



Missional Identity of a Parish Church: A Case Study from the Church of England

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ABSTRACT

This essay draws on the typological framework of Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder in *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), to analyse a case study church drawn from the Church of England. It investigates key elements of the theology and life of the church, in particular its implicit eschatology and understanding of salvation, and its approach to evangelism, to identify and establish which of Bevans and Schroeder's models it most closely expresses. This correlation is then used to draw out certain practical implications for the life of the church, most notably how it can more consistently and therefore with more integrity live out its inherent approach to mission. This shows the general practical usefulness of this methodology for other churches in different settings.

KEYWORDS: Bevans and Schroeder, models of mission, Church of England, parish church, eschatology, salvation, evangelism

Different Approaches to Mission

Recent publications such as Andrew Davison and Alison Milbank's *For the Parish*² have made a spirited attempt to halt what the authors perceive as a gradual erosion of confidence in the traditional parish church and its approach to mission within the Church of England.

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2. Andrew Davison and Alison Milbank, *For the Parish: A Critique of Fresh Expressions* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2010).

This erosion is occurring because of the vigorous promotion in some quarters of this and other churches around the world of 'fresh expressions of church', new forms of church life that bear little resemblance to traditional forms. The very critical tone of this book suggests, however, that there is an underlying insecurity about the case being made. Dispassionate and balanced debate has been replaced with polemic in which the reader is asked to make a choice between 'traditional' or 'inherited' church on the one hand and the new 'fresh expressions' on the other. But must the choice be such a stark either/or? Is there not a less fraught and ultimately more interesting question about the relative merits of these different approaches in relation to the differing character and needs of the communities they are serving? Is there not room for both approaches, and indeed other approaches from other parts of the Anglican Communion and the worldwide church, with the key issue being the discernment of which form is right for which setting?

This article is an attempt to present a framework within which to make such judgments. It draws on a recent, widely used and increasingly influential text around the world, Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder's *Constants in Context*.³ It applies their typological framework to a specific case study. This is of a church that in many respects is typical of a large number of parish churches in the Church of England. It falls on the 'traditional' side of the divide that Davison and Milbank present. The essay will establish which of Bevans and Schroeder's models the church most clearly correlates with and, out of that correlation, what lessons can be learnt for the mission and ministry of that church. In particular, it will ask how it can inhabit and express its approach to mission with greater integrity and confidence. The following pages will, by implication, show the general relevance and usefulness of their framework and how, therefore, it can be applied in a range of ecclesial and social settings, helping us move beyond Davison and Milbank's either/or view to an appreciation of *difference* in mission and the way churches can identify and grow in confidence and integrity within their own approach.

Bevans and Schroeder's *Constants in Context* is a successor to David Bosch's great *Transforming Mission*⁴ and balances the Protestant

3. Stephan B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004).

4. David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991). For an introduction and overview see Stephen Spencer, *SCM Studyguide: Christian Mission* (London: SCM Press, 2007).

emphasis of that book with an attention to the history of Catholic mission. They are Roman Catholic authors working in Chicago at the Catholic Theological Union. They draw on recent papal encyclicals as well as the documents of Vatican II. They also draw on recent Protestant statements and authors. Their book is similar to Bosch in that it sees history and tradition as formative of Christian mission. It gives less attention to biblical material, however, only focusing on the Acts of the Apostles as the key text for mission. There is more emphasis on both the Orthodox churches and the Pentecostal churches than there is in Bosch, demonstrating greater awareness of the catholicity of the church in history, across the globe and in a variety of denominations.

Bevans and Schroeder especially update Bosch's final chapter, a long and loose collection of 'elements' of 'an emerging ecumenical missionary paradigm'. They do this in Part III, after the survey of mission history, turning to 'a theology of mission for today'. They distil much recent thinking in missiology by presenting their four contemporary models of the church-in-mission. A model in this setting can be described as a stylized representation of an authentic tradition: it describes a form of mission and ministry that does not perfectly exist in any actual church but which many churches will largely and clearly embody, a form rooted in their history and tradition.⁵ Some churches may embody aspects of all four models but most churches, because of their tradition and the limitations of their setting, will predominantly embody one in particular. The first three are likely to be familiar: they thread their way through all denominations, but with varying emphases in different traditions and in different local churches. The fourth model is the authors' own synthesis.

