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The methodology of missiology in the context of Turtle Island

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Abstract

This article explores the impact of contextual change and reality in Turtle Island on missiological methodology. It is a contextually focused argument to try and tease out some specific dimensions of methodology. At the heart of the argument lies the conviction that posture in the study of missiology is a critical part of its methodology. This focus on posture also addresses the potential tension between practitioners of mission and university- and seminary-based professors of mission. First, it will briefly outline some traditional assumptions of missiological methodology. Then it will argue that methodology on Turtle Island should be rooted in a christomorphic engagement with Scripture and context. Out of this engagement arises a creatively constructive process, guided by the Spirit. Through this process missiological methodology needs to take on the character of a humble pilgrim through the different disciplines and "worlds" of its context while focused on the salvific thriving of all creation. Ultimately, because mission arises out of a joyful doxological response to God's grace for the world, missiological methodology is to be practiced as a discipline of creative poiesis.

Keywords

missiological methodology, Turtle Island, Bible and methodology, christomorphic posture, poiesis and methodology, North America, contextual, postcolonial, decolonial process

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In their survey of those not affiliated with Christianity in the United States, researchers Kinnaman and Lyon found that such people saw Christians as "very conservative, entrenched in their thinking, antigay, antichoice, angry, violent, illogical, empire builders; they want to convert everyone, and they generally cannot live peacefully with anyone who doesn't believe what they believe" (Kinnaman & Lyon, 2007: 26). This negative outsider perspective on Christian churches on Turtle Island[1] is not without substance. Even though Christians can point to many examples of life-giving and gracious behavior and profound sacrificial giving in Christian communities, such examples are marred by the hatred, judgmental, and exploitative behaviors that are evident as well. Christianity does not simply have an image problem, a significant part of it is a problem. The fast-paced growth of the proportion of people in the USA and Canada that report that they have no religious affiliation cannot entirely be blamed on these negative factors. However, these negative phenomena play a role.

Behind the more anecdotal and survey-level assessment of the status of Christian faith on Turtle Island lies the world of social research and philosophical reflection on the state of change of religion in Europe and on Turtle Island. Various social theories of secularization are used to try to explain the loss of religious adherence in both Europe and Turtle Island.[2] One of the most exhaustive studies of the state of Christian churches in Canada has just been published by two historians, Stuart Macdonald and Brian Clarke. It is not encouraging that they choose, *Leaving Christianity: Changing Allegiances in Canada since 1945* (Clark & Macdonald, 2018) as the title of their book.

As the obvious power Christendom slowly disintegrated over the twentieth century, partly due to the long-term effect of the fragmentation of Christendom (Taylor, 2007: 61), the public presence and power of the church in traditional societies where it has been dominant started to decline. There are theories of secularization that try to explain the decline of Christendom in terms of an inexorable process. However, it appears that the picture is more complex.[3] In particular, the evidence from census and denominational data in Canada shows clearly that things changed dramatically in the 1960s. Theorists like Callum Brown and Hugh McLeod have developed different explanations for the changes that occurred during that decade.[4] Charles Taylor, following a more philosophical social analysis, thus describes this slow-process change, which advanced more quickly since the 1960s, as a move to "a secular age" (2007). As missiology develops as a modern theological discipline the challenges faced are increasingly complex. How does the plethora of social theories on the decline of active Christian faith in the West impact on thinking about the discipline of missiology? How does the contrast between the strong growth of certain forms of Christianity in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, in comparison to Western decline, factor into our understanding of mission? How do we do missiology in the light of our changing context?

In this article I will respond to some of the questions above by exploring the impact of contextual change and reality in Turtle Island on missiological methodology. This is a contextually focused argument to try and tease out some specific dimensions of methodology. At the heart of my argument lies the conviction that our *posture* in the study of missiology is a critical part of our methodology. This focus on posture also addresses the potential tension between practitioners of mission and university- and

seminary-based professors of mission. First, I will briefly outline some traditional assumptions of missiological methodology. Then I will argue that our method on Turtle Island should be rooted in a christomorphic engagement with Scripture and context. Out of this engagement arises a creatively constructive process, guided by the Spirit. Through this process missiological methodology needs to take on the character of a humble pilgrim through the different disciplines and "worlds" of its context while focused on the flourishing of all creation. Ultimately, because mission arises out of a joyful doxological response to God's grace for the world, missiological methodology is to be practiced as a discipline of creative *poiesis.*

