Catholic) nor Bosch (as a Protestant) seriously employ the concept of 'Holy Spirit' as Biblically conceived and defined in the Words and teachings of Jesus Christ Himself as a guiding light or orienting, organizing theme in the development of Christian theology and missionary thinking and activities.

6. For better or worse or probably best viewed as some combination thereof, Christianity became linked with the Roman state. But it would be woefully misguided to view this historical relationship as firmly written in stone, unchangeable, amiable and not many times antagonistic. Therefore, it is absolutely essential that personal or professional ideologies and philosophies be kept at bay at this point lest a priori evaluations and assessments illegitimately sneak into theological analysis posing as objective commentary. Obviously, the horrific persecution of Christians by the Roman state for the simple act of declaring personal allegiance to Christ was no doubt barbaric and inhuman, and it needed to stop in whatever way possible. The Roman state itself over timestopped this persecution, which allowed Christians to flourish. We are indeed foolish to think that they did so simply out of perceived political self-interest. Surely, they were capable of perceiving for themselves the model behavior of Christians they were torturing and killing in the most grotesque ways. Surely, they were talking to other knowledgeable people about what they were seeing and experiencing in Christian behavior. Most people unblinded by ideological presuppositions and philosophical assumptions would surely agree that this was a positive development in the history of the Christian church, and that the world itself has greatly benefitted from this event. That is not to say, however, that state legitimation of Christian religious practices did not have any negative or otherwise questionable effects upon society nor upon the nature and practice of Christian beliefs. Whenever state and religion become too closely attached, history has shown that a host of human abuses and atrocities is the common result regardless of which particular religion is under scrutiny – Buddhism, Shintoism,

Islam, Christianity, and the like. Therefore, and especially for theologians, it bears to keep in mind strongly that such human abuses are not sourced so much in particular social institutions (or combination thereof) such as the 'state' or 'religion' nor in particular systems of institutions (social systems proper) as they find their real source in the depravity of human souls.

7. Hence, perhaps, why Bosch is so attractive to East Asian theologians, a geographical region where Christianity however defined still to this day plays a relatively insignificant role in guiding human social and personal behavior. All institutions do not regularly call on Christian religious doctrines, institutions, or organizations in the formulation of public policy of any sort – family, medical, educational, and so forth.

8. This avoidance is a serious omission in Bosch's typological models. It cannot be casually excused away in pedantic academic style especially since it bears directly upon the ideological presuppositions and philosophical assumptions contained in both the typological models and theological arguments or claims.

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