One of the models is described as 'mission as proclamation of Jesus Christ as universal saviour', or in short the *Salvationist* model. Here the emphasis lies on proclaiming the death of Christ as the means of salvation out of this world and into the safety of the gathered church. It is found in both Catholic and Evangelical and Pentecostal churches. The Lausanne Covenant of 1974 gives a concise summary:

To evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the

5. Bevans and Schroeder are using an approach popularized by Avery Dulles. See his *Models of the Church* (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell, 2nd edn, 2000).

liberating gifts of the Spirit to all who repent and believe. ... evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God. (para. 4)⁶

The emphasis on repentance means there is a clear line of demarcation between those who intentionally gather together as believers and those who do not. This associational model found strong expression in the theology of the Reformed tradition within the Reformation as well as with the Wesleys and the foundation of Methodism and the Evangelical revival across the churches.

Another model is described as 'mission as liberating service of the reign of God', or in short the *Liberationist* model. Here the emphasis is put on social and political praxis to free people from all that enslaves them. It finds strong expression in the Enlightenment tradition within Western Christianity.⁷ Bevans and Schroeder quote an apostolic exhortation from Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (On Evangelization in the Modern World) from 1975, to illustrate it.⁸ This document begins with Jesus' earthly ministry and his preaching of the Kingdom of God, which 'sums up the whole mission of Jesus' and leads to the description of Jesus as 'the first and greatest evangelizer'. This work of proclaiming the kingdom is the most important element of Jesus ministry, and a key reference is to Mt. 6.33: 'seek first the kingdom'. The document goes on to describe salvation as 'liberation from everything that oppresses man' and insists that this includes every aspect of the human person, including openness to the divine.

A third model is described as 'mission as participation in the mission of the Triune God (*missio Dei*)', or in short the *Trinitarian* model. It draws inspiration from the way the word 'missio' was originally used to describe relationships within the Trinity, and especially how the Father 'sends' the Son and the Holy Spirit to the world (as in Rom. 8.3). The word describes a deliberate overflowing of God's life and love into the world: this is the *missio Dei* within which the church is privileged to participate.⁹ The model lays emphasis on communion as being at the heart of salvation, a dynamic communion

6. For the entire statement see James A. Scherer and Stephen Bevans, *New Directions in Mission and Evangelization I* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), pp. 253–59.

7. For some examples within Anglicanism and further references see Stephen Spencer, *SCM Studyguide: Anglicanism* (London: SCM Press, 2010), ch. 10.

8. See Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, p. 305.

9. See Spencer, *SCM Studyguide: Christian Mission*, pp. 9–22.

with God in Christ as his life flows out through his creation and especially between the faithful. It finds particular expression in the Orthodox tradition. Bevans and Schroeder quote a major Orthodox document which bases missiology on Trinitarian theology in this way: God's involvement in history 'aims at drawing humanity and creation in general into this communion with God's very life'.¹⁰

The fourth model is described as '*Mission as prophetic dialogue*'. Bevans and Schroeder describe it as a composite of the other models. So mission must be dialogical in reflecting God's Trinitarian nature, appreciating the dignity of humanity and learning from culture. But it also must be prophetic in speaking for justice and peace, and in proclaiming the Lordship of Christ even if other religions have some 'rays of divine truth'. Mission must be prophetic as well as dialogical, since dialogue is impossible without clearly articulating truth:

Only by preaching, serving and witnessing to the reign of God in bold and humble prophetic dialogue will the missionary church be constant in today's context.¹¹

In many ways this approach reflects what the 'emerging church' movement represents: identifying with and living within postmodern culture (rather than within a distinct ecclesiastical culture), such as in cafes, gyms, coffee shops or schools, but also being prophetic in the way it seeks to serve the poor through acts of protest, soup kitchens, community organizing, campaigns etc. It correlates with some of the nine defining themes in Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger's *Emerging Churches*.¹²

It is important to add that these models should not be completely separated from each other.¹³ A healthy church will express elements of all of them to some extent though, as already mentioned, one will be predominant. This means that for churches expressing the Trinitarian approach to mission, where there is an emphasis on establishing genuine relationship with Christ and with one another, there will also be attempts to reach out to the surrounding community in an ever-widening circle of interaction and response to human need. Service of the world, and with that transformation of the world, will

10. *Go Forth in Peace: Orthodox Perspectives on Mission*, quoted in Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, p. 288.