On methodology in missiology

In one of his earlier reflections on the theological method of missiology, David Bosch, following Bergema's article published in 1967, argued that missiological method has two dimensions, descriptive and normative (Bosch, 1978: 247). At the same time, Bosch observed that missiology has to constantly reformulate its aims in the light of new circumstances and contexts. Because missiology follows a kind of elliptical cycle through different theological and social disciplines, it also requires an unusually wide perspective that, as James Scherer put it, is to be "dialogical and attentive, provocative and responsive" to other disciplines (Bosch, 1978: 246). The more recent work of Steven Bevans and Roger Schroeder and the most recent work of Stanley Skreslet echo a very similar structure, with some variations, to Bosch's magisterial work in its attention to Scripture, history, and then theological reflection (Bevans & Schroeder, 2004; Skreslet, 2012). It must be noted here that I rely much on Skreslet's comprehensive discussion as a backdrop to my argument. In Bosch's further reflection, as he responds to the work of Herbert C. Jackson on the discipline of the theology of mission, he points to the tension between the "theologizing trait" and the "event character" of the Christian movement (1980: 23). The argument was that missiological insight and activity seem to be served better when the Christian movement is focused on its "event character," while, when it withdraws into its own dogmatic "towers," it stifles engagement between church and world. Perhaps this perceived tension is also behind some of the thinking critical of a "theology of mission approach" to missiology.[5]

It is indeed appropriate to ask if we are losing the "event character" of the church in the Western or Global North context. Is our struggle with decline a result of being stifled by our theological endeavors? There certainly are those who would argue thus. The argument is that the church in the West is in crisis because it is too intellectual, too focused on theological correctness, too embroiled in philosophy and profound reflection, while the church in Latin and America, Africa, and parts of Asia is booming because it is not hung up on such things. This part of the church has lost its spiritual courage in the morass of theological nicety. As tempting as such an oversimplified analysis might be, I argue here, following Bosch, that the problem does not lie with our keen attention to theological reflection, but rather on a different plane (1980: 24). In fact, I have some doubt about the accuracy of a simplistic depiction of a tension between "event character" and theological focus. I would argue that such an analysis

is open to critique. For example, can we really claim that the Pietist movement and its impressive effort to engage the world with the gospel did not do good theology? Can we really claim that William Carey's "enquiry" argument, his exploration of Matthew 28 and Paul's missionary journeys, was not squarely rooted in theological reflection? I would wager that we are not so much dealing with a tension between "theology" and "event," but rather, a tension between a form of rarified decontextualized theology as opposed to a theology that integrates its insight into christomorphic posture and action. By christomorphic I mean in the shape and Spirit of Christ as a posture in the world.[6] Skreslet is rightly concerned that theology of mission might "obscure the broad scope of contemporary research," but is that not rather a problem of inadequate theology (Skreslet, 2012: 9)? While there is no magic bullet, or magical solution to the struggle of Western Christianity to find relevance within its present cultural contexts, at least part of our challenge and missiological response is to take seriously the integration of our profound theological reflection into our praxis. In short, my argument is that the "success" of Christian faith is not measured in numbers or statistics, nor is it measured simply in public opinion polls or impressive political success, nor in the absence of good and evaluative theological reflection, but rather in its faithfulness in bringing with integrity the thriving wholeness of the gospel to each local context (Fensham, 2008: 161–193). Given this assumption, I wish to reimagine the methodology of the missiological discipline in its different dimensions.

