

Discipleship: Marked for Mission

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... mission ... is prior to the church, and constitutive of its very existence.

Introduction

Bevans and Schroeder have written 'the book after Bosch' on mission. Their volume, subtitled *Theology of Mission for Today*, provides an overview of mission theology and mission history. It identifies six key constants of Christian faith (Christ, church, eschatology, salvation, anthropology, and culture) while considering the variety of ways in which faith is expressed in changing historical and geographical contexts (though three enduring perspectives are identified, called, simply A, B, and C types but corresponding loosely to so-called 'conservative', 'liberal' and 'radical' theologies).

In this chapter I bring the five marks of mission into conversation with Bevans and Schroeder's six constants of Christian faith and relate these to the particular tradition which is where, I propose, the three enduring but changing A, B, and C perspectives are sited. Discipleship is therefore the key site for working out our faith in contextual practice.² My proposal is that we are 'marked for mission' in so far as our discipleship commits us to the kind of daily lifestyle which the five marks of mission outline and only in this lived expression are the constants of faith and traditions of truth and unity truly known. Using Bevans and Schroeder's three types this would offer three different ways in which the five marks of mission could be used as identifiers of true discipleship. The question for Anglicanism is whether it has sufficient clarity about its own tradition of truth and unity for it to be able to say what is recognisably a 'holy' discipleship and what might therefore be outside the range of acceptable diversity. I affirm the positive role that the proposed Anglican Covenant could play in answering this question, making some suggestions about how the draft could be revised.

Mission first

Bevans and Schroeder do not compromise on the priority they give to mission. It is striking that two Roman Catholic theologians should use the kind of phrases with which this chapter begins or that they should also write 'Mission might also be called the "mother of the church"' (p. 11)! This missionfirst agenda sets the tone for the whole book: 'All theology ... must be missionary theology' (p.1). In its ecumenical breadth and critical depth. *Constants in Context* offers a great encouragement for all Christians seeking to engage with the 'new mission' agenda of the twentyfirst century. This missionfirst agenda is the chief marker of discipleship in today's world and, viceversa, makes clear that all mission should have discipleship as its intended (even if indirect) outcome.

From this perspective the five marks of mission gain a significance which helps to place them in the right relationship with other dimensions of Christian existence. This is necessary because,

notoriously, the five marks do not refer, for example, to Christ or to the church. In other words, the five marks necessarily require a broader framework in which to explore how they can be used to become the markers for those who, as disciples, follow Christ in the fellowship of the church. But once given this framework the markers can also then help to give shape to the Christian life in a way that allows discipleship to be wider than the church and encourages followers to express a mission spirituality rooted in the ultimate significance of Jesus for the whole world.

The constants of mission

The constants of mission that Bevans and Schroeder identify can be interpreted as providing two sets of three constants: Christ, eschatology, and salvation; and church, anthropology, and culture. The first set determines the theological existence of Christian life; the second set seeks to explore what that might look like in context. Given that it is in Christ's mission that we see the mission of God revealed and enacted, and taking for granted that the church is given to Christ in the Spirit for God's mission, these two sets of constants become critical for enabling the five marks of mission to be effective in identifying the life of Christian discipleship.

For example, eschatology and salvation are important for the motivation and therefore the expression of mission and its outcome in discipleship. To illustrate this point, take the way that the variety of views on the 1,000-year reign of Christ, as found in the book of Revelation chapter 20, have influenced mission.⁴ For postmillennialists the reign of Christ would begin after 1,000 years (or more) of a golden era of church history. They were optimistic about the unfolding of Christ's Kingdom; mission is all about drawing people into this Kingdom culminating in Christ's return. For premillennialists Christ's 1,000-year reign is yet to start and it will begin with judgement and only those who have responded to what Christ has done on the cross will be saved. Mission is about getting as many as possible into the Kingdom through preaching the Gospel. These two different perspectives would affect any outworking of the five marks in the life of discipleship, encouraging on the one hand a more holistic approach to Christian existence and on the other an urgency to get the message of the Gospel across in preaching and teaching. Without unearthing some of these deeper theological constants, the five marks lack credibility as markers of genuine discipleship.

