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Editorial: The Five Marks of Mission: Two Different Models

Jeppe Bach Nikolajsen

In 2018, the Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians (FEET) held a conference on *Christian Identity and Mission in a Divided Europe* in Prague. Around seventy theologians from various parts of Europe participated in this conference. The present issue of the *European Journal of Theology* contains an article which began life as a contribution to this conference, and hopefully more will follow. Let me also mention that the next conference of FEET will take place on 28-31 August 2020, once again in Prague. The theme will be *Discerning the Work of the Holy Spirit in and through the Church*.

In continuation of my opening lecture at the Prague gathering in 2018, I would like to address the main theme of that conference here. Various concepts can be used to describe contemporary Europe. Concepts such as secular, post-secular, multicultural, multi-religious and pluralistic are often applied indiscriminately. It may seem contradictory to designate Europe as both secular and post-secular at the same time. Nevertheless, I do not think this is the case. Because reality is complex and may seem to be contradictory on occasion, it is important to use various concepts and perspectives to understand European societies.

The afore-mentioned conference dealt with the challenges and opportunities which confront the Christian Church against the background of the increasing plurality of European societies in recent decades. For centuries, Christianity permeated most European societies, but since the Enlightenment the Church has gradually lost its central role in many of them. Moreover, in the past five decades a number of pluralisation processes have taken place as a result of migration, globalisation, individualisation, etc. These processes raise several problems, which are often interrelated, for both Church and society. As is well known, these problems are being debated extensively all over Europe today.

It is often stated that recent pluralisation processes imply the loss of the privileged position of the Church in society, and many bemoan this. However, the present pluralistic societal situation also offers important opportunities to the

Church. In the encounter with *the other*, the Church can learn about itself. I am not claiming that the encounter with *the other* is *the* source of self-realisation, but I believe that it can further a process whereby the Church rediscovers itself by reading the Scriptures and by studying its own tradition(s). This means that the present societal situation can help the Church to recover itself and to deliberate on its main tasks in this world.

One of the main tasks of the Church, which seems to become revitalised in a (religious) pluralistic society, is mission. It is not only evangelical Christians who are preoccupied with mission; this is also the case for other Christians. The Anglican Communion has developed five marks of mission, which were adopted for the first time in 1984. These marks of mission were originally described as follows: proclaim the Kingdom's good news, baptise and nurture new believers, respond to human need by loving service, change society's unjust structures, and safeguard the integrity of creation. This can be illustrated as in Figure 1.

If it is true that the Church, in its encounter with the other, can learn about itself, and if the present societal situation contains potential for this to happen, it can direct the Church to return to some of its six classic marks, which express central aspects of its nature and purpose: mission (*martyria*), community (*koinonia*), service (*diakonia*), preaching (*kerygma*), teaching (*didache*) and worship (*leiturgia*). In *Being My Witnesses* (1985), the American theologian Darrell L. Guder presents the thought that the mark *martyria* can function as an overarching mark of the Church, as it can contain the other five marks. Several other theologians have endorsed this suggestion, even though no one has yet outlined a mission model on this basis, as it is done here. If one follows Guder, this means that the other marks of the Church, *koinonia*, *diakonia*, *kerygma*, *didache* and *leiturgia*, give content to and substantiate the concept of mission. This can be illustrated as in Figure 2.

The two mission models which I have outlined above are not mutually exclusive but complementary and can supplement each other. In the recent

past, many have stated that the concept of mission in itself has lost its distinctive meaning because today almost everything seems to have become mission. Both mission models counter this critique by giving the concept of mission character and concrete content.

The second mission model, to a greater extent than the first, makes it clear that ecclesiology and missiology must be understood in light of each other. Stanley Hauerwas has contended that the Church is called to be the Church. Furthermore, he has argued that the Church does not have an ethics but is an ethics. In the same way he has also stated that the Church does not have a mission, but that it is the mission. I certainly concur with such statements, but I believe it is important to be aware that the *missio Dei* and the *missio ecclesiae* will never be

identical. It is true that the Christian Church must be a witness to its Saviour and Lord, and that it is called to embody the mission of God in the world. Meanwhile, it must also point away from itself to Jesus Christ who embodied the mission of God in flawless form. The two above-mentioned mission models can help the Church – wherever it is located in Europe – to live out its calling. However, in the midst of all good intentions of doing so, it must remember that the profound hope of the world is not the Church, but Jesus Christ.

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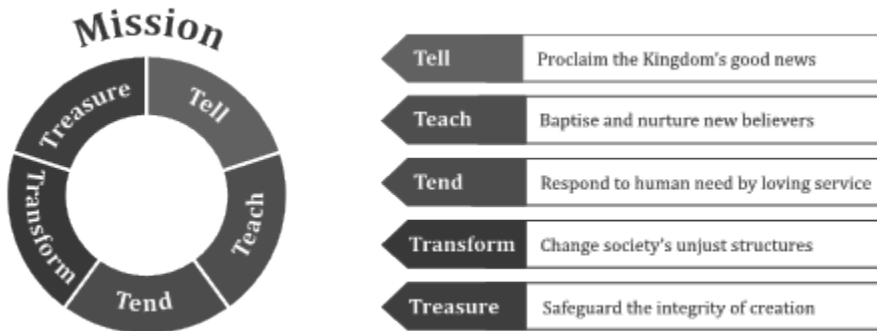


Figure 1.

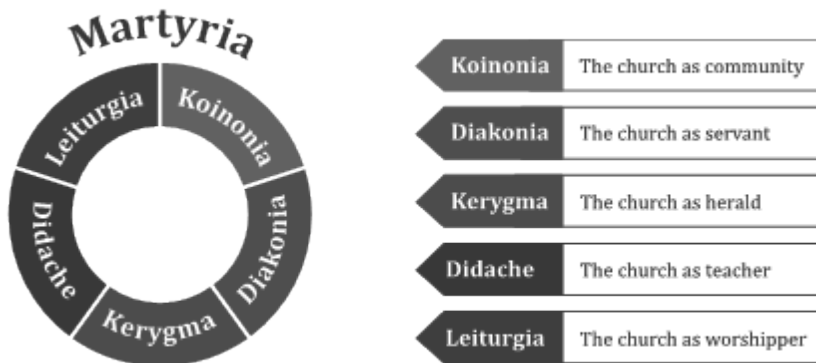


Figure 2.