11. The last sentence of the book, p. 398.

12. Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (London: SPCK, 2006).

13. Dulles emphasizes this point in *Models of the Church*.

follow on naturally. But the difference with 'Liberationist' churches is that the latter have this transformation as their primary objective, and the building up of communal relationships is seen as a means of helping this to happen. 'Salvationist' churches, on the other hand, will put the emphasis on inner personal response to Christ, and will build up good relationships and service of the world as a way of helping this primary objective to come about.

Bevans and Schroeder go on to explore, in detail and at length, how each model handles what they call certain 'constants', which are defined as constant themes which define Christianity wherever it is found. These have been developed from the work of the Scottish missiologist Andrew Walls.¹⁴ The first is the centrality of Jesus the Christ (along with his relation to the Father and the Holy Spirit). The second is described as 'the ecclesial nature of any missionary activity (expressed by fidelity to a common book, a common heritage and a common ritual)'. Bevans and Schroeder then add four more to these two. The third centres on questions of eschatology: when will God's reign be inaugurated fully and how far does the church already participate in it? Fourthly and related to this is the question of whether salvation is about turning away from the world or finding wholeness and transformation within it? Fifthly, Christianity's identity is always determined by its attitude to and understanding of the human, that is, by a particular anthropology: is human nature wholly corrupt or can it establish 'points of contact' with revelation? Finally, there is a constant question about human culture: is a particular culture a vehicle or an obstacle for communicating the gospel? Does it need to be destroyed or transformed or explored by the church in mission?¹⁵ These six constants are then labelled as Christology, ecclesiology, eschatology, salvation, anthropology and culture. They are seen as raising issues and questions which are essential to the continuity of the church and faith in all contexts, while claiming that in different contexts the answers will not be identical. Each model has its own answer or point of view, as it were, to each of these questions.

In the following section the case study will be presented. To help identify its profile we will explore what it says about some of these constants. Two in particular from Bevans and Schroeder will be explored, and a third of a more practical nature will also be examined.

14. See *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), pp. 33–34.

15. See Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, p. 34.

*A Case Study*¹⁶

The church in question serves the central area (parish) of a medium-sized town. The population lives in terrace housing near the town centre, with detached suburban housing and a poor housing estate at one end of the parish. There are two church-supported primary schools (one for 5–7 year olds, and one for 8–11 year olds) in which the clergy have some involvement. There is also a high school and some busy surgeries near the church. Most employment is in light industry and the service sector. There is a nursing home in which a weekly communion service is celebrated. The population is almost entirely white British and mostly of long-standing residence. There is a strong local voluntary sector, represented by active cubs and scouts, sports clubs, brass bands and an annual gala.

The church is near the town centre though separated from it by a busy road. It is a large Victorian structure, built to be the established church of the town, though never as well supported as the Methodist churches of the town, who now have a more visible building next to the bus station. In recognition of the smaller congregations that now attend it was re-ordered a few years ago, with the west end converted into a modern meeting room, kitchen, parish office etc. The east end has retained a fine Edwardian reredos and stained glass window. In the centre, on a platform that extends the sanctuary into the nave, with seating set around in a slight semi-circle, a striking free-standing nave altar provides a focus for the building.

The worship at the church is mainly Eucharistic, with a small choir, servers, and a music group which leads all-age worship once a month. There is a usual Sunday attendance of around 80, mostly older adults with a handful of young families and with a few people with learning disabilities from a care home next door. Many of the regulars are active in local groups and give generously to local and national charities.

The church is also quite well used by the wider community for the occasional offices, especially baptisms and funerals. These often fill the church and are one of the main ways the church serves the wider community. Another way is through support of the two primary schools. Many of the school governors are drawn from the congregation. The pupils come into church on a regular basis. The church runs a number of after-school clubs in the schools. It also runs a small youth club in the church for children who have recently moved to the high school.

16. The following is based on two years of ministry by the author in the case study church and community.

Eschatology

Which model of mission, then, might best fit this not untypical Church of England parish church? As mentioned, Bevans and Schroeder provide six 'constants' or defining issues in the history of the church. These are not so much doctrines as recurring questions which produce different answers at different points. We could examine any of them to see where the church falls within the range of classic answers, but in this case we will begin with eschatology because how a church understands the eschaton (the last things), however this is defined, will influence everything else about its life.

