
A table of contents for *Anvil* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_anvil_01.php

JOHN CORRIE

Creative Tensions in the Mission of the Church : David Bosch Ten Years On

In this article John Corrie examines how Bosch developed the concept of 'creative tension' in his influential book *Transforming Mission*. He explores the polarities held in tension when the Church engages in post-modern mission, and assesses the influence of Bosch's thinking on others writing on mission and evangelism through the last decade. He describes how opposing absolutes can be held together and welcomes the resulting openness to new ways of being Church that mission in such a context demands.

After ten years of assimilation and reflection on the legacy of David Bosch, certain themes have emerged with increasing clarity and significance for their contribution to the debate about mission in a post-modern context. It is true that his work has some considerable lacunas[1]. However, that should not discourage us from building upon what is there, in particular the theme of 'creative tensions', which resonates well with the ambiguity of postmodernism and yet presents a challenge to the articulation of an evangelical theology of mission.

The evangelical predilection, if it is possible to generalise, is for unambiguous doctrine which proclaims gospel truth in a way which affirms absolutes, precludes uncertainty, discourages questions and closes off discussion. Conservatives feel that their traditional way of thinking is increasingly under threat in the rush to find postmodern 'relevance'[2]. If the gospel is to be proclaimed with authority and conviction, dogma is to be preferred to doubt, simplicity to complexity, and clarity to confusion. So the notion of 'tension' between polarities that are not easily resolved, however 'creative' this promises to be, does not seem to fit easily with "passionate God-centredness and passionate gospel-centredness"[3]. For others less

1 See for eg Kim in Yates, T. (ed), *Mission – an Invitation to God's Future*, Cliff College Publishing, Calver 2000, pp 99-108, where she identifies feminism, ecology and indigenous spiritualities as serious deficiencies; see also C. Sugden in Saayman, W. and Kritzinger, K., *Mission in Bold Humility*, Orbis, New York 1996, pp 139–150.

2 Don Carson is concerned about the dilution of evangelical convictions and is sceptical of any form of 'postmodern evangelicalism' – see his extended discussion in Carson, D. A, *The Gagging of God*, Apollos, Leicester 1996, pp 443–489.

3 Carson, *The Gagging of God*, p 479.

wedded to classical evangelicalism an appropriate contextualisation of truth demands more recognition that ambivalence and symbolism are not inconsistent with faith. One notable example of this in recent years has been the challenges presented by Dave Thomlinson in suggesting a 'post-evangelicalism' which is radically open to ambiguity. In response to Thomlinson, Cray comments that holding things in tension is not entirely new in our experience: evangelicalism found its identity in holding together objective and subjective elements of knowing through critical engagement with the Enlightenment[4].

Indeed the concept of paradox, and the need to hold polarities together, is not new to evangelical theology. Jim Packer's discussion in 1961 of the old chestnut of the relation between divine sovereignty and human responsibility recognised an irreconcilable contradiction, though he preferred to speak in terms of 'antinomy' rather than paradox[5]. This contradiction reaches back into the very nature of God, and 'is only one of a number that the Bible contains'. Another problem, discussed since the first century, is the relation between divine passibility and impassibility, which in turn relates to the paradox of God's relationship with the world. This reflects the inner tension between the immanent and the economic Trinity, which in turn relates to the divine/human nature of Christ[6]. So we ought readily to accept that the reality of paradox/antinomy/tension – whatever word we prefer for it – reaches into the very heart of our understanding of God and therefore has consequences for many areas of Christian and Church experience.

The idea of 'creative tension' seems to have emerged out of ecumenical thinking some time around the middle of the previous century. Stephen Neill used it in discussing the need for both proclamation and dialogue in relationship with other faiths[7]. He recognised both confrontation and identification in this relationship, which is a reflection of the tension between the otherness/absence/hiddenness of God and his incarnation/presence/revealedness. However, before Bosch came along, relatively few others found it a useful concept[8]. Bosch himself does not reveal the source of his inspiration for this idea, so we must presume that it came through his deep involvement with the ecumenical movement. However, if we are prepared to acknowledge the paradoxical nature of basic Christian truths, then I suggest that evangelicals need to be prepared to adopt this terminology and not to be afraid of it. This paper is an attempt to elevate its importance for the theology of mission in the contemporary context, and to explore its relevance in the area of the identity of the Church.

