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# Book Reviews

**Sarosh Koshy, *Beyond Missio Dei: Contesting Mission, Rethinking Witness* (Postcolonialism and Religions), Palgrave Macmillan, 2022. 392 pp. \$139.99. ISBN-13: 978-3-030-82067-1.**

In *Beyond Missio Dei*, Sarosh Koshy highlights the problematic aspect of understanding Christian mission as *missio Dei* and offers the notion of witness as an alternative path toward a postcolonial mission. In chapter 1, Koshy introduces his work, presents key conceptual elements, and summarizes his proposal. In chapters 2 and 3, he situates his work in the Joban tradition—the biblical tradition around the Book of Job—to then provide the main arguments against the *missio Dei* in chapters 4, 5, and 6, arguing in favor of the notion of witness as well. In the final chapter, chapter 7, Koshy offers the conclusion of his work. Since *Beyond Missio Dei* is an extensive, comprehensive, and complex work that engages with many theological, biblical, postcolonial, and poststructuralist proposals, I will focus here on Koshy's main argument and the possible avenues that it opens to rethink mission from the Anabaptist tradition.

For Koshy, the notion of *missio Dei* has been used to present Christian mission as a task performed primarily by God and, therefore, as an endeavor at the center of God's salvific project, in contrast to other notions of mission that seem to focus on the church's expansion. Hence, the notion of *missio Dei* aims to understand Christian mission as God's sending of the church to the world as a sign, foretaste, and instrument of God's reign. In this regard, says Koshy, the notion of *missio Dei* has helped to clean the Christian mission's damaged appearance, from a self-righteousness and arrogant church-centered enterprise to the embodiment of God's salvation in the world. However, Koshy claims that the *missio Dei* still entails a very problematic engagement with the world (5–7). The fact that God is now the protagonist of mission—after shifting the Christian mission as the church's enterprise to God's—has not implied a substantial change in the notion and practice of mission itself but has only resulted in a different perception of mission and a mere adjustment of missional strategies (83). In this respect, Koshy argues, the main problem with the notion of *missio Dei* is that it does not question the traditional understanding of mission as an overarching mission.

Within an overarching mission, says Koshy, Christian mission is still conceived as a mandatory and non-negotiable enterprise that consists of sharing the Christian faith and transforming the world, regardless of any contextual factors or historical situations that would require revising or even holding the

missional task. In this regard, Christians ought to engage in mission repeatedly and indefinitely, and mission itself becomes an unquestionable law that could be nominally satisfied and mechanized regardless of its negative impact on other cultures, religions, and individuals. In the end, since the notion of *missio Dei* still entails an understanding of mission as an overarching mission, Koshy underscores that it becomes just another missional model that claims to be fully in line with God's goal for history. In that respect, it prevents deep engagement with the missional context and an equal relationship with individuals and communities in that context. For Koshy, the notion of *missio Dei* has shielded the church from questioning all missional endeavors, eliminating missionary reflexivity, and ultimately putting the Christian mission at risk of becoming another invitation for colonialism and tyranny (159–63, 282–87).

Koshy states that the notion of *missio Dei* is inconsistent with the Christian faith due to its overarching character. Therefore, he proposes witness as an alternative “mission.” For Koshy, the very process of becoming Christian bears witness to God since it highlights God's invitation to humans to become Christ's disciples. In this regard, a key element in his proposal is the idea that no one can actually become Christian and be such after that since becoming and being Christian is better understood as discipleship, a journey of faith and hope that no one can claim to have finished or accomplished. In the same vein, Koshy underscores that only God can direct human endeavors toward the eschatological end. Thus, disciples can only bear witness to God's goal of history. In the end, says Koshy, witness is a matter of God bearing witness to Godself on who God will be, a “powerful magnet” that continually draws new disciples who will then be invited to the continual process of “becoming” witnesses themselves.

In a powerful statement, Koshy specifies that even God cannot be perceived as preoccupied with a singular overarching mission of certain goals and transparent methods because this would restrain God from reflexivity, domesticating the living God and ultimately distorting the Christian understanding of the Divine. In the same way, disciples' witness can only be sustained in reflexivity, which includes the ability to discern God's precepts within the specific disciples' contexts, considering its challenges and potentials (7–14, 35, 283–84). In this respect, says Koshy, “the notion of mission can only be conceived and configured in a limited, secondary, or penultimate sense, and it can only be as a way to carry out the specific goals that express the significant witness that is relevant at a specific historical time and space” (185).

In Koshy's view, this notion of witness follows the Joban biblical tradition because the Book of Job for him must be read as “God's caution against the simplistic quest for well-defined eschatology and the designing of a self-assured praxis at arriving at any of the imagined eschatology” (67). Within the Joban tradition, the call to repentance that leads to conversion is a call that “begins with the problematization of an ongoing praxis and embracing another praxis

that appropriately and adequately helps bear witness to the different modes of becoming that an individual or a community testifies to have initiated” (68). In this regard, Job offers his witness by testifying to the presence of God in the world despite the absence of God in his life. This posture is similar to that of the crucified Jesus himself and also to that of his disciples, who are continually becoming Christians and cannot be anything more than God’s witnesses amid the many occasions of God-forsakenness (269).

As an Anabaptist Christian, I welcome Koshy’s notion of discipleship as a never-ending process of “becoming” Christian, especially in connection to challenges that this understanding of discipleship could entail for the notion of *missio Dei* and other missional paradigms. Koshy’s interpretation of the “Sermon on the Mount” is also especially significant for Anabaptists (285–308), not only because of its commonalities with some Anabaptist interpretations of the text but also because it offers a missional reading of the Sermon and not only an ethical one—a reading against a mechanized overarching mission.

Because *Beyond Missio Dei* is extensive, comprehensive, and complex, the book is unclear and confusing at some points, especially given a lack of explicit connectors between the different sections and the many ideas, topics, and authors that this work presents in order to sustain the main argument. However, I receive *Beyond Missio Dei* as an important invitation to engage with thinkers and proposals that are often outside and beyond Anabaptist main interests. In this regard, Koshy’s conversation partners—such as Derrida, Spivak, Deleuze, and many others—could help Anabaptist theologians develop a radical theology of mission centered in witness, one that could be intentionally Anabaptist and, because of that, different from other theologies of mission.

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**Matthew C. Clarke, *Disrupting Mercy: The Gift of Extreme Kindness Motivated by Compassion*, Newcastle, Australia, Turning Teardrops into Joy, 2022. 337 pp. \$17.50 USD. ISBN: 978-0648724827.**

The room was small and smelled like burnt coffee and secondhand clothing. I found a seat on a worn couch, set down my coffee cup, balanced a notebook on my knee. I looked around sheepishly, not quite sure what to expect at my first