Towards missiological method as a christomorphic response to Scripture

Skreslet outlines different approaches to Scripture, including the identification of themes, the process of translation, and principle of translatability, and "vernacularization" (2012: 21ff.) Here, with a contextual focus on methodology on Turtle Island, it is important to start with the meaningful work of the Gospel and Culture movement, with its roots in the work of Leslie Newbigin (Skreslet, 2012: 91). As a precursor, Donald Senior and Carol Stuhlmeuller's *The Biblical Foundations for Mission* (1983) constituted a larger integrative work on mission and scripture with a focus that Skreslet describes as "universalism" (2012: 34). Newbigin's careful attention to Scripture in his missiological reflection also set the tone for a coherent focus on Scripture.[7] Key in these developments was Newbigin's argument that the local Christian community is the hermeneutic of the gospel (1989).[8] The way that those outside the Christian movement know and see the gospel and make sense of the teaching of Scripture is through encountering the lives, witness, and preaching of faithful loving Christians in their world. This, as both Newbigin and Flett, following Barth, point out, is not a reliance on simple human obedience and action, but rather a work of the Holy Spirit. The church and the local Christian community remain acts of God (Flett, 2015: 207). In fact, such living scriptural witness to the gospel arises, as Newbigin puts it, out of thanksgiving and praise—it is "an acted out doxology" (1989: 127). As the responsible use of Scripture in missiological method developed, David Bosch's two monographs, *Witness to the World* and *Transforming Mission*, became exemplary of how

missiologists could employ and engage Scripture (Bosch, 1980, 1991a). In *Witness to the World* Bosch demonstrated a way to engage the Hebrew Scriptures and particularly the centripetal and centrifugal energies of God's coming reign, as well as larger missiological themes. Especially part II of that monograph develops biblical themes of mission that would remain an essential part of Bosch's approach to mission and Scripture throughout his career.

Transforming Mission, in turn, demonstrated a mature twentieth-century New Testament scholar joining both critical biblical scholarship and the "event character" of an active and engaged faith—an acted out doxology—in context and inter-contextually. Although we could disagree with some specific claims made in the opening section of *Transforming Mission*, as scholars are want to do, there is no doubt that the breadth of Bosch's New Testament knowledge, and his sensitivity to reading these texts with the New Testament context in mind, established a very high bar for the use of Scripture in all forms of contemporary theological reflection. In both these works Bosch's approach can be described as thematic, but the emerging themes are rooted in active and responsible scholarship on the texts involved.

For example, rather than simply rejecting the "Great Commission" in Matthew 28 as not being the words of Jesus, Bosch both convincingly critiques traditional missionary readings of this text and argues that these words, even though not the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus, represented an extension of the logic of the teaching of Jesus into the missionary life of the early church (Bosch, 1991a: 568–73). Moreover, even as Bosch moves towards the "emerging missionary paradigm," he starts with and roots this discussion in Scripture. This is not only a result of Bosch's own location in the Reformed tradition, but also of his conviction that missiological reflection needs to occur as an inter-contextual and inter-textual practice. Bosch remains aware of his own location and bias as he reads Scripture and allows the contexts to speak to each other over the deep "ditch" of history.

At the heart of what I would like to highlight here is the way Bosch draws on the emerging conviction that early Christianity was able to respond to new and challenging circumstances by prolonging the logic of the Jesus traditions with responsible but creative freedom (1991a: 21). With this sensitive but faithful attempt to take critical scholarship seriously while not killing off the dynamic "event character" of Christian faith, Bosch shows a way through the divide between fundamentalist-style biblicism and cynical critique in engaging the Scriptures for today. Moreover, by means of this move, Bosch demonstrates that it is not only the content of Scripture that can instruct us in our missionary reflection, but also the process of the formation of Scripture out of communities in mission in the world. I would like to capture this dimension of missiological method with the concept of christomorphism. It is not so much about the principle of being "christocentric," which can become dogmatically limiting, but rather, about reading, reflecting, and acting in responsible and free ways on the Jesus traditions captured in the Scriptures so that we may constantly seek to take on our best understanding of the shape of Christ in our action and reflection. Faith as encounter and event cannot be separated from a responsible theological understanding on engaging Scripture to discern and prolong the logic of the Jesus traditions to our own

contexts. This combination of the christomorphic posture and responsible theological work can and should bridge the divide between event and reflection as well as a potential tension between practitioner and theologian.

