

REGNUM HANDBOOKS

International Handbook
on Ecumenical Diakonia

REGNUM HANDBOOKS

Series Preface

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REGNUM HANDBOOKS

International Handbook on Ecumenical Diakonia

Contextual Theologies and Practices of
Diakonia and Christian Social Services –
Resources for Study and Intercultural Learning

Godwin Ampony, Martin Büscher, Beate Hofmann,
Félicité Ngnintedem, Dennis Solon, Dietrich Werner (Editors)

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Rudelmar Bueno de Faria, Thorsten Göbel, Cornelia Füllkrug-Weitzel, Isabel Phiri

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Brot
für die Welt



This book is dedicated to

Archimandrite Father Alexi (Dr. Alexi Chehadeh[†]), Syria¹
Moderator Rev. Augustinus Purba[†], Indonesia²

¹ Father Alexi was Director-General of the Department of Ecumenical Relations and Development at the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East (GOPA-DERD), the biggest social diakonia and humanitarian organization in Syria; based in Damascus-Syria. He was a vital member of the Lutheran World Federation's (LWF) Joint Lutheran-Orthodox Commission. Born in Syria in 1969 he was an outstanding leader and established close ecumenical friendships in Germany and much beyond while always striving to serve his people of all different background in Syria. Father Alexi was in close contact with Bread for the World and also with the chief editor of this book project. He contributed an article on Diakonia in the Orthodox Tradition – The Context of Syria and GOPA-DERD – which is part of this Handbook in Section II. He passed away on 15th August 2020 due to Corona Pandemic in a hospital in Damascus.

² Augustinus Purba was an ordained pastor and moderator of the Batak Karo Protestant Church (GBKP) in Indonesia. Born in 1966 he also was Director of the Diakonia Department of his Church (GKBP). Regionally as well as nationally he was known in Indonesia for his outstanding leadership in coping with the humanitarian crisis which followed after the eruption of the volcano of Sinabung on Java. He also presented a new style of leadership in his church referred to as “Participatory Leadership”. He was also a visionary in challenging and empowering his church to be relevant in social and diakonic issues with a “Public Voice”. As a person he was highly respected (“Tender Authority”) and was loved by many. Augustinus was closely related to the fellowship of churches brought together in UEM and was also alumni of the first master program on diakonic management which was held in the IDM from 2011-2013. He was also member of the International Community of Diaconic Management (ICDM). Rev. Augustinus Purba passed away on 19th November 2020 due to impact of the Corona Pandemic.

CONTENTS

Words of Greeting <i>Betty Cernol McCann, Zephania Kameeta, Ninna Edgardh, Rudelmar Bueno de Faria, Thorsten Göbel, Cornelia Füllkrug-Weitzel, Isabel Phiri</i>	xiii
Editorial <i>Godwin Ampony, Martin Büscher, Beate Hofmann, Félicité Ngnintedem, Dennis Solon, Dietrich Werner</i>	xix
Discovering and Learning from the Rich Diversity of Ecumenical Diaconia: Explanation and Meditation on the Cover Design <i>Beate Baberske, Corinna Smok, Achim Weinberg, Dietrich Werner</i>	xxix
List of Contributors	xliii

PART I: THEOLOGIES OF DIACONIA IN DIFFERENT ECCLESIAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXTS

1. Florence Nightingale and Her Pioneering Role for Diaconia and Holistic Care in Humanitarian Emergencies <i>Cornelia Coenen-Marx</i>	3
2. Terminologies, Learning Processes and Recent Developments in Ecumenical Diaconia in the Ecumenical Movement <i>Dietrich Werner and Matthew Ross</i>	8
3. Main Biblical Themes of Diaconia from European Perspectives <i>Renate Kirchhoff</i>	26
4. Different Shapes of <i>Diaconia</i> in Biblical Tradition from African Perspectives <i>Msafiri J. Mbilu</i>	31
5. Diaconia in a Trinitarian Perspective and as Dimension of the <i>Missio Dei</i> <i>Kjell Nordstokke</i>	37
6. The <i>Diaconia Dei</i> : Service of the World and Forms of Diaconal Ministry among Baptists <i>Darrell Jackson</i>	43
7. Towards a Comprehensive Concept of Diaconia: Care, Transformation, Empowerment, Advocacy and Conviviality <i>Wanda Deifelt and Beate Hofmann</i>	53
8. The Transformative Power of Diaconia – Theological Reflections from South Africa <i>Ignatius Swart</i>	62
9. The Transformative Power of Diaconia – an Eight-headed Hydra <i>Cornelia Coenen-Marx</i>	68
10. Vulnerability and the Quest for Healing among Migrants in Cape Town: Theological and Anthropological Reflections <i>Henrietta Nyamnjoh and Andrea Bieler</i>	73
11. Diaconia and the Church – Towards a Diaconal Ecclesiology – Reflections from Orthodox and Protestant Perspectives <i>Stephanie Dietrich and Evangelos Thiani</i>	81
12. Interpretation, Inspiration and Interruption: The Role of Theologies in Diaconia <i>Sturla J. Stålsett</i>	95