---

4 See Cray's contribution in Cray, G. et al, *The Post-evangelical Debate*, SPCK, Triangle, London 1997, p 5.

5 Packer, J. I. *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, IVP, London 1961, p 18ff. In 'paradox' the contradiction is verbal – a play on words – but not necessarily real, and is therefore dispensable. An 'antinomy' is neither dispensable nor comprehensible.

6 There is a lengthy discussion of this in: Nnamani, A. G. *The Paradox of a Suffering God*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt 1995.

7 Neill, S. *Creative Tension*, Edinburgh House Press, Edinburgh 1959.

8 See, for example, Russell, D. S. *Poles Apart: The Gospel in Creative Tension*, St Andrews Press, Edinburgh 1990.

The Concept of 'Creative Tension'

The idea of something stretched between two polarities that is creative of something else is not alien to the physical world. A violin string stretched between the bridge and the peg of the instrument is capable of a beautiful sound. A bicycle chain needs the tension between the wheel and the peddles in order to create movement. Even the two legs of a human being in motion are in muscular tension with one another – though hopefully in this case not pulling in opposite directions! This in fact is an important observation: the pull has to be real for the tension to be there. For anything creative to take place certain conditions need to be met: the polarities must be genuinely contradictory and pulling away from each other; there needs to be something between them which establishes some kind of relationship which can be worked on; and something else needs to act on the tension which may not have any connection with the two polarities. It is not sufficient therefore simply to set up two polarities and assume that the tension between them will be 'creative'. Tension can be destructive as well as constructive; and it is naturally easier for either or both of the polarities to go off in their own direction, and without a relationship between them that is what will happen[9]. It is no answer either simply to attempt to collapse the two polarities into the middle and hope for some compromise, since the integrity of the two polarities has to be affirmed and maintained. So there is nothing automatically creative about the theological or personal tensions we experience as Christians.

So it is important to recognise that not every tension is 'creative' and not every experience of tension is relevant. In mission practice plenty of tensions are self-generated. The focus here is on those polarities which are intrinsic to theological or missiological thinking.

In fact it is much more comfortable to opt for one end of the tension and let go of the other end – if we believe the opposite position to be erroneous, then why not let it go off in its own direction while we affirm what we believe to be the unambiguous truth? This is what we have often done with these tensions, for example between a conservative and liberal understanding of Scripture. We then feel uncomfortable relating to the approach of someone like Walter Brueggemann who suggests a 'dialogical transaction' between the 'core testimony' of scripture and 'counter testimony' which cross-examines it, which sometimes comes, he claims, from within scripture itself[10]. The temptation is always to close off the discussion by heading as quickly as possible for the core testimony, with what we see as its absolute truth, thereby collapsing the tension: 'Christian interpretation has a deep propensity to give closure, to end the dialectic, to halt the deconstruction, and to arrive as quickly as possible at affirmation'[11]. Brueggemann's conviction is that his approach recognises the scriptures as authoritative while giving

9 See Nicholls, B. J., *Theological News*, Vol 4, (1972). 'Tension is either destructive or creative. It is destructive when goals are confused and rigid patters of work lead to frustration and indecision. Tension is creative when diverse goals fit into a pattern of relationships. Methods of achieving them are flexible, and function controls structure.' p 1.

10 Brueggemann, W. 'Biblical Theology Appropriately Postmodern', *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, Vol 27, (1997)

11 Brueggemann, *Biblical Theology*, p 7.

much more credibility to Christian interpretation in a postmodern world familiar with ambiguity and contradiction[12]. By maintaining the tension between the givenness of scripture and the plurivocality of the text, something genuinely creative can emerge out of the process of 'imaginative construal' that is necessary. We will come back to this point later in the discussion.

Other Creative Tensions

Bosch identifies three tensions even within the first eleven pages of Transforming Mission: between 'danger and opportunity' as mission grapples with the present crisis; between 'divine providence and human confusion' as mission works out what is an 'ambivalent enterprise' between text and context ; and between the two callings of the Church in its 'being called out of the world and sent into the world'[13]. The essence of the approach is summed up as follows: 'Both the centrifugal and the centripetal forces in the emerging paradigm - diversity versus unity, divergence versus integration, pluralism versus holism - will have to be taken into account throughout. A crucial notion in this regard will be that of creative tension: it is only within the force field of apparent opposites that we shall begin to approximate a way of theologising for our own time in a meaningful way'[14].

