

Missiology as Global Conversation of (Contextual) Theologies*

Missiology and contextual theology are comparatively new terms in the theological lexicon and are sometimes understood as equivalent, particularly because contextual theologising is a means of mission in a particular context. This paper seeks to distinguish and also to relate the two, arguing that missiology must take cognisance of contextual theologies and that, without missiological awareness, contextual theologies may lose sight of their own contextuality. By highlighting the importance of pneumatology to both disciplines, this paper suggests that missiology should be understood as global conversation of (contextual) theologies.

The development of missiology

From its origins in the late nineteenth century as the study of Christian foreign missions, the agenda of missiology has been global and its interest cross-cultural. Although it was at first seen as peripheral to the traditional theological agenda, mission studies is now an established theological and academic discipline. No one has done more to achieve this than South African missiologist David Bosch. Nearly a decade after its publication, Bosch's *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* remains the indispensable *summa missiologica* (Bosch 1991). As Bosch has clearly shown, the expansion of the doctrine of *missio Dei* to include the sending of the church into the world put mission in the context of the Trinity and thus at the very heart of Christian reflection. Mission has since become accepted by Christians of virtually all persuasions as "a participation in the movement of God's love toward people shown in Christ". The theological basis of mission as *missio Dei* also undergirded the recognition of partnership of the "older" and the "younger" (mission) churches and contributed to overcoming the old barriers between "foreign" and "home" missions. The corollary of the doctrine of *missio Dei* is that the church, wherever it exists, is understood as existing for the sake of the world, that is as "essentially missionary". In the second half of the twentieth century particularly, insights gained from mission in other parts of the world and other generations have been applied to contemporary Western society – in the challenge of Lesslie Newbigin to "a genuinely missionary encounter" with modernity, for example (Newbigin 1989), or Bosch's own attempt at "a missiology of Western culture" (Bosch 1995) – so that missiology has become truly global and also contextual.

As Bosch affirmed, mission studies is the theological discipline that remains true to both the missionary dimension of faith and the missionary intention of God, and that follows through the implications of *missio Dei* throughout the whole domain of theology (Gensichen 1987). As a recognised theological discipline, missiology has a distinctive focus and methodology of its own. However, the "dimensional" aspect of missiology, that is its task of highlighting theology's reference to the world, means that a missionary perspective permeates all theological disciplines. Historically missiological reflection has emerged within a variety of disciplines including communications and evangelism, development and social studies, historical studies, religious studies, anthropology and cultural studies, ecumenics, biblical

* Dr Kirsteen Kim is a Tutor at the United College of the Ascension, Selly Oak, Birmingham, UK and Coordinator of the UCA Mission Programme. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Research Seminar of the Queen's Foundation, Birmingham on 29 October 2002.

studies, and systematics (Kim 2000a). However, its historical origins in the missionary movement and its theological consciousness of the mission of God to the whole world unite missiological reflection and distinguish missiology from other theological subject areas.

These global connections mean that missiology's primary role in the theological curriculum is often to challenge "parochialism" in theology. In 1984 Kenneth Cracknell and Christopher Lamb urged that missiology be part of every British theological curriculum in order to rescue theological teaching from "its enclosure within an exclusively European, not to say Anglo-Saxon, cultural framework", its "timeless and uncontextualized" nature, and help it to relate to a plural world (Cracknell 1986: 1-2,8,15, 132-35). Similarly, Orlando Costas has claimed:

Missiology contends against all theological provincialism, advocating an intercultural perspective in theology. Missiology questions all theological discourse that does not seriously consider the missionary streams of the Christian faith; all biblical interpretation that ignores the missionary motives that shape biblical faith; all history of Christianity that omits the expansion of Christianity across cultural, social, and religious frontiers; and all pastoral theology that does not take seriously the mandate to communicate the Gospel fully and to the heart of the concrete situations of daily life.... By fulfilling such a critical task, missiology also enriches theology because it puts theology in contact with the worldwide Church with all its cultural and theological diversity (Costas 1988: 15).

Missiology draws its life-blood from the experience of crossing cultures and from the church worldwide in its global and local expressions of *missio Dei*. Therefore, missiology that loses contact with its roots in the missionary movement and its links with world Christianity will be indistinguishable from other theological disciplines.