13.	Diaconia as Public Theology within a South African Context <i>Nadine Bowers du Toit</i>	105
14.	Interdisciplinarity and Contextuality Analysis in Diaconic Studies <i>Martin Büscher and Dennis Solon</i>	111
15.	Christian Social Service in Countries with a Predominantly Christian Tradition and State Church History <i>Ingolf Hübner</i>	118
16.	Christian Social Service in Minority Protestants Contexts and Secular States <i>Caterina Bain</i>	123
17.	Diaconia as Inclusivity: Living Community with the Excluded – A Biblical Didactic of Inclusion <i>Kambale Jean-Bosco Kahongya Bwiruka</i>	132
18.	The Diaconal Profile of Christian Social Services within Multicultural and Secularised Settings <i>Beate Hofmann and Annette Leis-Peters</i>	139
PART II: CONCEPTS AND PROFILES OF DIACONICAL MINISTRIES IN DIFFERENT WORLD REGIONS		
19.	Patristic Approaches to Diakonia – Diakonia in the Ancient Mediterranean Region <i>John N. Njoroge</i>	151
20.	Social Ministry – Social Work with Drug-addicts in Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches in Russia <i>Tatiana Gorbacheva</i>	159
21.	Diakonia and Social Assistance in the Theology and Practice of the Romanian Orthodox Church <i>Ion Vicovan</i>	163
22.	Christian Social Services in the Serbian Context – A Brief Overview <i>Ilija Jovic and Dalibor Petrovic</i>	168
23.	The Understanding, Roots and Practices of <i>Diakonia</i> in the Coptic Orthodox Church <i>Bishoy Kamel</i>	172
24.	Diakonia in the Greek (Rum) Orthodox Tradition: The Context of Syria and GOPA-DERD <i>Alexi Chehadeh</i>	179
25.	Diaconia in Southern and Central African Christianity <i>Bosale E. Eale</i>	186
26.	Examples and Concepts of Diaconia in Southern African Christianity <i>Willie van der Merwe</i>	191
27.	Diaconia in West African Christianity <i>Confidence Worlanyo Bansah and Edem Dzunu</i>	197
28.	Examples and Concepts of Diaconia in West African Christianity <i>Emmanuel Kwesi Anim</i>	203
29.	Examples and Concepts of Diaconia in East African Christianity <i>Edison Muhindo Kalengyo</i>	213
30.	Diakonia in an Asian Context <i>Victor Aguilan</i>	220
31.	Diaconia and Sustainable Development in China <i>Theresa Carino</i>	229
32.	Diakonia across Borders: Interfaith Cooperation – A Case Study of Shanghai YMCA & YWCA in China <i>Jianrong Wu, Zhaozhen Ma and Ruomin Liu</i>	234

33.	Diakonia in Indian Christianity <i>Sushant Agrawal and Joycia Thorat</i>	240
34.	Diaconia and Conviviality in Central and Eastern Europe <i>Janka Adameová and Tsovinar Ghazaryan</i>	247
35.	Reformulating Diaconia in Western Europe: New Approaches and Theological Challenges <i>Erika Meijers and Heather Roy</i>	255
36.	Diakonia in the Churches of Central America <i>Benjamin Cortes</i>	263
37.	The Diaconal Church in the Public Sphere in the Brazilian Context Today <i>Rudolf von Sinner</i>	269
38.	A Lutheran Theology for <i>Diakonia</i> in North American Contexts <i>Craig L. Nesson</i>	279
39.	North American Diaconia and the Deaconess Movement <i>Jenny Wiley Legath</i>	289
40.	Theological Reflection: Mission and Service of UnitingCare Australia <i>Ji Zhang</i>	297
41.	Diakonia as a Quest for Just and Peaceful Communities in the Pacific <i>James Bhagwan</i>	305