A precursor to Bosch's biblical approach is the seminal article of Daniel von Allmen which was published in the *International Review of Mission* (1975). Von Allmen, a New Testament professor in Cameroon, and later president of the Basel Mission (now Mission 21), took on the difficult task of trying to untangle the challenge of Scripture, contextualization, and the danger of harmful forms of syncretism. Even though his article focused on the debates of the time that dealt with the rise of African and Asian theologies, his argument still speaks with relevance to our present situations in different cultural contexts. Von Allmen points to the reality that the Hellenizing process of early Christianity, as demonstrated in the New Testament, reveals a *process* of contextualization from a Hebraic-Aramaic form of Christianity into a contextualized Greek form. Rather than a process of dogmatizing, the Pauline literature demonstrates a creative and dynamic boldness to speak the Christian faith in the Greek context while seeking to remain faithful to the foundations of the faith (1975: 41). Like Newbigin, he shows that this process of formulating Christian faith in the new context did not arise out of attempts at being dogmatic but out of a desire to worship God (1975: 41). Thus the earliest and paradigmatic contextual theology was birthed out of worship as a response to the work of the Spirit of God. Von Allmen then shows convincingly that Paul did not demand a kind of literal dogmatic agreement of the new Greek movement, but rather, a more profound faithfulness to the "inner thrust of the apostolic faith" (1975: 46). Arguably, the "inner thrust of the apostolic faith" is a rather inexact measure to define. In this regard, the important work of Steven Bevans and Roger Schroeder in their book *Constants in Context*, guides us towards a surer vision of the themes of the inner thrust of apostolic teaching with their focus, in the first section of their book, on the book of Acts (2004). They draw on Andrew Wall's argument that there are constants that draw together the diverse expressions of Christianity through the ages. Principal among these are the constants of Christology and ecclesiology (2004: 33). Their creative development of six constants further bolsters our resources as we seek to stay faithful to the "inner thrust of the apostolic faith." Although, curiously, they do not identify the posture of doxology or worship as a "constant," their discussion of the visionary concept of "prophetic dialogue" includes a significant exploration of the concept of worship. "Prophetic dialogue," I believe, is an important aspect of the process of christomorphic prolongation of the Jesus traditions. The work on the early contextualization through Hellenization in Scripture is further developed by Walls in his discussion of Origen as an exemplar of this process (Skreslet, 2012: 87). Besides the seminal insights of Walls, Bevans, Schroeder, and Von Allmen, and Bosch's demonstration of reading Scripture missionally, it is also of primary importance to recognize the earlier work of Kenneth Pike and Eugene Nida, and the development of dynamically equivalent translations of the Bible as a dimension of the emerging methodological engagement with the Scripture in missiological method (Nida, 1961).[9]

Although biblical approaches to mission and its role in methodology enjoy a fair amount of discussion as witnessed in Skreslet's chapter on this (2012: 21–42), my

argument here is to focus on the posture with which the scriptural resources need to be engaged in a missiological context while maintaining academic excellence. The concept of a christomorphic contextual response to Scripture has much in common with Scott W. Sunquist's development of the cruciform nature of church and mission (Sunquist, 2017: chapter 5). For Sunquist this "cruciform" dimension of Christianity is rooted in the incarnational nature of Christianity. Sunquist insightfully highlights how the "cruciform" dimension of Christian faith brings to light the power of vulnerability as opposed to manipulative power in the Christian movement. This is an argument already substantially developed by David Bosch in his book *A Spirituality of the Road* (1979). It is thus not only the cross, but the witness of the Jesus traditions in Scripture of Jesus' emphasis on the poor and powerless that is captured in Sunquist's version of being "cruciform." For Sunquist the "cruciform" dimension ultimately leads to a transformative effect. This transformation, he argues, is demonstrated not only in the transformation of individuals but the powerful transformative effect of a "cruciform" Christian movement that builds institutions of wholeness and healing. I believe that this "cruciform" character and its appeal to our ability, on Turtle Island, to see the plight of "those who suffer most"—the poor—must be related to the development of insights from Latin America, various contextual theologies around the world, and theologies of identity that bring to our awareness the process of seeing, judging, acting, and celebrating as integral to our method in missiology. Skreslet documents the growing ecumenical emphasis on mission as reconciliation. He documents the contributions of Schreiter, Volf, and Langmead (Skreslet, 2012: 72). The response to suffering, the focus on justice, the concern for world repair and peacemaking, all contribute to a fuller picture of the cruciform-christomorphic posture necessary for a missiological method. It is exactly this "cruciform-christomorphic" awareness that brings the seeing of the suffering of others, the judging of the situation, the action of engaging the powers, and the celebration of doxological worship of God into our method.