Bosch's greatest contribution to missiology was to persuasively make the case (within a classical Western theological framework) for mission to be contextually defined. His approach was founded on Thomas Kuhn's paradigm theory, which posits the contextual nature of scientific knowledge. By dealing with seven paradigms of mission – three in the New Testament (Matthew, Luke-Acts, and Paul) and four subsequent historical paradigms of mission and delineating what he sees as a contemporary ecumenical paradigm, Bosch called missiology that is the study of the Western missionary enterprise to acknowledge its own contextuality. The logical implication of his work is the recognition by Western theologians of mission theologies arising in other contexts.

Bosch himself formally acknowledges "the indispensable contribution to theological thinking coming out of Third World situations" and challenges Western systematic theologians to interact with this (Bosch 1991: 495). However, his own theology is firmly in the classical tradition, as the biblical-historical structure of his book shows. Though he is ecumenical in his purview, Bosch has been criticised for his limitations in failing to engage with the substance of emerging theologies from the former mission fields (Verstraelen 1996; Mofokeng 1990; Livingston 1999). He refers to African, Asian and Latin American theologians, and their existence is essential to his argument that mission is contextual, but the content of their work does not impact on his own. *Transforming Mission* represents a pinnacle of achievement of ecumenical theology as it has developed in the West. It points the way toward but, because it does not take full cognisance of the emergence of these and other contextual theologies. It argues for contextuality without being fully aware of its own (Kim 2000b).

Missiology and the emergence of contextual theologies

The establishment of the Christian church in almost every nation of the earth that is often referred to by the short-hand “world Christianity” or the “world(wide) church” is the result of missionary movements, particularly those in the West of the last two hundred years. It is now well known that there has been a shift in the centre of gravity of the Christian faith from the West to the non-Western world. The missionary context in which the gospel is communicated in new cultures and traditions has led to the growth of theological reflection specific to these new contexts and the use of methods alien to the classical traditions. Broadly speaking, the new theologies fall into two categories: they may seek to express the gospel using a different philosophical or cultural framework or, alternatively, to use social analysis as the starting point for Christian praxis and reflection on it. These two categories of inculturation and liberation theologies are identified by Bosch, who takes into account the groundwork of Robert Schreiter and others (Bosch 1991: 420-56; Schreiter 1985; Ukpong 1987).

Theologies emerging from Asia, Africa and Latin America are often termed “Third World theologies” or “contextual theologies”. The former describes a group of theologies and highlights their dominant political and economic concerns, emphasising the liberation model. The latter is often used as an equivalent but may also be conceived more widely to include the inculturation model as well. “Contextual theologies” is an appropriate term for theologies which are conscious (or even unconscious) attempts of Christians in a locality – wherever it may be – to relate and express the gospel in the context in which they live. In contrast, “classical theologies” are those which, rooted in a long tradition, claim a universal validity which transcends the particular context in which they arose. From the perspective of contextual theologies, classical theologies must also be contextual, whether they recognise this or not, whereas classical theologians tend to fear the newer theologies are abandoning central tenets of faith enshrined in the tradition. Referring to five models of “contextual theology”, Stephen B. Bevans shows that contextualisation of theology takes place in the North as well as the South (Bevans 1992).

Missiologists such as Schreiter and Bevans have helped to establish contextual theology as a form of study and illustrate the way in which it derives from mission experience. A search on the internet shows that contextual theology is a growing area of interest in both North and South and that the term is used as the title of several masters degree courses, particularly where the emphasis is on the application of theology to a specific locality. However, Schreiter and Bevan’s work also shows that the justification of contextual theology within Western theology presupposes a new understanding of culture (Schreiter) and a new consciousness of the incarnational rather than the propositional nature of revelation (Bevans). In other words, contextual theology arises not only directly from missiological reflection but also from developments in philosophy and systematic or dogmatic theology.