PART III: TRENDS AND CRUCIAL CONCERNS IN DIACONIA

42.	Diakonia and Human Dignity – South African Theological Perspectives <i>Nadine Bowers-Du-Toit</i>	313
43.	Diakonia and Human Dignity – Asian Theological Considerations <i>Dennis Solon</i>	317
44.	Peacebuilding in the Philippines: The Diaconal Engagement of the Church <i>Victor R. Aguilan</i>	324
45.	Diakonia as Peace and Justice Advocacy: A Philippine Perspective <i>Noriel C. Capulong</i>	331
46.	Diakonia in a World of Vulnerability – Some Public Theological Parameters <i>Nico Koopmann</i>	336
47.	Dynamics of Diaconia and Public Theology in the Post-Peace Society of Serbia <i>Rastko Jovic</i>	345
48.	Mutual Learning on Sustainability: Eco-Diaconia in Scottish – Hungarian Partnership <i>Tamas Kodacsy and Adrian Shaw</i>	354
49.	Towards an Eco-Diaconia in a Context of Displacement: Theological Impulses from Adivasi Communities in India <i>Christ Sumit Abhay Kerketta</i>	358
50.	Eco-Diaconia in Southern African Contexts – SAFCEI as an Example for a Multi-Faith Eco-Justice Response <i>Kate Davies</i>	365
51.	Diakonia and the Sustainable Development Agenda – Trends and Crucial Concerns <i>Chad Rimmer and Julia Brümmer</i>	372
52.	Diakonia and Poverty Reduction in Namibia: The role of the Evangelical Church in Namibia (ELCRN) <i>Janine van Wyk</i>	378
53.	Diakonia and Poverty Reduction: Diaconia and the Poor in the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda <i>Mathilde Umuraza</i>	382

54. Poverty in the Midst of Wealth and Social Exclusion as a Diaconal Challenge – Reflections on Responding to Household-debt in the UK <i>Andrew Orton</i>	388
55. Social Exclusion of the Poor Amid a Wealthy Society – Diaconal Challenges in Hong Kong <i>Kenneth Tsang</i>	393
56. Conviviality as a Vision and Approach for a Diaconal Society <i>Tony Addy and Ulla Siirto</i>	399
57. Diaconia of Orthodox Communities in the Context of Migration in Germany <i>Rossitza Dikova-Osthus</i>	412
58. Migrants and Refugees: Voice and Agency. Towards an Infrastructure of Welcome and Hospitality and an Architecture of Advocacy and Solidarity <i>Liberato C. Bautista</i>	417
59. Health and Healing in Diaconia <i>Thorsten Moos</i>	427
60. Healing in the Church in Africa as Diakonal Praxis <i>Philomena Njeri Mwaura</i>	431
61. Health and Healing as Key Concerns in Churches Diaconia in West Africa <i>Godwin Ampony</i>	437
62. Mental Health as a Task of a Diaconal Church at the Local Level <i>Beate Jakob</i>	444
63. Diaconia in Contexts of Traumatization – An Introduction <i>Christine Gühne</i>	452
64. Diaconia in Traumatized Societies: Learning from the Rwandan Context <i>Nagaju Muke</i>	456
65. Diaconia as Peacebuilding and Reconciliation <i>Wendy Kroeker</i>	468
66. Diaconia as Peacebuilding and Reconciliation <i>Vladimir Fedorov</i>	475
67. Diaconia and the Challenge of Fundamentalism and Exclusivism <i>Aled Edwards</i>	481
68. The Need for a Theology of Resilience, Coexistence and Hope <i>Antje Jackelén</i>	485
69. Deliverance, Mental Health, and Prosperity: A Holistic Diaconal Perspective from Indonesian Context <i>Jaharianson Saragih and Parulihan Sipayung</i>	490
70. Contours of Challenges for People Living with Disabilities in Local Churches with Examples from Cameroon <i>Félicité Ngingtedem</i>	497
71. An Ecumenical Diaconal Response to Disability: The Journey of EDAN <i>Anjeline Okola</i>	502
72. The Prosperity Gospel, HIV, And #Blessed: Diakonia as Liberating Praxis in the South African Context <i>Beverly Haddad</i>	510
73. Addressing the Spatial Turn in Diaconia <i>Kaia S. Rønsdal</i>	515
74. Social Responsibility in Monastic Orthodox Religious Communities <i>Vladimir Fedorov</i>	520