It is thus critical in missiological methodology to recognize that the cross stands undeniably at the core of the larger Christian and Jesus traditions of Scripture. However, I argue for a broader view that does not isolate the cross from the stories of resurrection and the wider memory of the birth, life, and ministry of Jesus. The "judging" and "acting" arise also out of the hope of the resurrection and the presence of the Spirit in our midst. As Jürgen Moltmann points out, the story of Jesus includes not only the cross but also his life and ministry. The cross and the resurrection are one single event of divine intervention in history. As Moltmann writes, "The event that is called 'raising' or 'resurrection' is an event that happened to Christ that died on the cross in Golgotha. Where he himself is concerned the cross and the resurrection are mutually related, and they have to be interpreted in such a way that the one event appears in the light of the other" (1993: 213). While being strongly supportive of Sunquist's argument, I would argue that the concept "christomorphism"—being in the shape of Christ and seeking to grow into the shape of Christ—captures this larger frame of the incarnation, ministry, cross, resurrection, ascension, Pentecost, and the *parousia*—witnessed by the Jesus traditions in Scripture. The cross and the resurrection, and their relationship to the complete witness to the story of Jesus in the Scriptures, always need to be placed within a mutually

interpretive relationship while pointing to our best memory of Jesus Christ. It is exactly this mutually interpretive relationship that makes a vulnerable, suffering but hopeful, healing, and thus transformative Christian church possible that sees, that judges, that acts and celebrates out of the cross-resurrection event witnessed in the Scriptures.[10] It is this attention to the whole of the shape of Christ in the Jesus traditions of Scripture that allows us as missiologists to attempt to responsibly, vulnerably, and creatively prolong the missionary logic of Jesus into our contemporary contexts. At the end of *Transforming Mission*, Bosch argues for six core salvific events that missiological reflection need to attend to (1991a: 512–518). Essentially, these six events also summarize this wider focus on all of the story of Christ. Therefore, missiological method requires this ongoing dynamic responsible and creative engagement with the texts of Scripture in the light of the "texts" of our lives, our "con-texts," and our time inspired by the christomorphic impulse. The responsible side of this methodological assumption is predicated on a humble but bold awareness of our own limitations and biases while we proceed with "bold humility." As hinted above, missiologists would follow a method that would strive to rely on the work of the Holy Spirit in doxological thankfulness as the Scriptures are read and interpreted anew. Method for the missiological discipline begins at this integral link between Scripture, local visible Christian community, and the christomorphic-doxological response to the Spirit. Skreslet notes how awareness of the role of colonization, the impact of the enlightenment, the development of theories of decolonization and gender studies have all started to intersect with missiology (2012: 626–28). For the missiologist the integration of this bold but humble christomorphic posture while engaging in prophetic dialogue with these emerging perspectives and critiques is essential.

Towards a creatively constructive missiological method

As mentioned above, Bosch argues that missiological method includes the two basic tasks of descriptive and normative reflection. However, as the discussion above demonstrates, it is difficult as well as ill-advised to try to separate these two tasks. Thus, in *Transforming Mission* the Scriptural discussion that leads off Bosch's development of a theology of mission also renders important normative insight into the practice of mission. Describing the process of the missional nature by which the New Testament came into being has implications for how we then handle those texts in our normative reflection. Bosch attends to scholarship and theories on the communities for whom and within which the texts of the New Testament found their life. Thus, the word "normative" does not adequately describe the task and challenge of missiological method because of the creative, vulnerable, and humble—read cruciform—dimensions of mission that are required. Even as Bosch engages history in the second part of *Transforming Mission* he is also engaging in the creative and constructive task of creating paradigmatic categories and developing a missiological historical taxonomy. His is not a dispassionate description of history because the challenge and task of creatively discerning the prolongation of the Jesus traditions in the history of Christianity and identifying moments of dissonance with the Jesus traditions is always present. Von Allmen describes the identification of dissonance as the "ordering" function of theology as he

points to the way that the text of Colossians 2:62–63, demonstrate the corrective task of assuring that every thought is taken captive to obey Christ, as it seeks to remain faithful to the foundations of the faith (1975: 46–47).