On the other hand, an understanding of anthropology and culture are important for showing how mission can take a variety of forms as the church becomes inculturated in the life of a people and in a place. Here the relationship between education and mission comes to mind. For some Protestant British mission perspectives the education of those who had not yet heard the Gospel was essential in order that they might understand it properly. In other words, the view of humanity that underlay this approach, deemed it necessary for people to develop more fully a rational capacity in order for them to become truly Christian.

Such a view presumes the preeminence of the culture from which the missionaries are coming. It was the breakdown of such cultural prejudices that the encounter with other cultures gradually made possible as both sides of the translation of the Gospel from one culture to another slowly contributed to the process of the Gospel being truly inculturated. Without an awareness of this kind of concern, once again, the five marks of mission can be used in a pragmatic manner to affirm all kinds of mission practice and therefore fail to become markers of true discipleship. Unconsidered views of humanity and culture need to be unearthed so that the process of discipleship becoming a contextual practice allows for the fullness of Christ to be seen transculturally and in diverse 'local human contexts.

A, B, and C perspectives

The three perspectives which Bevans and Schroeder identify (drawn largely from the typology developed by Justo Gonzalez) each get established early. Type A is associated with Carthage and Tertullian, Type B with Alexandria and Origen, and Type C with Antioch and Irenaeus. Each type evolves but each has an enduring perspective that has been projected into modern times; representatives of each type would be John Paul II, Rahner, and Gutierrez, respectively.

Each type adopts a variety of angles on the six constants. For example, Type A maintains throughout its history a high view of Christ in which the humanity of Jesus and the historical Jesus take second place to the divine and eternal. With regard to the church, Type A gives preference to the institutional and the hierarchical, drawing a close relationship between sacramental practices and the clergy in the outworking of mission. The law, order of the church, is how the Kingdom of God is known and how the revelation of Jesus is to be interpreted for salvation. In relation to two other constants, Type B theology offers another perspective. For example, the eschatology of Type B tends towards a realised eschatology: the Kingdom has arrived, we just need to discover more of what this fullness of life is about. There is a high value given to reason and so to the 'analogy of being' or its modern equivalent of the analogical imagination. This is then seen to imply, in the constant of anthropology, that humanity is always educable as grace builds on and perfects nature, and as mission engages with the depths of a culture in the development of a society. Bevans and Schroeder suggest a connection here with Henry Venn's three-self approach to mission, a connection that is strengthened as this model also develops to include the fourth self of self-theologising (p. 60).

Then in Type C, in relation to the constants of salvation and culture, we see another perspective. For this theological perspective salvation is about more than saving the person for a future state of new creation, it is also about the healing of creation as a whole. Salvation is the reconciliation of all things with all things in being reconciled with God. Questions of injustice arise here, so that it is no surprise to find that, in relation to culture, Type C prefers a countercultural mission that challenges any form of captivity of culture to sin. So mission is a praxis of liberational action that unmask the ambiguous nature of culture and explores what a just or truer society might be.

Without working through the details of each of the constants in each type, with their variety of historical and geographical expressions, it is not possible to appreciate the subtlety of Bevans and Schroeder's unfolding overview. So in what follows I offer their outline summary of what the three types have to say about the nature of Christian mission as each perspective endures but develops in relation to each constant. •

Type A key word. Law:

Mission within the context of Type A theology, therefore, might be characterized as the effort to save souls and extend the church. Without the saving knowledge of Christ, offered by the church, human beings cannot be saved; without structures of the church, the reign of God on earth, men and women cannot avail themselves of the means of salvation. Salvation is found not in the transformation of the world or its enhancement of the human, but in recognition of the world's transitoriness and the value of eternal life. Culture, although it has no religious significance per se, might be used to make Christianity clearer, to better communicate the gospel or to help Christians better express their faith. But it might also be regarded as something to be exorcised, even eliminated altogether, so that Christ might establish his 'new creation'.