Before starting, though, it is important to clarify what is meant by the point of view of the church here. It is not simply the theology preached from the pulpit. Much of this, after all, is barely remembered by the congregation. It means the recurrent theological outlook that is implicit in the outlook of those who make up the church (which includes the clergy insofar as they bring to verbal expression this outlook). In many respects this outlook will be quite hazy and vague but there are certain distinct features and characteristics (like the outlines of a hill partially covered in cloud).

What of the eschatology of the church? On a scale of options within the Christian tradition generally, at one end must be realized eschatology ('the kingdom is in your midst'); at the other end must be futurist eschatology (the kingdom is coming at some point in the future); in the middle of the scale will be immanentist or inaugurated eschatology (the kingdom has begun to arrive but is still awaited in its fullness).

The Orthodox churches, rooted in the Platonic philosophy of Hellenistic culture, with its belief in the eternal reality of the Forms, are usually to be placed at the 'realized' end of the scale.¹⁷ The Liberation theology of Latin America, with its emphasis on the struggle to bring about justice for the poor and so realize the kingdom in the future, is to be placed at the 'futurist' end, along with Adventist and millenarian churches of a different hue.¹⁸

Where on this scale is the predominant view of the case study church? After two years of exposure to the church I have not come across anything which suggests people have a different view of the future than in the wider culture of contemporary Britain in general. In other words, most of the congregation would be postmoderns in this respect: they are no longer Victorian or Edwardian historicists who see

17. See Spencer, *SCM Studyguide: Christian Mission*, pp. 69–74.

18. See Spencer, *SCM Studyguide: Christian Mission*, pp. 149–52.

human history in terms of progress towards the building of the new Jerusalem on earth. Far from it: as children of the twentieth century with its Holocaust, atomic bombs and ethnic cleansing they recognize that history shows humanity repeating its waywardness and cruelty and selfishness and greed. While they would recognize that humanity makes technical advances, especially over the last century, very few would say the world is getting 'better' or that we can look forward to the arrival of God's kingdom in the near or distant future.

On the whole it is clear the people of this church do not see salvation lying in the future. They have hopes of peace and reconciliation with God and loved ones *beyond death*, but that is different: they look to a kingdom above and beyond this wearisome world. The salvation that really counts, the one that makes a difference to their lives and brings them back to church week by week, is the one they experience now, the one they glimpse and touch and sometimes feel in worship and in the fellowship of the church, the one that gives them a sense of peace and energy for the week that lies ahead.

In this way, then, they are more Platonist than historicist or Adventist: they believe in an eternal salvation above us and over us which we can occasionally access in our daily lives, especially in worship, and which we will enter fully after death, as in Scott Holland's perennially popular 'Death in nothing at all', for example, in the lines 'Life means all that it ever meant. It is the same as it ever was; there is unbroken continuity...'¹⁹

Where does this place the church in relation to Bevans and Schroeder's models of mission? It shows that it is not to be linked with the Liberationist model with its historicist eschatology. It is a long way from that outlook. Should it be linked with either the Trinitarian or the Salvationist models which have a stronger vertical dimension or, in the language above, a stronger realized eschatology? Which is the front runner?

Salvation

Another constant in mission, for Bevans and Schroeder, is the theme of salvation and how the believer receives it. Answers to this question are closely related to eschatology, as they point out.²⁰ But there is a striking contrast between the Trinitarian model and the Salvationist model in the answers they give.

19. Scott Holland did not intend to promote this outlook: he was describing it as one of two contrasting responses to the fact of death. See his 1910 sermon, 'The King of Terrors', at http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_King_of_Terrors

20. Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, p. 35.

In the Salvationist model salvation tends to be presented as an individualized reality: it is something that happens to one person rather than their neighbour, and happens between them and God within 'the secret places of their heart', that is, in an invisible realm. This would be typical of Reformation theology which places a strong emphasis on a person being justified by faith rather than by church membership or by participation in sacraments. In modern Evangelical forms of this outlook it is often expressed as the need for an inner conversion, accepting Christ as one's 'personal Lord and saviour' and being assured of salvation in one's heart. In the Pentecostal tradition this is linked with the baptism of the gifts of the Spirit. The key point here is that you can be saved while the person next to you, even the one with whom you share your home and even your bed, is not.