This interplay between the creative dynamic and apostolic faithfulness is no surprise in the light of the challenges of our own time. There is no pure description of history. Historical studies are always embedded in their own history. Skreslet's discussion of the historical work of Gibbon, Harnack, and the more contemporary work of Schnabel demonstrates how contextual location and social location impacts on the way histories are written (2012: 22–27). Thus, for example, David Bosch, as an anti-apartheid activist in his time, could not and should not have divorced his concern for the oppressed as he describes a missiological take on church history. As Moltmann writes, "History is interaction and process between human beings, groups, classes and societies, and not least between human beings and nature" (1993: 236). Moltmann argues that hope is based in remembrance. In as much as the missiological task of the church is to bring hope in history, the dance between the remembrance of the Jesus traditions and the history of hopeful transformative life through faith, and the creative task to engage our world and context with hope is the stuff missiological method is made of. The integration of the description of the history of mission and past engagement in mission is thus never separated from our constructive and creative reflection on these descriptions as we wrestle with our contexts and indeed also with ourselves and our own struggle to live in new but christomorphic ways in our context. Awareness of our biases, not denial of them, and an exposure of these biases to the Jesus traditions in Scripture, is what is required in missiological methodology. This is a task in which we need to humbly confess that we will always fall short in some way.

From a center in cultural anthropology to a pilgrim-method

Traditionally the missiological discipline, by virtue of its nature of crossing frontiers with the gospel of Christ, has relied on paying close attention to the diverse cultural worlds it engaged.[11] Despite the rise of religiously unfriendly "secular" ideology arising out of the enlightenment, missionaries tended to be and become some of the earliest cultural anthropologists. Colonialism and colonial attitudes complicated this process. However, much of what we know today about the culture and customs of those pre-colonial contexts in the world outside European Christendom came through the meticulous descriptions and notebooks of missionaries.[12] It is therefore natural that missiological method has often rightly focused on cultural anthropology as a discipline. However, our context on Turtle Island today needs a much wider engagement. James Scherer's "dialogical and attentive, provocative and responsive" engagement needs to extend to the many publics and disciplines of our time including the disciplines of sociological reflection, philosophy, science, economics, and popular culture. In this the missiologist will always find herself as a humble student learner in the worlds of the expertise of others. We are pilgrims entering the many different worlds with an insatiable curiosity about those worlds and their assumptions for the sake of the gospel.

Missiology in our context on Turtle Island therefore needs the bold humility of being guests at the table of many who are different than who we are, assume different things than we do, and live in different ways than we do. This is not only true for the boundary between those of faith and those who do not believe, but also for the internal boundaries among Christians. Being pilgrims through the worlds and experiences of others is one of the most profound insights of the twentieth-century ecumenical movement also beautifully reflected in the Vatican II document, *Ad Gentes*: "The pilgrim church is missionary by its very nature" (1). Missiological method today can only be ecumenical. Good missionaries have always known this and done this in the name of the gospel. However, we need a particular kind of ecumenical humility—a humility born out of repentance. We do not find ourselves in the world of early Christianity where the scandal of the cross was about the challenge of the empire and the unthinkable truth of Jesus Christ as God-man incarnate. Our scandal is of our own making and not strictly speaking a scandal of the gospel. It is a scandal of the way we, the supposed carriers of the transformative love of God in the world, twisted the story for our selfish needs and our exploitation of others in no small way through our internal fights and divisions carried into the world. As Johannes Herman Bavinck put it in *Introduction to the Science of Mission*, "The idea has been expressed in more than one quarter that the missionary enterprise is a form of penance. We have missed the mark in our own world" (1960: 303). Bavinck claimed this in the light of the history of colonialism as he encountered it in the 1950s. Today the need for a penitential method, not only in missiology but in all theological disciplines in the Global North, is even more critical. During the height of the Apartheid regime in South Africa David Bosch was invited to address the South African Council of Churches. In that article he argued that the church owes the world faith, hope, love, and intercession. However, before introducing these themes, he writes, "The first mission of the Church is therefore not to change the world but to repent" (1976: 173). This in turn is consistent with the argument advanced by Karl Barth in his 1932 lecture to the Brandenburgh mission conference. There he points out that we—the church—even though we have repented and received baptism is ever anew in need of repentance (1957: 101).[13] In a similar way, Miroslav Volf, in contrast to Louis Luzbetak's claim for missiology in a place of honor (Skreslet, 2012: 15), reminds us that theology is descending from its throne and discovering that in our Western context it is now finding itself more on a chair among many other chairs (1996: x–xi).