75.	Social Responsibility in Protestant Religious Communities – the Case of Kaiserswerth Association <i>Christa Schrauf</i>	526
76.	Social Services and Responsibility in Christian Religious Communities – the Example of Diakonia in World Federation <i>Sandy Boyce</i>	531
77.	Changing Patterns of the Family – Implications for the Future of Care <i>Cornelia Coenen-Marx</i>	538
78.	Ethics of Diaconia: The Relevance of Good Life, Common Good and Global Justice in Diaconia <i>Johannes Eurich</i>	542
79.	Transformative Diaconia: From Early Christianity to Development Concepts and Economic Globalisation <i>Jerry Pillay</i>	548
80.	Ecumenical Diaconia in the Context of COVID-19 – A Chance for Growing Collaboration between ACT Forums and Churches <i>Corrie van der Ven and Jørgen Thomsen</i>	556
81.	Christian Social Witness towards Polarization, Markets and Money – Pivotal Moments from the U.S. Context <i>Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty</i>	563
82.	Digitalisation in Diaconia – Description and Ethical Reflection <i>Melissa Henne</i>	568
83.	Care and Care Deficit <i>Christine Globig</i>	573

PART IV: MODELS AND METHODS FOR COMPETENCY BUILDING IN DIACONIA

84.	Current State of Diaconia Training with Special Focus on Urban Diaconia in South Africa, USA and China <i>Christoph Sigrist</i>	581
85.	Multi-Rational Management for Diaconic Leadership <i>Martin Büscher and Udo Krolzik</i>	586
86.	Liberation Theology and Diaconia: Methods of Learning <i>Craig L. Nessian</i>	591
87.	Abuse and Misconduct in Church Settings: Learning from the Dark Side of Diakonia History <i>Tormod Kleiven and Matthew Ross</i>	597
88.	Diaconal Church Development in Hong Kong: Theological Grounds, Contextual Challenges and Capacity Building <i>Kenneth Tsang</i>	602
89.	Building Diaconal Leadership in Different Contexts – African Perspectives <i>Bosela E. Eale</i>	609
90.	Building Diaconal Leadership in Different Contexts – Perspectives from the Argentinian Context and the Role of CREAS <i>Humberto Shikiya</i>	614
91.	Training for Social Services in Pentecostal Christianity – Discoveries in Ghana <i>Emmanuel Kwesi Anim</i>	620
92.	Training for Social Services in Orthodox Christianity <i>Vladimir Khulap</i>	628

93. <i>Seeing-Judging-Acting: A Learning Method for Empowerment in Diaconia from a Latin American Perspective</i> <i>Carlos E. Ham</i>	631
94. <i>Methods for Engaging Youth with and for Christian Diakonia: the Case of the Living Generation Church</i> <i>Elorm Nick Ahiale-Mawusi</i>	639
95. <i>Engaging Youth with and for Diaconia in Italy: from Peer Education to Social Work</i> <i>Stefano Bertuzzi</i>	645
96. <i>Applying Liberating Pedagogy in Eastern and Central Europe – Innovative Learning Programmes for Diaconia by Interdiac</i> <i>Oksana Prosvirina</i>	649
97. <i>Didactics of Inclusion: Diakonia as a Round Table</i> <i>Rodolfo Gaede Neto</i>	653
98. <i>Learning Diakonia in Organised Church Institutions – Biblical Principles for Training for Professional Diakonal Work</i> <i>Kambale Jean-Bosco Kahongya Bwiruka</i>	664
99. <i>Christian Social Action and Global Citizenship Education</i> <i>Gordon Zerbe</i>	673
100. <i>Financial Management and Resource Mobilisation in Diaconic Organisations</i> <i>Bright G. Mawudor and Deborah Suparni</i>	681
101. <i>Global Learning for Diaconia – Rethinking Concepts and Praxis</i> <i>Matthias Börner, Lusungu Mbilinyi and Angelika Veddel</i>	689
102. <i>Curriculum Development for Diaconia and Training in Christian Social Services</i> <i>Beate Hofmann</i>	698
103. <i>Diakonic Training in the Ev. Bildungsstätte für Diakonie und Gemeinde (v. Bodelschwing Foundations Bethel, Germany)</i> <i>Jutta Beldermann</i>	705
104. <i>List of Selected Bibliographical Resources for Contextual Diaconal Studies: Textbooks, Articles, Websites</i> <i>Godwin Ampony and Félicité Ngingtedem</i>	710
Preview Regnum Handbooks	714

WORDS OF GREETING

President Betty Cernol McCann

Anyone involved in Christian diakonia soon learns that for such work to bear fruit it must emerge from what is happening on the ground, the result of serious engagement with the needs and aspirations of local people. What is happening on the ground is not the same for all. Even with the best intentions in the world, those who engage in diakonia must enter into the spirit of learning from one another's lived experiences, where sharing insights and wisdom is crucial to a clearer understanding and a deepening of our commitment to effective service.