Contextual theologians who apply the term to theologising in the West, such as Graham Ward, find a basis for contextualisation in philosophical theories of postmodernism. Ward uses new literary theories of the relationship of text and context, particularly that of Jean-François Lyotard who defined “postmodern” as “incredulity toward meta-narratives”, to stress the legitimacy of theological difference and contextuality (Ward 1997: xv-xlvii). Whilst Ward’s project is extremely important to the future of Western (and perhaps global) theologising, because it is set within postmodernity, in his understanding contextual theology tends to appear as a new Western way of doing theology into which the contextual theologising of the rest of the world – if it is considered at all – is subsumed. However, it may be argued that the

crisis of knowledge, which has brought epistemology to centre stage in Western philosophy and stimulated postmodernist thought, is closely connected with the Western encounter with diverse ways of life and philosophies that was part of the colonial experience and continues in our globalising world. This has been brought into the Western academy particularly through cultural anthropology and religious studies. For example, in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Enlightenment certainty was publicly challenged by Asian philosophies of plurality. Universal truth claims have been challenged by Indian thinkers such as Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi and these have stimulated the development of pluralist philosophies. Swami Vivekananda's address to the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, in which he presented Hinduism as a more tolerant faith than Christianity, was a watershed in inter-religious and intercultural relations. In his speeches and writings Mahatma Gandhi called into question not only British rule but also British "civilisation" and modernity itself. However their debt to non-Western thought seems to be rarely acknowledged by postmodern theologians nor do they commonly relate their work to non-Western theologies. There is a tendency to disregard the impact of the mission experience on postmodernism and focus only on postmodernism's impact on the proclamation of the gospel in the West. Postmodernism tends to be seen as a recent and external factor in mission disconnected from the crisis within mission itself which began in the colonial period (see for example Kirk 1999).

Some contextual theologians in Asia, Africa and Latin America claim the term "postcolonial" to describe their approach. As R.S. Sugirtharajah points out, a major difference between postmodernism and postcolonialism, stemming from their differing contexts, is the former's insistence on a meta-narrative of liberation (Sugirtharajah 2001). Postcolonial theologies, arising from situation of economic dependency, have an ethical agenda to transform global economic relationships. In contrast, postmodern thought encourages relativism, in theology as well as other areas of life, due to the awareness of the subjectivity of all knowledge and consequent scepticism of any universal claim. As such, postmodernism poses a crisis for Christian mission that concerns itself with the proclamation of truth and, while encouraging particularity of gospel expression, militates against discourse between (contextual) theologies (Kirk 1999, 3-17). Ward argues that when the postmodern is finally achieved it will also be post-secular and therefore able to contemplate God (Ward 1997: xlii), but in its present development, postmodernism lacks a framework for the conversation between contexts that is the main interest of this paper.

Theologically, the emphasis on the incarnational nature of revelation necessary for contextual theology has been accompanied by an interest in the immanence of God in creation and the person and work of the Holy Spirit. The Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches, held in Canberra, Australia in 1991, took the theme, "Come, Holy Spirit – Renew the Whole Creation" and, in so doing, brought tensions between contextual and classical theologies to the fore (Putney 1991; Clapsis 1991; Raiser 1991). The emphasis on the Spirit's presence and activity in the whole creation was used by some to justify the baptism of indigenous traditions as vehicles of the gospel – as for instance in the famous plenary presentation of Chung Hyun Kyung, who performed a Korean shaman's dance. In reaction to this tendency, as custodians of a classical tradition, Orthodox participants signed a strongly worded statement complaining that the Council was diverging from its explicitly Christian basis (Kinnamon 1991: 279-82). Evangelicals also called for a "vital and coherent theology" to provide integrity for World Council programmes and particularly for a renewed affirmation of the centrality of Jesus Christ (Kinnamon 1991: 282-86). In the aftermath of Canberra, the General Secretary Konrad Raiser was convinced that the development of pneumatology, and in

particular “the constitutive role of the Holy Spirit in understanding the Christ event”, is necessary if the World Council of Churches is “to be open to the contribution of all traditions and contexts represented in its constituency” and he initiated an attempt to bring tradition and context together (Raiser 1994; 1991).