Some may consider it an odd thing to identify attitude or posture as critical to method in theology, but in our time and place our method itself needs to be steeped in christomorphic humility and in the repentance to which the Jesus traditions call us. If missiological method is to arise out of the doxological energy that responds to the Spirit, then remembering that ongoing repentance is the first step in the process of the joyful glorification of God is critical. George Hunsberger's argument that, today, the church needs to walk with the world in comradeship, companionship, and courage can rightly be applied to the method of missiology (2005: 315–324). As missiology is about crossing the frontier between faith and unbelief, church and world, and death and thriving life for the sake of the poor and suffering, our task is to be humbly and penitentially companionable in our engagement with many different disciplines. We are to listen more than

preach, be open to learn more than teach, while never losing our passion to advocate, act, and speak on behalf of those who are marginalized and suffer most in the world.

From a focus on numerical expansion towards a flourishing of all creation

In his classic nineteenth-century text on theology of mission Gustav Warneck explores the history of Protestant mission. When he reaches his contemporary time in his discussion of the "field of evangelical missions," he focuses particularly on the idea of expansion and growth. In this he was a child of his time, swept along by the colonial assumptions of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He writes, "There are still, it is true, wide regions, especially in central Asia and Africa, not at all or very poorly occupied by Christian mission; but from decade to decade the field gains so much in extent, that without rhetorical exaggeration it may be said, 'The field is the world'" (1901: 147). The unspoken and unexamined assumption was that expansion and occupation represented the coming of God's reign. Talk of "obligation" and "command" as motivations for mission was also part of the order of the day finding its roots in William Carey's argument, but not necessarily his posture, at the close of the eighteenth century. Thirty years after Warneck's work, and with much pain and struggle, theologians like Barth and others in the post-World War I theological world started to recognize the cultural captivity to the spirit of triumphalism that confused our missionary efforts and numerical "success" with the reign of God. We can say that before the rise of the secular postcolonial critique, missiological thinkers started to realize an internal critique of colonialism that would later blossom into the work of Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and many others.[14] Since then the postcolonial awareness has also entered the missiological debates more fully in the work of Musa Dube's critique of missionary biblical translation (and her critics) and the work of Dana Robert in uncovering the untold story of the role of women in mission, as well as the unsung local agents of mission (Dube, 1999; Skreslet, 2012: 41–42, 94).[15]

Missiology is a discipline which at its best seeks to enter the world with repentant humility; to enter the world with love for the sake of the healing and well-being brought by God's reign in the world.[16] It is a discipline with its focus on the frontier between death and resurrection life in the world. It seeks to facilitate, join, and encourage the coming of God's reign and the growth of this gracious process especially for those most on the margins and those who suffer and are poor. Its method is not to be focused on simple numerical measures, but rather on the evaluative reflection on the growth of God's gracious reign for all living things.

From pragmatic techniques towards imaginative creativity in the Spirit

Embedded in the arguments above is the assumption that the missiological discipline in its heart is a discipline that values and practices responsible, constructive imagination with and for the sake of the poor and the suffering in the world. If our task is to

serve God's church in the world by reflecting on and imagining the responsible prolongation of the logic of the Jesus traditions to our present situation, then behind all said above, lies this creative process. Although he did not develop it fully and was unable to do so because of his untimely death, David Bosch saw this clearly when he wrote *Transforming Mission*. There he cites Max Stackhouse's use of the term *poiesis* (1991a: 431).[17] Before the twentieth century, missiology was more of a technique than a theology of mission (Bosch, 1978: 242). Bosch cites Josef Glazik to show that in that form missiology was a theology of the missionary. Over the last century missiology has developed into the discipline of the coming of God's reign to the world—*missio Dei*. We no longer simply reflect on the "how to" of mission but also on the "why," "for what purpose," and "out of what motivation." Moreover, it has come to our attention to what extent our preoccupation with measurement, numbers, and techniques of mission is rooted in the spirit of modernism and the industrial revolution (Fensham, 2008: 77–136). Missiology has taken a broad and cosmic view of the coming salvation of God and the role of the church in that process. This broad horizon is critical in our time as we think of missiological method. Arguably, doxology is expressed in *poiesis*. When the Spirit moves, people sing and create poetry and prose. *Poiesis* inspires and facilitates social transformation (Fensham, 2016). Lives take on iconic beauty and remembrance in love brings hope. One of the most poetic definitions of mission comes from Msgr. Ivan Illich and illustrates this important posture of missiological method. Missiology is