But what are the lessons to be learned from such active involvement? Which best practices can readily be adapted? What are some sociocultural and geopolitical sensibilities we must take into account in our change processes such that we honour the grace and dignity of all peoples? How are such lessons to be shared with others, beyond the immediate circle of local projects? What are the range of networks and vehicles of communication that can facilitate such mutual learning? Do universities have a role to play in facilitating the development of diakonia awareness and expertise? I hope so.

Silliman University, as a Christian institution of higher learning which includes a theological faculty, is committed to "total human development for the wellbeing of the society and the environment." The International Handbook of Ecumenical Diakonia promises to be an insightful reference for my colleagues and I who continue the search for best practices in Christian social service. The book's cross-disciplinary and cross-denominational points of view offer a multiplicity of perspectives, windows from which readers can peer out across boundaries into the vast, complex and diverse communities that long for improved conditions and the alleviation of suffering and deprivation.

I am confident that this Handbook will be an invaluable resource for students, educators, church workers and researchers as they grapple with community development challenges and collaborate with others in addressing needs across such fronts as health care, politics, ecology, religion and economics.

Betty Cernol McCann, PH.D.
President Silliman University
Dumaguete, Negros Oriental, Philippines

Bishop Emeritus Zephania Kameeta

I am grateful to be asked to write a word of greeting, especially from the United Evangelical Mission (UEM) and Bread for the World. I have so many beautiful memories of the 8 years spent as moderator of the UEM, and the work we did to shape the future of UEM as it is today. Regarding Bread for the World, I would like to extend a token of appreciation for the work, context, and vision of the organisation. I was lucky to be a part of their 50 years celebration when I was invited to Stuttgart among 50 people who contributed. I am happy and appreciate this connection between UEM and Bread for the World, especially in writing and serving together in the publication of such an important and much needed documentation.

The importance of diaconia in our world cannot be emphasised enough, even more so in a world where so many changes are taking place now: migration where people are trying to find safety and a new life, and climate change which is predominantly affecting the poor of this world. Not only in the wider world, but also in Namibia, diaconia is important to reduce the suffering and give support to the poor.

I hope and pray this publication will reach many people and assist them wherever they are to be compassionate and supportive. May it help them in such a way that they clean their emotions and intelligence. Especially during these times where the focus is on hygiene, taking care of their “emotional hygiene” is of great importance. Thus, I hope it will enable all of us to become pro-active helping others.

Hon. Bishop (Emeritus) Dr. Zephania Kameeta
 SWAPO member of the National Assembly first Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Namibia
 The First Minister of the Ministry of Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare of the Government of
 Namibia, Windhoek, Namibia

Ninna Edgardh

We live in a common household, where we need to take care of each other and of the earth, full of living creatures, that is our home. This insight is the basis for the Christian tradition which is sometimes given the Greek name *diakonia*, sometimes summarised as Christian social practice, but also appears under any of a number of possible names. But the names as such are seldom important. What is crucial is the attitude transmitted from Jesus and his followers that we have a responsibility, not only for ourselves, but also for our neighbour, and even more for those who are strange to us, marginal or especially needy. Today, these needy might include climate refugees or animal species threatened by extinction.

It goes without saying that this very basic aspect of Christian faith appears in innumerable contextual forms. Increasingly however, needs are taking the form of global challenges, migrating from context to context. This means teaching on diakonia or Christian social practice also needs to be able to migrate. Diaconia needs to become a globe-trotter.

This very special book can be seen as a backpack, useful for diaconal migrants, wanting to be equipped for the challenges they meet. Concepts, theories, methods, stories and visions are shared by a large number of experienced scholars and practitioners, gathered by the ambition to communicate the mission of Jesus to care for each other and the earth we have been given.

May it be well spread and well read!

Ninna Edgardh, PhD, Chair of The International Society for the Research
 and Study of Diaconia and Christian Social Practice (ReDi) 2016-2020.

Rudelmar Bueno de Faria and Thorsten Göbel

Diakonia, service in action, is at the very heart of ACT Alliance – Action by Churches Together. ACT Alliance is committed to working in a spirit of ecumenical diakonia (serving together). As a coalition of more than 135 churches and church-related organisations working together in over 140 countries, we aim to create positive and sustainable change in the lives of poor and marginalised people. ACT members are united in the common task of all Christians to manifest God’s unconditional love for all people. The Alliance works towards a world community where all God’s creation lives with dignity, justice, peace and full respect for human rights and the environment.