Before it becomes necessary to focus our discussion, it is worth noting other polarities, some of which reflect the basic tension between evangelical and liberal interpretations of the gospel. One of the most significant ones is the classic distinction between the 'now' and the 'not yet' of the Kingdom. In relation to mission, a focus on the 'now' of the Kingdom leads us to look for what the gospel can do to transform this world and our present Christian experience, whereas a focus on the 'not yet' will see the gospel more for what it offers of future glory.

> We need an eschatology for mission which is both future-directed and orientated to the hereand now. It must be an eschatology that holds in creative and redemptive tension the already and the not yet; the world of sin and rebellion, and the world God loves; the new age that has already begun, and the old that has not yet ended; justice as well as justification; the gospel of liberation and the gospel of salvation. Christian hope does not spring from despair about the present. We hope because of what we have already experienced. Christian hope is both possession and yearning, repose and activity, arrival and being on the way.[15]

Not entirely unrelated to this is the tension between orthodoxy and orthopraxis, or between reflection and action, or between revelation given and revelation as contextual. A focus on orthodoxy leads us to deduce our mission strategy from what God has already said in His word, and our aim is simply to apply it in faithful obedience in whatever context we find ourselves. A focus on orthopraxis will lead us to work out God's will as we go along. The journey of creative tension between them is a 'missiology on the road'; it has a map to guide it, but the precise direction is flexible and provisional as it discovers new dimensions of truth through its praxis.[16]

12 Brueggemann, W. *The Bible and Postmodern Imagination*, SCM Press, London 1993.
13 Bosch, D. J. *Transforming Mission*, Orbis, New York 1991, p 7-11.
14 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p 367.
15 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p 508.

> We need an experimental theology in which an ongoing dialogue is taking place between text and context, a theology which, in the nature of the case, remains provisional and hypothetical.[17]

Interestingly, Bosch recognises a third player in this tension – that of 'poiesis' or creative imagination. In this case 'poiesis' becomes the element which makes the tension between theory and praxis truly creative – not so far removed from Brueggemann![18]

> The best models of contextual theology succeed in holding together in creative tension theoria, praxis and poiesis – or, if one wishes, faith, hope, and love.[19]

Space precludes us from exploring many others: between the personal and social dimensions of the gospel; and related to that, between evangelism and social action; and related to that, between proclamation and dialogue. In each case it is essential that we keep hold of both ends of the tension, affirming each and maintaining the relationship between them in a wholistic, integrated way. In this way what we do will inevitably be creative of something new, not pre-determined by either polarity of the tension, and not simply a compromise with both. It's an approach which consciously rejects the categorising tendency of the Enlightenment and the either/or dogmatism which grew out of it. Therefore, in relation to the 'emerging ecumenical paradigm', which is Bosch's main thesis, all these tensions are caught up in the force-field between continuity and change, tradition and transformation.

> In the case of each paradigm change reviewed so far, there remained a creative tension between the new and the old. The agenda was always – consciously or unconsciously – one of reform, not of replacement. [20]

The challenge for the Church is to work out its identity in relation to these polarities, and it is to that discussion on which we will now focus.

The Identity of the Church

The Church finds itself working out its identity in relation to a number of contradictions. In a recent study exploring ecclesiology in a post-modern context, Michael Jinkins asks: 'Can we make any statement about the church directly, simply, and unequivocally, or does speech about the church necessitate another kind of language, either a more elegantly nuanced articulation or a more brutally conflicted dialectic, in which we attribute to the church opposite qualities and hold them in tension in seeming contradiction?'[21]. Jinkins builds on Stephen Hawking's principle of paradox: 'One of the best places to look for new ideas in theoretical work is the apparent paradoxes that occur in the existing theory'. In relation to the Church with all its historical particularities that defy categorization Jinkins comments: 'the complexity of the church requires taxonomies that convey... paradox and contradiction. The creative potential to expand our understanding of the church

16 Kritzinger, J. N. J. and Saayman, W.. A (eds), *Mission in Creative Tension*, SA Missiological Society, Pretoria 1990, p 17ff.
17 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p 427.
18 'John Drane sees 'poiesis'as a key in relating to postmodernism. See Drane, J. *Cultural Change and Biblical Faith*, Paternoster Press, Carlisle 2000, p 108f.
19 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p 431.
20 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p 367.
21 Jinkins, M. *The Church Faces Death*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999, p 71.

lies not in reading into the history of the church's practice a uniformity (or, even, a harmony) that was never there... rather it lies in detecting the places of paradox and contradiction in our theoretical categories, in describing their nature, and in pressing them further'[22].