Type B key word. Truth:

Summarizing its implication for mission, we might say that mission is carried out in search for God's grace that is hidden within people's cultural, religious and historical context; it is a call to people to fulfil their deepest potential as human beings allowing Christ to be the answer to their

deepest human desires. Mission, in other words, is an invitation to discover the Truth. In that Truth lies human salvation, already realized and present in human experience and human culture.

The church in mission is the great sacrament of what being human is about; it is a community in which one has access to the mystery and community of God. Contemporary concerns with the inculturation of theology in various contexts find their roots in the confidence in human experience to which Type B theology witnesses.

Type C key word. History:

Mission, therefore, from the perspective of Type C theology is the commitment of Christians towards the liberation and transformation of humanity, indeed, of the world. Christians proclaim Christ as the true liberator and 'transformer of culture'. And the church is the community of liberated humanity that finds its identity in its commitment to a liberated world; it is community in mission. The salvation the church proclaims is a salvation already inaugurated in the saving work of

Christ, yet not fully established as the church works with God in confronting the evil of systems and structures, purifying and perfecting human culture and working for the reconciliation of the entire creation.

The five marks from three perspectives

It will be clear by now that the five marks of mission cannot stand alone as a way of describing the nature of mission. There is a lot more to mission because mission, the mission of God, is that which characterises the Christian life overall. Whether it be in the revelation of Christ or in the life of the church, mission is constitutive and a priori. The most effective way to explore the five marks would therefore be to engage with them from this thicker and richer description of mission: to consider how there might be three different approaches to the five marks from the three perspectives on mission identified by Bevans and Schroeder. These three different approaches might be the basis for different patterns of discipleship which are recognised as such because they exhibit the acknowledged marks of mission with the depth of an authentic perspective.

The Type A version

The five marks, from this perspective, are clearly subordinate to an overarching view of mission that emphasises the authority for what has already been given and been made clear in Scripture and in the tradition of the church. This authority is 'the law' of mission: it provides the *raison d'être* of mission, the limits of salvation, and an interpretation of the means of mission. Thus the first mark is clearly to be interpreted in terms of saving souls: the good news is that people can be saved and become part of God's Kingdom. The overall purpose of mission is therefore to enable this to happen most effectively. The second mark is connected with the importance of the church as the community which, in its planting and upbuilding (through, teaching, baptising, and nurture) identifies the extent of God's saving Kingdom in the world. In relation to the third mark, the purpose of responding to human need is to show the love of God, whose service to the world in the death of Christ is his response to human need and therefore the basis for fellow human response to need. The fourth mark acknowledges the place of wider society, but in this type all cultural and social human forms are necessarily going to exhibit the sin which characterises humanity, making necessary God's rightful judgement of injustice and the importance of Christian witness to an alternative social order. The last mark opens mission to the widest reality of existence yet in this perspective the ambivalence about the transitory

nature of creation and the hope of a new creation make commitment to environmental mission a matter of symbolic action rather than the coming of the Kingdom of God.

The Type B version

In this perspective the first mark of proclamation is more like a dialogue in which proclamation is one side of a conversation with experience, other faiths, or uncertainty, all in the quest for truth. There is confidence that somehow God's Kingdom is already present and it just needs to be unveiled through the catalyst of sharing the good news about Jesus. The second mark of mission is therefore in this same vein, so in this perspective there would be a more open approach to who is in, or out, of the church; and the church itself would not identify the limits of salvation. The third mark, of loving service, would be interpreted as connecting to the real depths of human need which is the fulfilment of desire in the hope that the relief of human suffering would lead to personal and social development and transformation. The fourth mark would, in this perspective, be seen as an opportunity to advocate for truth: to reveal false consciousness and to encourage right action in the face of injustice so that a society, more in keeping with the sacramental expression of humanity in the church, might result. The last mark of mission would be interpreted as a way of highlighting the sacramental nature of the whole of creation in revealing the truth about the nature of God's love and commitment to restore the whole creation, and our part in cooperating with him in this, the widest expression of the *missio Dei*.