Diakonia is an expression of what churches are and do. The commitment to unity and sharing includes a mission to serve in the world, participating in God’s mission of healing and reconciliation, and of lifting

up signs of hope. Jointly, we are therefore working together through emergency preparedness and humanitarian response, sustainable and transformational development co-operation, and advocacy.

Diakonia comprises and cuts across all of these elements. As the world becomes more complex, churches are called to rethink their ecclesiology, the way of being church in today's context, as they are increasingly facing new emerging challenges, which require an innovative approach to conduct their diaconal work. This goes far beyond the common recognition that churches 'run high quality health clinics and schools and are present in the remotest corners.' There is a rising call for diaconal action to be rights-based, to promote human dignity and work for justice, peace and the integrity of creation. It includes prophetic *diakonia*, denouncing injustice (advocacy) and announcing (actions) the 'good news' – in serving human need, breaking down barriers between people, promoting humanity in justice and peace, and upholding the integrity of creation, so that all may experience 'fullness of life' (Jn 10:10).

Profession of faith requires the rejection of those conditions, structures and systems which perpetuate poverty, injustice, the abuse of human rights and the destruction of the environment. For ACT Alliance, *diakonia is equally grounded in a human rights-based approach*, expressing global solidarity with poor and marginalised people everywhere, recognising their agency and innate human dignity. ACT Alliance advocacy supports and amplifies the voice of all people and communities pursuing their rights and their efforts to hold their local and national authorities accountable for the realisation of these rights and for abuses of power leading to a violation of rights. Therefore, it is important that we keep faith and rights together.

ACT Alliance is rooted in this history of ecumenical commitment for joint social service. As a visual expression, we have embarked together on a process with the World Council of Churches towards *strengthening both the theological reflection as well as the practical application of ecumenical diakonia* since 2014. This would have been impossible without the strong support of ACT Alliance member *Brot für die Welt* in the process, for which we are highly grateful.

Numerous ACT Alliance members have contributed chapters to this volume. It is a witness to the fact that this handbook is a further important contribution to the process and thinking on ecumenical *diakonia*, and to education for diaconal service in its various expressions. *At this age and time, such service is more important than ever.* The COVID-19 pandemic which rapidly swept through the world since early 2020, and the national and global responses to try to contain it, have further brought to the fore fundamental and systemic flaws in global structures and prevalent economic models, spotlighting the pernicious effects of increasing inequality as well as age and gender discrimination. In some countries, Government responses, whether intentional or not, have also served to erode further human rights and political participation, exacerbating the trend of shrinking space for civil society and attacks on human rights defenders, as well as deepening humanitarian crises.

We therefore congratulate and thank our member *Brot für die Welt* on this important publication, and commend it to the ACT Alliance membership and diaconal ministries at large.

Rudelmar Bueno de Faria, General Secretary, ACT Alliance
Dr Thorsten Göbel, Director of Programmes, ACT Alliance

President Cornelia Füllkrug-Weitzel

Diakonia is part of the essence of what it means to be the church. Both the closest neighbour and the distant neighbour far away have been of relevance for the Christian social commitment from the earliest beginnings of the church. The horizon in which the Gospel is communicated is the "whole world", the

“oicoumene” (2 Cor. 5:19; Mt. 18). “All creation” will receive his judgement and righteousness (Ps. 96:13). The extension of love, care and righteousness to people suffering is an eschatological scale as it is Christ who identifies with them unconditionally (Mt. 25:40).

This is why ecumenical Diaconia from the very beginning was also an organic part of the global ecumenical movement. Starting 1922 with the European Central Office for Inter-Church Aid Geneva (Adolf Keller), the international Christian network engaged in Diakonia was continued and enlarged after the catastrophe of the Second World War and provided major assistance to relief and integration work for more than 15 million refugees in Germany (at that time) in the late 40s. It was out of gratitude for this overwhelming experience of having received ecumenical Diaconia by churches in Britain, America, France and even non-western churches in the reconstruction period of destroyed Germany that, in 1954, the Protestant churches of Germany decided to join the Inter Church Aid Office with two lines of engagement, namely “churches helping churches” and the “relief program for refugees and victims of emergencies”. In 1959, the protestant development organisation “Bread for the World” was founded. It understood itself as a key instrument of commitment on behalf of all protestant regional and free churches in Germany for ecumenical diakonia for those marginalised around the world. The history of ecumenical diakonia in the ecumenical movement and the history of Bread for the World were closely interwoven – moving from charity approaches to issues of economic justice, from individual emergency relief to disaster preparedness on global scale, from care to individual victims to advocacy for structural justice, from environmental protection to broad-based concerns for sustainability.