In the first place the Church has both a divine and a human orientation, constituted by the Spirit as the Body of Christ, united with Christ and destined to be His Bride (Eph. 5:32; Rev. 21:2), and yet very human, weak, sinful and vulnerable. Then, related to this, as it works out its life and witness in faithfulness to Christ, it finds itself caught in the tension between being in the world but not of the world, sharing with Christ the duality of separateness and identity (John 17:13-19). This relates to the calling of the Church to be both the gathered community of the people of God and those who are sent out in mission, experiencing both the centrifugal and centripetal dimensions of being a covenant community, a tension which reaches back into the Old Testament. This in turn leads us into the relationship between tradition and renewal – what the Church is on the basis of its heritage, and what it is becoming under the renewing influence of the Holy Spirit. Tradition gives to the Church its institutional character, whist the Spirit renews the Church as a dynamic community whose primary identity is relational; so in this case it is the structures of the Church that are in tension. Finally we might want to recognise the paradox of unity and diversity, or the universality and particularity of the Church, the one and the many.

All of these tensions have their origin and their ultimate resolution in God Himself, both in His historical revelation in the divine/human person of Christ, and in his being as Trinity, eternally three- in-one, the perfect relational community of unity and diversity. Although there is an obviously eschatological dimension to the perfect fulfilment of the communion of the Church with the Triune God, our present experience of the presence of God is real and therefore, in the words of Miroslav Volf : 'The Church must speak of the Trinity as its determining reality'[23]. For Jinkins, following Barth, the essentially paradoxical nature of the church's identity is rooted in the character of God 'whose name lies hidden in revelation, for whom contradiction makes possible disclosure'[24].

So it seems that we are not speaking of contradictions that are merely experienced as such simply because we live and worship in a fallen world. More profoundly these paradoxes could be said to have been *given* to the Church by a God who became incarnate and took to Himself the 'radical ambiguity of creaturely existence'[25]. In so far as the church's identity has correspondence with the Trinity, there will always be an open and on-going dialogue between the human and the divine (and between unity and diversity, tradition and renewal, structures and relationships, ingathering and mission) as a reflection of the relational dynamic within the Godhead. The Church's experience will always be one of both hiddenness and revealedness, weakness and triumph, death and life. For this reason there never has been nor never will be, this side of the eschaton, a single answer to the question:

22 Jinkins, *The Church Faces Death*, p 64.

23 Volf, M. *After our Likeness; The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1998.

24 Jinkins, *The Church Faces Death*, p 68.

25 Jinkins, *The Church Faces Death*, p 73.

What is the Church? But this is where the tensions become creative. If we seek to resolve the question into a uniform and supposedly 'biblical' ideal, we easily become entrenched at one end or other of the tensions, we may try to impose our ideal upon others, and we easily lose touch with the real world, a postmodern world which is still struggling with the ambiguities and cannot share our certainties. This leads us to the irresistible conclusion that the maintaining of creative tensions is essential for mission.

The Mission of the Church

Let us look now at how Bosch develops this theme in relation to mission. His first major exposition of the Church describes it as 'the interim eschatological community' and relates to how Paul understood 'ekklesia'[26]. Bosch argues first that Paul's language is consistently corporate, since his framework for the experience of God is incorporation into Christ. Even righteousness is first of all a gift to the community rather than to the individual. So the whole edifice of reconciliation with God depends upon being a reconciled community in which all human barriers are transcended, creating 'a new kind of body in which human relationships are being transformed'. The creation of a reconciled community is, for Bosch, the whole focus of Paul's mission: 'The Church is called to be a community of those who glorify God by showing forth his nature and works and by making manifest the reconciliation and redemption God has wrought through the death, resurrection, and reign of Christ'[27].

However this generates a creative tension between the exclusivity of the community (in its working for holiness and pure fellowship in Christ) and its mission of 'practising solidarity' with the world. But these two polarities are linked because as the Church grows towards being a new creation which glorifies God by its life and holiness, so it automatically bears witness to the world. This makes the church 'missionary by its very nature through their unity, mutual love, exemplary conduct, and radiant joy'[28].