At the other end of the scale are strongly collectivist views of salvation, where membership of the church is seen as essential to salvation. Drawing on Augustine of Hippo and behind him, Cyprian of Carthage, who articulated the principle '*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*' (outside the church there is no salvation) this view is classically found in the early Middle Ages, where whole villages or clans or kingdoms would be brought into Christianity *en masse* through corporate baptisms. Augustine of Canterbury's mission to Kent, for example, only took hold when King Ethelbert was baptized, followed by his court and then the people of Kent. David Bosch in *Transforming Mission* links this model with the instruction in the parable of the wedding feast where the master tells the servants to 'compel people to come in' (Lk. 14.23). If they do not do so they will perish: so they must be baptized and Christianized for their own good (and whatever is going on in their hearts).

Salvation, then, is as much about the visible world as the invisible world: it encompasses the complete transformation of every aspect of life, from culture and language to politics and economics, as well as religious practices, as the clan, tribe or nation is brought into Rome or Constantinople's embrace and Christendom is formed.

This is not, though, a popular model in the contemporary church and is not included by Bevans and Schroeder in their survey. The one that perhaps comes closest to it is the Trinitarian model with its emphasis on relationship as the key to salvation. It sees the relationships of a community as being at the heart of God's life as the Trinity, and at the heart of the life of the church. The one participates in the other. So salvation cannot be described as an inner or invisible reality known only to God. It is constituted by the whole set of ways in which the people of God interact with each other and with God. But unlike the collectivist view of the Middle Ages it has no place for

coercion: relationships must be freely entered into, with commitment and enthusiasm, with giving as well as receiving. It could be described as a communal rather than an individualist or collectivist approach.

What about the case study? It is a church that does not issue altar calls. Most regular worshippers and most of those who come for the occasional offices were baptized as infants. Most *assume* that everyone who comes through the doors are already Christian. There is little if any overt evangelism. And for those who do not attend regularly, there is an open baptism policy – anyone who wants their child ‘christened’ is welcomed with open arms. Parents and godparents are told that they are going to have to make the baptism promises in the service, but they are not pressed on how far they believe them. The church advertises itself as belonging to the community and that everyone should regard it as their ‘home’.

Clearly, then, it could not be described as an example of the Salvationist model. But nor should it be seen as operating out of the medieval Catholic model: the nostalgically remembered days of the Lord Mayor’s service, when the church was filled with aldermen, councillors and other representatives of the establishment, in which church and town were seen as one indivisible reality, in a Christendom nexus of obligation and duty, have long since gone. It is very clear that people only come to the church because they choose to do so. There are many other ways of spending a Sunday morning, and there are other venues available for weddings and funerals. People who come to the church are freely entering into the network of relationships with congregation and with God, usually with commitment and enthusiasm, freely giving as well as receiving. (Financial giving to the church is higher than it has ever been, in common with many other churches.) So the Trinitarian model, with its communal view of salvation, presents itself as clearly the closest of the three to describing what goes on in this church.

Evangelism

But what about the possibility of Bevens and Schroeder’s fourth model, their ‘prophetic dialogue’. To assess this, let us refer to a different ‘constant’, which is in all the models – though not explicitly identified as such by Bevens and Schroeder – that of the way the church reaches out to the wider community and seeks to win new people to its cause or, in a word, ‘evangelism’.

‘Prophetic dialogue’ expresses a type of evangelism which is not content to leave the church community sitting comfortably within its own four walls but which needs its people to go out and meet other

groups in society, striking up conversation with them and then sensitively but firmly bearing witness to what it believes. This is a kind of evangelism that is not primarily looking for converts but which is interested in sharing beliefs and views with others. Both the words 'prophecy' and 'dialogue' imply that conversation with strangers is the key medium of mission (though prophecy can also include prophetic action). They imply that members of the congregation go into the market place or pub or community centre and strike up open and sincere conversations with whoever is there, sharing views and beliefs in witness and sometimes protest.

At the other end of the scale would be the kind of evangelism that draws newcomers into church, a centripetal rather than centrifugal evangelism, the kind that operates through attracting people towards something they have heard about and want to see for themselves. This was characteristic of the Hellenistic era of the second to fifth centuries, in which the early church drew people into its fellowship through the power and attractiveness of its worship and common life, first in homes and then in the churches and basilicas of the Roman Empire as the church spread around the ancient world.²¹ As Tertullian quotes of observers of the early Christians, 'Look ... how they love one another.'²² Liturgy came to be at the heart of this common life, the practice in which priest and people would draw near to the life of heaven through the Eucharistic celebration in church on earth, above all in the Easter liturgies.