The Type C version

For Type C, proclamation is about making known God's ongoing transformation of the world in history, making clear that this transformation touches the whole of reality and is not just about personal salvation but the ultimate significance of Jesus-the-transformer of all things. The second mark is therefore to be understood in terms of helping believers to become a community of reflective practitioners who, in relation to marks three, four, and five, seek to live a life of praxis that reflects the transformation seen in the life of Jesus and now continued through the Spirit in the lives of his followers. This means that serving human need, engaging with culture, and seeking to safeguard the environment are valuable expressions of the mission of God so that the restoration and reconciliation of the whole of creation, already begun, will be completed in the culmination of history in the coming of Christ.

Marks and discipleship in Anglicanism: 'Holy' mission

These three different perspectives on the five marks of mission not only show the need for a framework for the marks of mission, but in their diversity also highlight the need for them to be grounded in a tradition of discipleship that offers guidance about priorities and limits. The Anglican way of being a follower of Jesus may, at first sight, be an unlikely candidate for providing this kind of help. However, the first thing to note is that any interpretation of discipleship with the kind of range of perspectives outlined in the three types is going to have to be a generous one! In this sense, Anglicanism qualifies, having within itself representatives of all three types as serious as each other in pursuing an expression of discipleship that is sincere in its quest for holiness.

So while there may not be an agreed common way to describe the Anglican approach to discipleship, let me suggest that there are some commonalities in the quest for grounded holiness that, if connected to a strengthening of the way the Anglican Communion is living as a family of churches, may be useful. This approach depends on an understanding of Anglicanism that would allow it to be seen as traditions of diverse spiritualities and theologies that, even in their divergence, share enough constants of faith to offer mutual recognition and respect. That the current climate in Anglicanism seems to show little evidence of this reality, belies the fact

that there is still a serious engagement across significant differences which are being sustained in Anglican conversations in a way that might not be possible in other communities.

In *Love's Redeeming Work: The Anglican Quest for Holiness* Geoffrey Rowell, Kenneth Stevenson, and Rowan Williams have explored the resources for sustaining an Anglican approach to holiness. They propose that there exists across the centuries, among the proponents of the different doctrinal perspectives in Anglicanism, a common concern, i.e. that for those who have contributed and developed this Anglican practical holiness 'thinking about God was closely bound up with thinking about how human beings became holy, came to show in their lives the grace and glory of God'. This seems to imply that 'If holy lives are recognizable, there is a prima facie case for believing that some kind of unity in doctrine is being taken for granted; and the job of theology will be to draw out what that might be, rather than to clear up all possible controversies before anyone is allowed to recognize holiness.'

This practical optimism about an organic unity is, however, fed by some interesting resources. Firstly, the authors suggest there is an Anglican emphasis on scepticism which has its roots in the Reformation understanding of fallen humanity but also in an uncertainty about the institution of the church. Such scepticism has resulted in a reticence: spiritual truth always has a certain hiddenness even in the most exuberant form of spiritual renewal. Given this, those who dedicate themselves to foster and nurture such hiddenness are a welcome part of the church community: the monastic and mendicant orders and the evangelical associations for renewal and mission. Yet such emphasis on the empirical nature of discipleship has also found itself co-opted into a form of liberalism cut loose from its moorings in the discipline of community and prayer. This was made possible when, what authority the church had in relation to providing a spiritual centre to the nation, began to fade, as church and state each developed their uses for Enlightenment thought. Yet when empirical liberalism becomes experientialism the possibility for recognising holy lives is lost the constants of faith are denied and the diversity of perspective becomes an intolerant requirement.

This has led many to suggest that the Western contribution to Anglicanism has run its course and that any hope for the future of the Communion now lies with the South: 'There is a widespread perception that the Anglican Communion needs to grow beyond its historic ethos into a more consistently biblical and evangelistic identity; though there are other voices in the Communion that argue for a new reformation infinitely more radical, a revitalizing of the entire tradition, perhaps even of conventional language of belief in a God independent of the universe or of the thinking mind. There seems no obvious way of bringing two such diverse perspectives together.'