This vision of course has an eschatological dimension, which creates another tension between what the Church is and what it is becoming, the 'now' and the 'not yet' of its experience of the Kingdom. At this point Bosch concurs with Jinkins: the church is always a 'preliminary community', on its way to glory, and so Paul never constructs a 'doctrine of the Church' as if it were set in stone for all generations. This open-ended provisionality allows for a rich variety of models of 'church', and means that the Church will always, to some extent, be working out its identity as it goes along.

However, as we have already emphasised, we must always be careful to hold on to both ends of these polarities. There is a certain givenness about the nature of the Church, which arises from Christ's commissioning of it, and which is based on the 'apostolic tradition' which provided its theological foundations. Although Bosch acknowledges the importance of the biblical testimony, he is sometimes rather too ready to let go of it. So for example, in the interests of drawing out the

26 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p 165.
27 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p 168.
28 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p 380.

corporateness of Pauline theology, he hardly recognises individual justification and ethical responsibility. In the interests of relating the mission of the church to the transformation of society, there is no mention of proclamation as an element of Paul's missionary paradigm. In the interests of promoting the Church as the Church for others (or better, *with* others), the internal dynamics of worship, prayer and fellowship are hardly explored. However he is surely right to highlight the dualities with which Paul's thinking is soaked through: between weakness and power, suffering and victory, what we have already and what we are waiting to receive, and so on. It is in the tension between these dualities that the mission of the Church is worked out, and the dialogue becomes creative because it creates new relationships, both within the church and with society, and it finds creative ways of bearing witness both with 'humble boldness' and 'bold humility'[29].

Bosch picks up and expands upon these ideas in expounding the theme of the missionary Church as the first element of the 'emerging ecumenical missionary paradigm'. His section headed 'creative tension' is preceded by some foundational, but by now familiar, thinking about the Church: that it is essentially 'missionary by its very nature', a 'sacrament, sign and 'instrument' of the Kingdom, a community of the Holy Spirit, and primarily local so that it is the "local church that is the primary agent of mission[30].

The stage is therefore set for the recognition of creative tension as integral to the identity of the church: 'At one end of the spectrum, the Church perceives itself to be the sole bearer of a message of salvation on which it has a monopoly; at the other end, the church views itself, at most, as an illustration – in word and deed – of God's involvement with the world'. Which end we opt for depends upon the importance we attach to the 'missio Dei': either the Church has been commissioned with the task of world mission to extend the Kingdom by building the Church, and it is our responsibility to get on with it (the traditional evangelical view); or we seek to cooperate with God in His mission to the world and focus our mission on the humanisation of society (the liberal view).

The point is it doesn't have to be either/or, although Bosch is pessimistic about any possible integration since old ways die hard, and we much prefer our inherited patterns to the uncertainty of living with creative tension. But the first view denies the gospel its ethical thrust towards the world, and can become obsessed with numbers and church growth. The second view however has no cutting edge in its view of salvation, identifying too much with the world, and allowing the world to set the agenda for mission. In typically thorough fashion Bosch deconstructs the ecumenical thinking which drops any distinction between the church and the world. The Church needs to be distinctive in order to be missionary: so that '...the church can be missionary only if its being-in-the-world is, at the same time, a being-different-from-the-world'. It is precisely for the sake of the world that it has to maintain its holiness and identity in Christ.

The Church can therefore be seen as an ellipse with two foci, revolving around the polarities of worship and prayer on the one hand and service and mission on

29 Saayman, W. and Kritzinger, K. *Mission in Bold Humanity*, Orbis, New York 1996.

the other. It is the gathering together which makes the sending out effective, and conversely going out requires us to come back to the spiritual and supportive community of love. Theologically it means that 'the church is both a theological and a sociological entity, an inseparable union of the divine and the dusty...it is this church, ambiguous in the extreme, which is 'missionary by its very nature', the pilgrim people of God'.

Implications for the Post-modern Context

Bosch is not the only one to have recognised the importance of this theme for post-modern mission. In particular Robert Warren picks up on the elliptical image of the dynamic between distinctiveness and engagement. 'The essential point is that any Church that allows itself to be polarised as belonging to a totally gathered or totally dispersed church style will have lost the necessary creative tension of a missionary congregation which is both engaged and distinctive'[31]. He also affirms that there is no single way for the church to be renewed in mission, which points to the need for flexible structures with a whole-life orientation in 'a community which celebrates, demonstrates and thereby proclaims the gathering up of all creation into the purposes of God revealed in Chris'. If the church were to be more integrated it would be more able to be 'community + faith + action' orientated, rather than 'building + priest + stipend' obsessed.