Thus, we are grateful for this joint initiative between IDM Institute, United Evangelical Mission, Protestant University/Kirchliche Hochschule Wuppertal and Bethel and Bread for the World which has produced this valuable resource collection on different approaches to Diaconia and development in many regions of this world and from a great variety of denominational traditions.

The Malawi consultation of the World Council of Churches on ecumenical diakonia in 2014 underlined the need for both churches and ecumenical agencies for diakonia to collaborate together, as it developed a fundamental understanding of the immense resources, assets and gifts that can be shared between the churches and specialised ministries in order to strengthen the common calling for service and Christian witness. This *International Handbook on Ecumenical Diakonia* is a visible expression of mutual learning and sharing of perspectives between churches, agencies and Christian social initiatives on how to give witness to God’s call for justice and human rights, peace and sustainability in this world. We do hope that this Handbook will find many interested readers and will enhance competence building and training for providing new leadership for diakonia, development, political advocacy and lobbying work both in churches and in ecumenical agencies which is urgently needed as never before.

Rev. Dr. h.c. Cornelia Füllkrug-Weitzel, President of Bread for the World
Chair of the Board of Protestant Agency for Diaconia and Development (EWDE), Berlin, Germany

Isabel Phiri

Ever since its foundation in 1948, the World Council of Churches has been committed to the study and advancement of *diakonia*. Its first diaconal project was aiding displaced peoples in the aftermath of World War II. Since then, it has been involved in numerous activities and helped create ACT Alliance to specialise in the important diaconal tasks of advocacy, development and emergency relief.

This handbook is a timely contribution to education for diaconal service. The COVID-19 pandemic has made this even more urgent. Demands on diaconal services will inevitably increase, just as financial,

physical and human resources become ever more limited. This makes education for effective and appropriate delivery of diaconal care of utmost importance.

Cyclone Idai made news headlines in March 2019 when it caused devastation in Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. The headlines soon turned to other events, yet the human impact is still ongoing and will be for many years to come, especially for those who have lost homes, livelihoods and, *above* all, loved ones. Diaconal service for human need – caring in Christ’s name – is more than headlines or short-term expediencies; it is long-term, often unreported and it is also prophetic (addressing the root causes of the broken world). Such commitment requires effective education as well as faithfulness and goodwill.

The World Council of Churches warmly welcomes this publication and is glad to have had a part in its preparation, development and final publication and dissemination. The international perspectives of this book will challenge readers to look beyond local assumptions and horizons. I hope that it will help the processes of training, education and ethical orientation, thereby advancing the concept of *ecumenical diakonia* as we journey together on a pilgrimage of justice and peace.

We congratulate and thank *Brot für die Welt*, *United Evangelical Mission* and *Institute for Diaconia Management* and *Kirchliche Hochschule Wuppertal/Bethel* on this timely and important publication which will also be of benefit to the WCC fellowship.

Professor Dr Isabel Apawo Phiri
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World Council of Churches, Geneva, Switzerland

EDITORIAL: BEING ONE IN CHRIST IN CONTEXTS OF SUFFERING AND INJUSTICE – KAIROS FOR DIAKONIA

Diakonia in Post-Corona Contexts

This volume on Contextual Theologies of Diakonia and Christian Social Services was planned and conceptualised in the historic period before the COVID-19 pandemic. When the collection of essays for this volume was almost finalised, the pandemic unfolded like a wave of a tsunami, first underestimated, and gradually affecting ever more countries in the world, and is currently seen as the biggest and most influential crisis that has affected the world since the Second World War.

The pandemic has hit the world in an unprecedented manner, with major political bodies being overwhelmed by the immensity of the challenges, having to make decisions for which they were unprepared and often forced to act in an unco-ordinated manner. Continuing business as usual no longer worked and many national economies have faced a severe slow down or even disruption: a recession has hit many regions of the world. The model of economic growth without limits and focused on endless progress suddenly came to an unforeseen standstill where the economic consequences of the pandemic often exceeding the health-related consequences in gravity and duration. Earth, nature and climate seemed to have come to a period of enforced, although limited, rest nobody would have imagined would come about this abruptly.