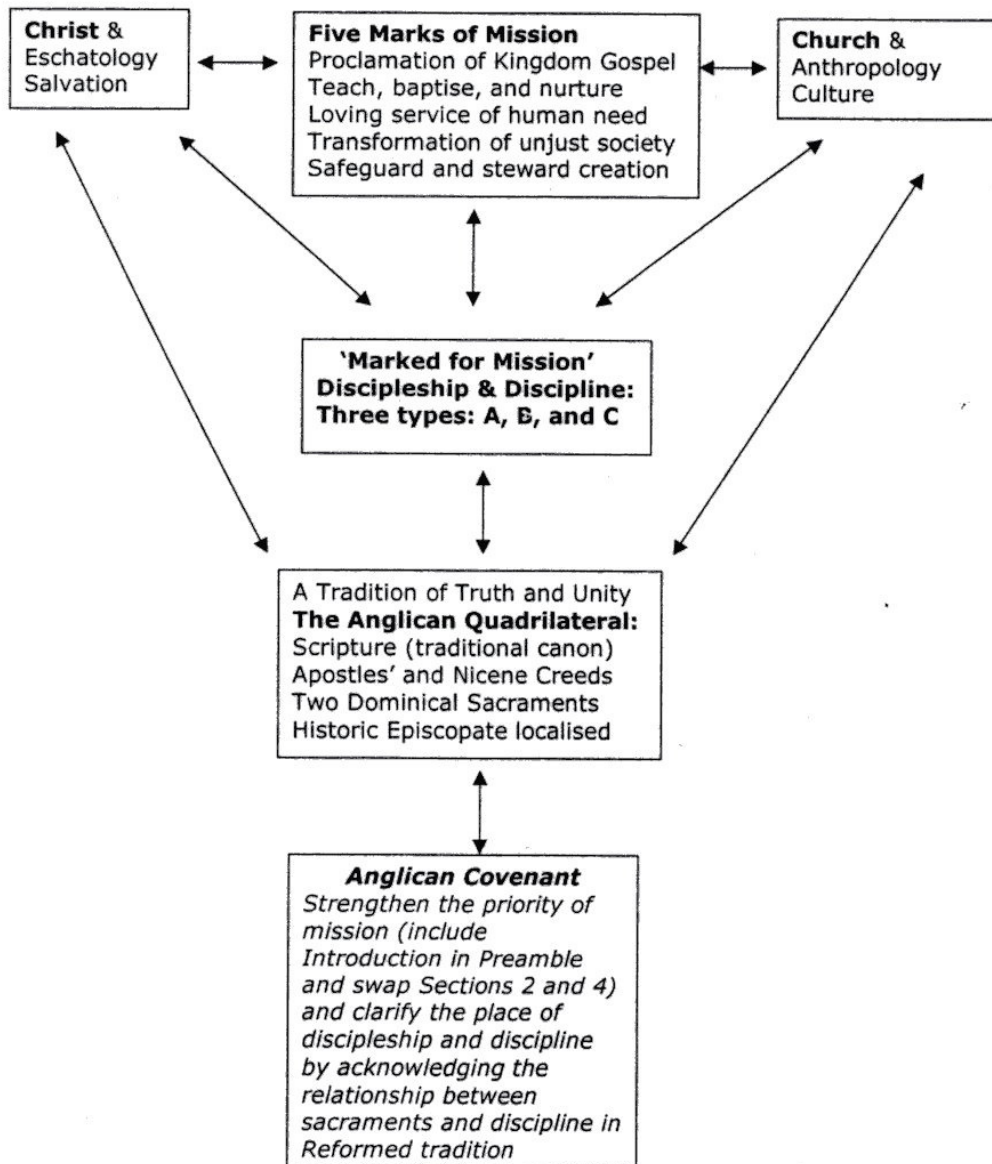
The authors of *Love's Redeeming Work* are under no illusion that, 'Without the structures of both discipline and doctrine, "spirituality" can be vacuous and indulgent.'⁸ In other words, if there is an abandonment of what can commonly be recognised as holiness in the constants of faiths, then there is a fundamental shift beyond the range of different perspectives. It is their hope that in bringing the rich resources of the historic tradition of Anglicanism into conversation with the multicultural environment of the Communion, there might some kind of mutual ressourcement an interchange in which there is a building up of the Body of Christ for its edification in mission. Their hopes are grounded in a genuine fact: that the Anglican approach to holiness fuelled the mission societies and churches which planted and fostered the Communion and which still seek to sustain the Communion in mission today.⁹ Thus the Evangelical revival and the Oxford Movement were spirituality traditions that, though taking different perspectives, led to vital and transforming mission and, in today's context, find themselves sharing a common concern for holiness with those who might be called liberal or radical Anglicans who also share the Anglican tradition of holiness. The Anglican covenant: truth and unity in mission However, it is clear that in a tradition of spirituality like Anglicanism more is required than holy reticence and mutual recognition of holy lives. This recognition has emerged 'accidentally' through the crises that have sometimes beset the family of churches that have become the Anglican Communion. Following the Colenso crisis in South Africa in the mid