Lesslie Newbigin famously described the Church as the 'hermeneutic of the Gospel'[32]. He shaped the dynamic tension around the way in which we on the one hand "indwell" the gospel story, allowing it to shape the community and become its 'plausibility structure', and on the other hand steadfastly and confidently live out that story in the market place of ideas and witness to the Lordship of Christ in every dimension of life. Newbigin has a lot in common with Bosch in affirming confidence in the historical revelation through Christ which is the essence of the story, and yet also in maintaining a humble openness to the truth as it meets us from the future.

Charles Van Engen, from an American perspective, recognises the importance of 'community', which at its best should be a 'dynamic, energised, transformed and transforming fellowship'. This will enable the Church to be truly One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic: One, in communion with Christ; Holy, maintaining a purity of life and holiness which is based on 'covenantal knowing'; Catholic, as a spiritual network of universal fellowship more concerned about renewal than restructuring; and Apostolic, as agents of reconciliation in the world. For Van Engen all this resonates with Volf's 'provisional absoluteness', which recognises the objectivity of Christian belief while at the same time acknowledging that its eschatological nature locates certitude in hope.[33]

Peter Kuzmic, commenting on the tension between the 'now' and the 'not yet' of the Kingdom, observes that conservative Christian theology tends to oversimplify

30 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p 380ff.
31 Warren, R. *Being Human, Being Church*, Marshall Pickering, London 1995, p 59.
32 Newbigin, L. *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, SPCK, London 1989, p 222ff.
33 Van Engen, C. *Mission on the Way*, Baker, Grand Rapids 1996.

issues that are in reality more complex than we are prepared to admit.[34] Thus there is always the temptation to resolve the identity of the Kingdom in one direction or another, which in turn has its consequences for how we think of mission in relation to history and eschatology.

We can see a clear consensus developing here around the notion of creative tension. I suspect that our problem is the fear of letting go of absolutes in the name of subjectivity, experience, open-ness, provisionality, flexibility and all the post-modern characteristics at the other ends of the spectrum. The point is though that we do not, nor should we, abandon those absolutes, because they form one end of the polarity which is essential for the tension to be creative. But if we are going to take contextualisation seriously, then our engagement with the other end has to be committed and sincere. Too often evangelical 'contextualisation' has meant simply applying the gospel to a particular context, without any recognition that the context itself may challenge us to re-think what the gospel means in that context and/or how it can apply. There is a whole different agenda here which space does not allow us to explore. But it is not far removed from the 'critical realism' of N T Wright and others, including Brueggemann, as we have already acknowledged, who insist that we need a new paradigm if we are veer going to engage with postmodern culture and thinking.

Conclusion

I have suggested that the paradigm for mission appropriate for a post-modern context should be focussed on the theme of 'creative tension', a concept that we should embrace, if for no other reason than that it reaches into the very experience and identity of God Himself. It offers us the only way out of the impasse which polarises us in our mission between those who are doggedly persevering with their affirmation of revealed truth, and those who identify with the post-modern in too uncritical a way and find themselves letting go of the absolutes. In the dynamic of creative tension, new ways of being Church can emerge, different models can be seen to be appropriate in different contexts, new ways of understanding hermeneutics and epistemology can be affirmed, and we can be set free from our bondage to inherited ways. If there is no single way of being 'Church', and particularity and plurality have always been integral to the nature of the Church, then we can be adventurous in our contextualisation, not afraid of the questions and ambiguities that will arise, taking risks of faith as we humbly engage with culture. The secret is to recognise and accept the tensions as genuine paradoxes, and work for a creative integration of perspectives which maintains the integrity of each. Is integration possible in a wholistic view of mission which affirms both evangelism and social transformation, spirituality and humanisation, word and deed, boldness and humility? If it is not, we will be for ever stuck in our polarisations and lose a great opportunity for the gospel as the agenda for a post-modern world bewilderingly unfolds around us.

The Revd John Corrie is Tutor and Lecturer at All Nations Christian College.

34 Kuzmic, P. 'History and Eschatology: Evangelical Views', in Nicholls, B. (ed), *In Word and Deed*, Paternoster, Exeter 1985: 'Evangelicals seem to find it hard to think in dialectical terms and can hardly endure to live with unresolved questions and amidst tensions' p 148.