> … the science about the Word of God as the Church in her becoming; the Word as the Church in her borderline situations; the Church as a surprise and a puzzle; the Church in her growth; the Church when her historical appearance is so new that she has to strain herself to recognize her past in the mirror of the present; the Church where she is pregnant of new revelations for a people in which she dawns … Missiology studies the growth of the Church into new peoples, the birth of the Church beyond its social boundaries; beyond the linguistic barriers within which she feels at home; beyond the poetic images in which she taught her children … Missiology therefore is the study of the Church as surprise … (cited in Bosch, 1991a: 493)

Missiological method therefore is a thankful act of *poiesis.* On Turtle Island we, as missiologists, are called to exercise our imaginations, to dream dreams and see visions, as we do justice, seek mercy, and walk humbly with our God.

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Notes

1. I will use the title Turtle Island for the North American continent, following the preferred language of aboriginal First Nations in Canada and the USA.
2. See Peterson, 2018.
3. See a more fulsome discussion in Fensham, 2018.
4. See McLeod, 2007; Brown, 2001; and Brown, 2012.

5. See Skreslet's critique of a "theology of mission" approach and his mention of Mika Vähäkangas's identification of two distinctive publics in missiology (2012: 9, 12).
6. Richard Niebuhr used the term "christo-morphic" to distinguish his view from "christo-centric" in a lecture he gave at a 1963 Minister's Institute (https://bulletin.hds.harvard.edu/articles/springsummer2017/christo-morphic-view-religion, accessed 1/15/2019) and Peter Slater developed the idea of a christomorphic approach in his reflection on Anglicanism and theology of religions (1998: 151). Terrence Sherry developed the idea that Niebuhr's theology can be described as a "Christo-morphic, hermeneutical theology" (2003).
7. There is solid scriptural reflection in all Newbigin's writing. Note particularly his commentary on the Gospel of John (1982).
8. See John Flett's fulsome discussion of Newbigin's claim that the "congregation" is the hermeneutic of the gospel. He argues that Newbigin moves the focus from the church apostolic and universal more clearly to the concrete and specifically visible local community of Christians; see Flett (2015: 195ff.).
9. See Skreslet's discussion of the contribution of Kenneth L. Pike and Eugene A. Nida which he identifies as a linguistic approach in mission and the use of the Bible (2012: 79).
10. Note that John Flett makes a similar point in his discussion of Newbigin and attention to the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension (Flett, 2015: 208).
11. Skreslet, 2012: chapter 4, 69ff. provides a thorough discussion of this dimension of missiology and its role in method.
12. See for example, Hitchen, 2002, as well as another among many classic works, Junod, 1936, which is also recognized by Skreslet as one of the active contributors to the anthropological discipline (2012: 76).
13. It is perhaps important to cite his exact words here, "Die Kirche der Heiden drinnen, der Heidenchristen, der Heiden, die schon gehört, schon Bußе getan, schon die Taufe empfangen haben und doch in dem Allem immer noch und immer wieder Heiden sind."
14. Most representative of this was the devastating critique that Paul Schütz—German mission executive—published after his fact-finding trip to the Middle East. So striking and shocking was Schütz's critique that Barth mentioned it in his 1932 lecture and the implications of these critiques were not welcomed by the mission personnel at the time. See Schütz (1930) and Barth (1957: 115). It is fascinating to note that this paragraph, where Barth invokes Schütz rhetorically, is also the one that contains Barth's claim that "mission" in the ancient church was associated with the self-sending of God into the world—thus an early reference to the idea behind *missio Dei.*
15. See also the Documentation Archives, Biography and Oral History project of the International Association of Mission Studies, http://missionstudies.org/index.php/study-groups/daboh/, and the Dictionary of African Christian Biography, https://dacb.org/
16. Bavinck, 1960: 303.
17. See also a fuller argument for this (Fensham, 2016).

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