Not all contextual theologians at Canberra diverged so far from traditional Christian theological themes and terminology as Chung did, and many were more careful in their ascription of movements and events in history to the work of the Holy Spirit, advocating the recovery and exercise of the gift of discernment (e.g. Ukpong 1989). Rather than promoting a theological free-for-all, the debates at Canberra highlighted this need for discernment of Spirit and spirits by the double criteria of the confession that the Holy Spirit “points to the cross and resurrection and witnesses to the Lordship of Christ” and that the presence and activity of the Spirit results in recognisable fruits, especially love, joy and peace (Kim 2002). Nevertheless, the creation theology promoted at Canberra assumed that the Holy Spirit was at work in the world in a way that was not always explicitly linked to Christian confession. The effect of this was to broaden the scope of theology and mission and widen the source material, that is to support contextual methods against the classical. Reformed theologian Eduard Schweizer, for whom the Holy Spirit describes the gift of God to the disciples at Pentecost and is “in no way in line with what happens throughout creation”, was one who found acute difficulties with the Canberra theme (Schweizer 1989). Even Orthodox theology, whose doctrine of “the two hands of the Father” was the catalyst for WCC reflection on the Spirit in the world, in practice related Christ and the Spirit closely and focussed both on the church in its Orthodox expression. The Orthodox therefore emphasised tradition and spoke out most strongly against contextual hermeneutics. This prompted Michael Fitzgerald, a Catholic observer at Canberra, to ask why the questions about inculturation were raised in connection with Chung’s presentation and not that of Parthenios, the Patriarch whose paper was read in the other of the two plenaries at Canberra (Fitzgerald 1991).

Incarnational theology that recognises the Holy Spirit of God at work in the world both provides a firm foundation for contextual theologising and also contributes to a fuller understanding of *missio Dei*. For many at Canberra, the question was not whether but where and how the Spirit is present and at work “outside the visible boundary of the church in the world” (cf. Samartha 1990). In this sense a new understanding of mission was articulated there. This differed foundationally from the “ecumenical consensus” outlined by Bosch but was consistent with *missio Dei*. In Bosch’s work, mission is understood as the task of the church to continue the mission of Jesus Christ, which was initiated by the Spirit at Pentecost, and guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit through subsequent history. The development suggested by the discussions at and around Canberra understood mission as the activity of the Spirit in the world ever since the creation, of which Jesus Christ is the supreme and normative (for Christians) expression, and in which the church is privileged to participate. The latter understanding, by affirming the varied expressions of the Spirit’s creativity in the cultures of the world, allowed for new ways of theologising outside the historical tradition. The former, by focussing on the church and the historical tradition, tended to regard contextual theologies as marginal to a main stream of Christian tradition. An understanding of mission that recognises both the mission of Jesus Christ and the mission of the Holy Spirit in the whole creation, and relates the two, will recognise and affirm the contextuality of all theologies. What is more, if the confession of the oneness of Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit is to be meaningful, classical and contextual theologies must find a way of interacting.

Missiology as global conversation of (contextual) theologies

The necessity and importance of contextual theologising is now widely affirmed and accepted, though limits on such activity continue to be hotly debated. However, in the emphasis on the importance of contextualisation, the dangers of contextuality may be down-played. Werner Ustorf, speaking out of his studies of missiology in the Nazi period when the *Volkskirche* idea bound theology to culture, points out that contextualisation that merely affirms culture may compromise the Christian gospel and lose sight of “the mysteries of God” (Ustorf 2001). However strong the internal debate, there is the possibility that contextual theologies will become captive to the new culture and lose sight of their contextuality.

This problem is compounded because the logic of contextual theologies is often that theology in one context cannot be challenged by outsiders to that context. Because Asian theologians, for example, are trying to do theology in a specifically Asian way and with respect to Asian realities, it is inappropriate to assess them with respect to criteria derived from a different context, and such moves, especially by proponents of a “classical” theologies, are strongly resisted. As was evident in the Canberra Assembly, ecumenically agreed criteria for theologising are far from being established and their establishment is hampered by the power question of who defines such criteria. As a consequence, contextual theologies may find it difficult to lay themselves open to critique.

Mission in the sense of *missio Dei*, that is commitment to God’s loving concern for the world, is an antidote to relativism in theology. On the one hand, the missionary impulse in each theological tradition provides the motive for contextual theologising but, on the other, it gives global awareness and provides both the impulse and the opportunity to cross boundaries between theologies. A corollary of this is that doing theology contextually is not necessarily doing missiology, however diverse the context. For example, India is a pluralistic society yet there is a recognisable “Indianness” about theologies from that sub-continent, which distinguishes them from, say, sub-Saharan African theologies. If theology done in a particular context has no awareness of global concerns or interest in the theologies of others, it risks the parochialism that missiology inherently challenges. The interest of the missiologist is not in a particular contextualisation of the gospel but in diversity of contextual theologies, and part of its role is bring these to the attention of theologians in other contexts.