1800s, which, interestingly, emerged out of the mission context where the range of diversity of doctrine was in question, a pattern for handling disputes around truth, and a simple framework for Christian unity, emerged. The pattern was the gathering of bishops at Lambeth to hold counsel with each other under the leadership of the Archbishop of Canterbury what we now call the Lambeth Conference. The framework, for how Anglicans and others could recognise each other as ecclesial communities, was the Anglican Quadrilateral, which proposed that churches which accepted the authority of Scripture, the tradition of the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, the centrality of Baptism and Holy Communion in the life of the church, and the leadership of the historic episcopate locally adapted, could recognise each other.

It seems that the range of diversity in discipleship, now being proposed in Anglican churches, requires a further development in this tradition of truth and unity. This further development is the proposed Anglican Covenant. Fundamentally, what this Covenant does with the pattern and framework of Anglicanism is to develop the conciliar nature of the Communion.¹⁰ In other words, where there is a tradition of holy reticence that relies on mutual recognition of holy lives, there must also be a way of stating the centre and limits of truth and unity. The great advantage and the weakness of Anglicanism, is its ability to adapt to any context and therefore to express a range of theological viewpoints in a variety of patterns of discipleship. But without a way of addressing the truth of discipleship and the discipline of unity, there is the grave danger that the constants of faith are abandoned in the process of contextualisation.

The Anglican Covenant seeks to go beyond the Quadrilateral's minimalist requirements and also seeks to clarify the nature of conciliarism. These developments are an attempt to sustain the faithfulness of Anglican commitments to the constants of faith that, if abandoned or so reworked in contextual expressions, become sub-Christian. The ultimate significance of Jesus for salvation and for the future of the world is unquestionable; and the place of the church as God's fellowship for restoring humanity and redeeming culture cannot be denied. A Covenant which affirms these kind of constants would be a great utility to a tradition, like Anglicanism, whose way of discipleship is resourced by holy reticence and a mutual recognition of holy lives. For this to happen, however, the Covenant would need to have a pattern that does indeed have a mission-first architecture. God's mission and the five marks of mission need to be the chief concerns that the Covenant seeks to promote. In support of this, there needs to be a clear affirmation of the constants of faith and an outline of the conciliar way of dealing with the local expression of discipleship in context. The current draft of the Covenant (see Appendix 1) could be revised to make this mission-first agenda clear. In simple design terms, the Introductory Statements about the narrative of God's mission in the world as revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ and sustained by the Holy Spirit need to be incorporated (something like this was in the original draft but needs integrating in the Preamble). Secondly, the layout of the Covenant should be altered so that Section Four, on the Five Marks, is swapped with Section Two, which is about some of the constants of faith. This would then allow the positive and visional aspects of the Covenant to become the key foci, offering a generative and missional centre for life in the Communion. The commitment to truth and unity, in later sections, would then be seen to serve the purpose of mission while allowing for a range but a limit to diversity. These simple proposals make possible the rediscovery of the resources of Anglican discipleship as these have emerged and are developing in an intercultural context.

Discipleship that is consistently biblical and has an evangelistic identity will need to be resourced in a new way in the emerging Anglican Communion. The contributions of this book are one offering in that direction, representing a new era in which there is a remaking of Anglicanism for the new mission of the twenty-first century. The five marks are helpful but they will no doubt need further clarification during this period when world mission is undergoing rapid change and the worldwide church is growing.



Discipleship: marked for mission