In the modern Western church this approach is seen in churches which set great store on the quality of the singing, preaching, liturgy and social life of the church. In Grace Davie's phrase these are churches which have evolved a strong 'feel good' factor and which of their own accord attract newcomers through their doors. Cathedrals and town centre churches often fall into this category, and also many Charismatic and Pentecostal churches which invest heavily in the quality of the music and the quality of the welcome for those who attend.²³

In all these traditions the strong emphasis on good experience shows that the involvement and participation of the worshipper is valued highly, which shows we are back with the Trinitarian model

21. See Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, ch. 3.

22. In *Loeb Classical Library*. II. *Tertullian: Apology...* (trans. Gerald H. Glover; London: Heineman, 1966), ch. 39, 7.

23. Grace Davie, 'From Obligation to Consumption: Understanding the Patterns of Religion in Northern Europe', in *The Future of the Parish System* (London: Church House Publishing, 2006).

with its emphasis on participation and interactive relationship as the fundamental approach to mission.

Where does the case study lie on this scale? It clearly believes in providing worship of quality, by maintaining one of the best organs in the area, paying an organist to play and lead the small choir and maintaining a peel of eight bells. It invests time and resources in the upkeep of a large and impressive building which is clearly set aside for worship. The liturgy is dignified, ordered and flowing through a regular pattern of prayers, readings and hymns with a minimum of announcements and other interruptions. It is a style of church life that certainly attracts some, and congregational numbers have held up reasonably well over the last few years despite an increasingly secular culture all around. It also invests in a well-organized social life, with dining and entertainment at regular points through the year. Belonging to the church means belonging to a network of relationships that form a friendly and supportive community.

Furthermore the congregation are not in the habit of going out to share their faith with strangers (in this respect they are typical Anglicans). They would not describe themselves as good at striking up conversations about their faith with others in and around the town. The church building, music and bells, worship and social life is left to do the evangelism of its own accord, attracting newcomers through the inherent quality of its life on a centripetal principle.

The congregation do not tend, then, to engage in prophetic dialogue: Bevans and Schroeder's fourth model is not a serious contender. It is the Trinitarian model, with its emphasis on relationship with Christ and one another, communion at the Lord's Table and participation in the divine life of heaven here on earth, that best captures the mission of this church.

Conclusion: So What?

Do these insights change anything?

The answer is that they provide a leverage point, a means of moving the church forward in an effective way. They do this by uncovering the inherent missional identity of that church and therefore *what that church has within itself to become*. It shows, in other words, that it should not attempt to invest a major part of its time and resources in liberationist initiatives, or salvationist initiatives, as these would not sit easily within this identity. If it did decide to launch such initiatives there would need to be a huge shift in the outlook of the congregation, with all the trauma that that implies. Instead it shows that the church

should find better ways of living out the Trinitarian model, of being true to itself, as it were, by removing what gets in the way and strengthening what helps it to fulfil this vocation. This is where integrity in its mission will lie.

How, then, does the Trinitarian model itself challenge this church community to grow in integrity and outreach? Three suggestions come to mind:

(1) In a church which seeks to live within the life of the Trinity, relationships will always be *ends* and not *means*. The relationships of people with people, clergy with laity, congregation with wider community, choir with music group, elderly with children, church with school, and so on, will be seen as utterly important and worth full attention in their own right. In such churches initiatives like mission action plans, strategies for growth, purpose driven aims, will have a place, but a secondary place. The people of the community, in all their maddening and lovable quiriness, will need to come first and be honoured and respected for their own sakes.

But it is easy for such churches to lose this focus. The need for economy and efficiency, not least in the time and activity of those who are ministers within the church, mean that they will not always have 'the time of day' to spend with neighbours and strangers. Churches will often only be 'open for business' when there are enough participants to make this worthwhile. So for much of the week the building remains locked. This means it is rarely open for those who want to drop in on a casual basis, to spend time with each other or just to 'waste time' with God. To an outsider it can easily seem a functional kind of place. The Trinitarian model may be challenging such churches to be more like a home and less like a business. In medieval churches the nave of the building was often a bustling community space for its village through the week: it may be that these kinds of churches need to recapture some of this life.