In this way missiology can be understood as global conversation of (contextual) theologies. The word “conversation” is to be preferred over “dialogue”. The reasons for doing so here are, first, because “conversation” allows of more than two partners. The kind of interaction contemporary missiology offers is not between “myself” and “the other” but a discussion in which there are a number of contexts represented, as was the case at Canberra. Secondly, “conversation” does not have the connotations of formality invested in the word “dialogue” in its religious sense. The conversation between theologies may take place in a formal way at conferences and seminars or through interaction in literature. It also happens less formally through “chat” on the internet utilising the world wide web of cross-cultural relations. The deepest level at which it takes place is when personnel are sent in mission from one context to another (in multiple directions). In experiencing another context, particularly over a period of years there is a sharing of life and mutual learning. This experience is often life-changing and has far-reaching significance for the individuals which may be fed back to challenge and shape the sending churches. Thirdly, “conversation” does not imply an equality of status of the participants that might be implied by “dialogue”. Mutual respect between conversation partners may be highly desirable but a conversation may still take place where the balance of

power is very much tilted toward one partner. The important thing is not the etiquette but that the conversation happens. One person who insists on their own way does not make for good conversation but at least the conversation takes place, whereas relativist stances may mean conversation never happens for lack of common ground or motivation to cross barriers.

While preferring the term “conversation”, much of the theory of dialogue as developed over recent years in inter faith situations is pertinent here. Stanley Samartha, first Director of the dialogue sub-unit of the WCC drew up the Council’s *Guidelines on Dialogue* (Samartha 1979) and stamped his mark – and an Indian model – decisively on the concept. Samartha was similarly trying to prevent recognition of the integrity of each religion – as a particular response to the Ultimate Mystery – from degenerating into relativism (Selvanayagam 2000: 182). Thus he emphasised the necessity of dialogue and encouraged “traffic across the borders”. While Samartha’s theology for dialogue seemed to rest on the sometimes questionable assumption that all religions share common theological ground, the application of dialogue to Christian theologies is more clearly based on their common confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and their recognisable affinity as part of the same family. Conversation between Christian theologies from different locations does not need mystical, material or philosophical justification. It is also relevant to note that Samartha’s foundation for dialogue was essentially pneumatological, on the grounds that the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth, is free and may be encountered outside explicit Christian confession (see Samartha 1981, 1991; Kim 2003). How much more is it justified to expect that the Spirit of Jesus Christ is present and active in contextual Christian theologies meeting in the Spirit’s fellowship.

The twentieth century rediscovery of the Spirit in the world, which affirms cultural diversity and stresses the immanence of God at work in creation, has laid a foundation for contextual theologising and also for missiology as a means of relating these theologies to one another. The theology of the Holy Spirit both authenticates contextual theologies and also calls into question any theological monopoly. Moreover, the Spirit, the agent of mission, motivates the crossing of theological boundaries and the global conversation of theologies from different contexts.

References Cited

- Bevans, Stephen B.
1992 *Models of Contextual Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Bosch, David J.
1991 *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
1995 *Believing in the Future: Toward a Missiology of Western Culture*. Leominster: Gracewing.
- Clapsis, Emmanuel
1991 “What Does the Spirit Say to the Churches? Missiological Implications of the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches.” *IRM* 80/319-320: 327-37.

Costas, Orlando E.

- 1988 "Theological Education and Mission." In C. René Padilla, ed. *New Alternatives in Theological Education*. Oxford: Regnum Books.

Cracknell, Kenneth and Christopher Lamb,

- 1986 *Theology on Full Alert*. Revised Edition. London: British Council of Churches.

Fitzgerald, Michael

- 1991 "Mission in Canberra." *IRM* LXXX/319-20: 315-26.

Gensichen, Hans-Werner

- 1987 "Missiology as a Theological Discipline." In Karl Müller, *Mission Theology: An Introduction*. Nettetal: Steyler Verlag: 24-27.

Kim, Kirsteen

- 2000a "Mission Studies in Britain and Ireland: Introduction to a World Wide Web." *British Journal of Theological Education* 11/1: 72-86.
- 2000b "Post-Modern Mission: A Paradigm Shift in David Bosch's Theology of Mission?" *IRM* 89/353: 172-79.
- 2002 "Spirit and 'spirits' at the Canberra Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 1991." Paper presented at the Yale-Edinburgh Group Meeting, New College, Edinburgh, 11-13 July.
- 2003 *Mission in the Spirit: The Holy Spirit in Indian Christian Theologies*. Delhi: ISPCK.