(2) The Trinitarian model of mission is not advocating relationship in a generalized way: it is not suggesting that whenever we enter into a relationship with someone else we are adequately participating in the life of the Trinity (though it can easily be misread to be saying this). Many congregations have fallen into the trap of thinking that good relationships in general are the goal of mission, thereby losing a focus on Christ, and becoming associations of the like-minded or even a group of friends who run their church for their own socializing. The Trinitarian model advocates not relationship in general but a specific relationship, with the person of Christ, in his life, death and resurrection, and says that when we participate in *his* life we then

participate in the life of Father, Son and Holy Spirit or *missio Dei* which flows out through creation. The model draws attention to the need for us to have an absolute dependence on Christ, so that we become genuinely open to receiving the life that he offers to us.

The danger of churches in this tradition becoming merely an association of friends is a real one. After all, much of the fundraising that needs to take place happens through social committees and the many friendships that sustain groups like that. It is easy for them to think that when enough funds have been raised, and the parish share or quota to the diocese has been paid, the work for the year is done (though paying the share becomes more and more unachievable as levels rise year on year). The challenging figure of Christ can easily be nudged away from the centre of the life of the church. At an extreme, the church could become an ecclesiastical club rather than servant of Christ and his world.

How, then, to keep Christ at the centre? A cherishing of space and silence, a place in which Christ is given the opportunity to make his presence felt, will be crucial: not just the silence that is an absence of noise but a positive or expectant silence, a kind of stillness that allows the Spirit within to pray through the Son to the Father and to make his presence felt through the unfolding episodes of life.

The case study church is good at bringing people together for services and social events, but it is less good at creating such spaces and times when its people can enter and contemplate God's presence within themselves and beyond. It will need to make points in the week when this happens deliberately, but it will also need to create a general attitude of waiting expectantly upon God, so that in Newman's popular phrase 'heart will speak to heart'; or in the language of the Psalmist, the people will be able to be still and know that God is God.

(3) The Trinitarian model recalls the Hellenistic era when the early church welcomed crowds of people through its doors and grew at a phenomenal rate. In many ways the secret of that growth, as the history of the early church attests, was the suffering, persecution and martyrdom of the early Christians. The same observer who remarked on how Christians love one another also added 'look ... how they are ready to die for one another'.²⁴ Before Constantine, persecution was a recurrent reality for Christians.

Today, thankfully, the case study church is not part of a state that persecutes and kills Christians. But it does reside in a culture that is

24. In *Loeb Classical Library*, II, ch. 39, 7.

sometimes hostile to the Christian faith, especially for young people trying to live out their faith in secondary schools and colleges. The early Christians were famously principled in their stand against state idolatry. Perhaps the Hellenistic roots of the Trinitarian model are challenging its adherents to recover something of that principled and self-sacrificial attitude, paying the price where necessary. Then others might begin to take a serious interest in what goes on in church and begin to come through its doors in greater numbers.

For churches embodying this model this will mean occasionally taking a stand in the local political life of the parish and district, standing up for residents in poverty and isolation, such as the elderly on fixed pensions or young families finding it increasingly hard to make ends meet. Church communities will need to respond to these needs in the most appropriate and costly ways. This will be hard, but if a church is fundamentally rooted in the Trinitarian life of God, a life rooted in the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, such political witness will flow naturally from that relationship.

In all of this the priest will have a key role in keeping Christ at the centre of parish life. The building, the ringing of bells, the fellowship, and probably even the services, will carry on whether or not a parish priest is in place. But the constant public representation of Christ's life, death and resurrection, and with that the opportunity to enter into a profound and life-giving relationship with him and with one another, will not happen unless the priest makes sure it does. For those called to this role, it is an enormous privilege as well as a daunting responsibility.

Finally, it is important to add that the methodology of this article is not only applicable to parish churches within the Church of England. As the introduction hinted, Bevans and Schroeder provide a typological framework that can be applied to a wide range of churches across the Anglican Communion and in the worldwide church at large. The process of analysing and discerning the missional identity of churches, recognizing that there are a variety of valid approaches, is one that can happen in many settings, such as in churches committed to salvationist evangelism, or those rooted in a liberationist approach to their society, or those engaging in dialogue with postmodern urban cultures. The type of analysis presented in this article is one that can help these kinds of churches uncover their inherent identity and so come to know the direction they should travel in, if they are to grow in integrity and confidence in their mission.