Kinnamon, Michael, ed.

- 1991 *Signs of the Spirit*. Official Report of the Seventh Assembly of the WCC, Canberra, 1991. Geneva: WCC.

Kirk, J. Andrew and Kevin J. Vanhoozer, eds.

- 1999 *To Stake a Claim: Mission and the Crisis of Western Knowledge*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Livingston, J. Kevin

- 1999 "The Legacy of David Bosch." *IBMR* 23/1: 26-32.

Mofokeng, T.A.

- 1990 "Mission Theology from an African Perspective: A Dialogue with David Bosch." In J.N.J. Kritzinger and Willem Saayman, eds. *Mission in Creative Tension: A Dialogue with David Bosch*. Pretoria: South African Missiological Society: 168-80.

Newbiggin, Lesslie

- 1989 *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. London: SPCK.

Putney, Michael E.

- 1991 "Ecumenical Moments." *ER* 43/2: 226-29.

Raiser, Konrad

- 1991 "Beyond Tradition and Context: In Search of an Ecumenical Framework of Hermeneutics." *IRM* LXXX/319-20: 347-54.
- 1994 "Is Ecumenical Apologetics Sufficient?" *IBMR* 18/2: 50-51.

Samartha, Stanley J.

- 1979 *Guidelines on Dialogue*. Geneva: WCC.
- 1981 *Courage for Dialogue: Ecumenical Issues in Inter-Religious Relationships*. Geneva: WCC.
- 1990 "The Holy Spirit and People of Other Faiths." In Emilio Castro, comp. *To the Wind of God's Spirit: Reflections on the Canberra Theme*. Geneva: WCC: 50-63.
- 1991 *One Christ - Many Religions: Towards a Revised Christology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Schreiter, Robert

- 1985 *Constructing Local Theologies*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Schweizer, Eduard

- 1989 "On Distinguishing Between Spirits." *ER* 41/3: 406-415.

Selvanayagam, Israel

- 2000 *A Second Call: Ministry and Mission in a Multifaith Milieu*. Madras (Chennai): CLS.

Sugirtharajah, R.S.

- 2001 *The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters*. Cambridge: CUP.

Ukpong, Justin S.

- 1987 "What is Contextualisation?" *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* 43: 161-8.
- 1989 "Pluralism and the Problem of the Discernment of Spirits." *ER* 41/3: 416-425.

Ustorf, Werner

- 2001 "Farewell to Missionary Innocence." In Simon Barrow and Graeme Smith, eds. *Christian Mission in Western Society*. London: CTBI. 132-48.

Verstraelen, Frans J.

- 1996 "Africa in David Bosch's Missiology: Survey and Appraisal." In Willem Saayman and Klippies Kritzing, eds. *Mission in Bold Humility: David Bosch's Work Considered*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books: 8-39.

Ward, Graham, ed.

- 1997 *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Summary

Missiology and contextual theology are related but not equivalent. Missiology arose from the study of mission activity in the former mission fields of Africa, Asia and Latin America but has come to be understood as the study of the mission of God in the whole world in which the church participates. Missiology therefore occupies a central place in theological reflection. Global and cross-cultural perspectives are essential to missiology and these challenge all parochialism in theology.

David Bosch has shown that all that mission should be contextually defined and therefore challenges Western theologians to interact with theologies from other contexts. Theologies of inculturation and liberation emerging from Asia, Africa and Latin America are often termed “contextual theologies”, whereas “classical theologies” claim a universal validity rooted in a long tradition. Contextual theology derives from mission experience but its justification in terms of Western theology presupposes postmodernism in philosophy (though this rarely acknowledges the post-colonial challenge that contributed to its rise) and the development of incarnational theology, in particular a theology of the Holy Spirit in the world – as illustrated by the Canberra Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1991 and its aftermath.

There is a danger that contextual theology degenerates into relativism. In mission all theologies are challenged to recognise their own contextuality and at the same time their common Christian confession. Grounded in an understanding of *missio Dei* that includes a creation theology of the Holy Spirit, missiology can and should affirm contextual theologising and at the same time encourage and facilitate theologians from different contexts to pursue a global conversation. “Conversation” is preferred over “dialogue” because there are many partners from around the world, various means of conversing, and widely varying access to social power among the participants.