While this book is not about the corona crisis as such, but on the theological foundations, different forms, new trends and educational resources for Diakonia, the pandemic has deepened and reinforced some of the core themes of the church's commitment to Diakonia. This is why the editors have decided to begin this editorial with *ten reflections on the interrelatedness between the corona-pandemic and core issues of ecumenical Diakonia*. This is because several key themes discussed in church-related discourses on Diakonia since decades suddenly have received unexpected urgency and new relevance both on a global as well as regional and national political and public levels:

1. The immense vulnerability of humankind, the need and relevance of care for the sick and the dying, the tragic consequences of a neglect of health systems and underfinancing of public health, as well as the issues of social exclusion and inequality in terms of social security and accessibility of digital communication as well as public support – all of these point to core issues for churches engaged in Christian social services. With this crisis, we have thus entered into a new era of *increased relevance of Diakonia, Public Health and Social Inclusion*.
2. While in the past era of neo-liberal economic policies there was the impression that investment bankers and hedge fund managers are the “masters of the universe”, who can direct and manipulate everything, it abruptly became clear that there are limits to financial and economic power and that there are factors which even the allegedly powerful cannot control. It has dawned on many that those professions which are deemed to have “systemic relevance” are less those who control finances or economic power, but *those who provide care and medical help as well as social support in times of an emergency*. Thus, *Diakonia as emergency intervention and humanitarian assistance* has become relevant and is well within the public focus again. The political primacy of the market seems to be replaced by the primacy of health. This is a cornerstone to rebalance the importance of different activities for humans living together in our world today. Diakonia should not become tired of raising its public and prophetic voice in this regard.
3. A reordering of our priorities and our key objectives for development co-operation in the context of the SDG goals proves to be one of the key lessons from the pandemic. What counts is not only the economy of fast financial gain and success. It is the reliability, resilience and strength of an *economy of care*. Those who work in the area of medical, psycho-social and spiritual care deserve an appropriate degree of political support and social recognition which is often still underestimated. Thus, Diakonia as

providing immediate and direct care to those suffering has been put into the light of public attention again.

4. COVID-19 has also underlined another core theme of Diakonia, that is poverty and inequality. As in a burning glass, the pandemic reveals the structural imbalances and inequalities globally and nationally which prevent human beings from enjoying equal access to health care, social security and mutual support systems. Migrant workers in India were simply dumped in the streets without proper transport, without social security, without being enabled to protect themselves as a consequence of an ill-planned lockdown. Slumdweller in South African towns are far from being enabled to keep social distancing. Even water is not regularly provided to follow hygienic protocols for one's own safety. For people who are forced to stay with 10 or 15 people in small huts working in a home office and staying at a distance from each other is a complete illusion. Thus, *Diakonia as advocacy on behalf of those excluded and the suffering* has achieved a new urgency and relevance.
5. In many local congregations and churches with the closure of worship occasions and the self-isolation of many people belonging to risk groups, there was a strong sense of the need to reinvent mechanisms and innovative means of communication to keep in contact with the elderly and vulnerable despite social distancing. Thus, *Diakonia as reinventing new paradigms of conviviality* has become relevant.
6. With the crisis and subsequent changes to or even disruption of established channels of project work and partnership agreements between agencies in the North and churches and faith-based organisations in the Global South, there is also a huge challenge to reinvent and strengthen international collaboration between partners in different continents and denominational traditions, as the virus is not halting at national or denominational boundaries, but is presenting a challenge for all countries and churches together. Thus, *Diakonia as spelling out new mechanisms of Inter-Denominational and Inter-Contextual Solidarity, Sharing and Assistance*, i.e. as *Ecumenical Diakonia*, has become an urgent challenge as well.
7. It is the shared conviction of the editors of this volume that Churches and Christian agencies, which have 2000 years of history in exercising and exploring different forms of Diakonia, care, solidarity and public advocacy have something unique to offer the world in terms of providing a meaningful response not only to the pandemic but also to many underlying social and health-related challenges which are currently aggravated by the impact of the virus.¹ In many countries, churches are probably one of the most important providers of “heroes and heroines of everyday life” and “heroes and heroines of social care” which often bring with them high motivation, diligence and resilience to an otherwise rarely met degree. *Churches provide visible and invisible health-related assets which should not be underestimated* both by politics and by society as a whole.
8. There is a culture of a new thoughtfulness, an openness to reconsider the priorities of our societies and our international co-operation in the period following the outbreak. The added value of faith-based organisations, which has been often stressed in the *religion and development discourse*, is obvious not only as agents of social care, but also as providers of values and moral orientation for a culture of thoughtfulness, mutual protection and restraint which is needed for curbing the impact of the virus. This volume is intended to serve as a contribution towards this new thoughtfulness in terms of our political and social priorities. It also underlines the need for *a more deliberate strengthening of diaconal*

¹ The WCC on 3rd November 2020 has circulated a draft document entitled, “The diaconal work of the churches in the context of COVID-19”, a companion to the document “Called to Transformative Action – Ecumenical Diakonia.” The document takes up many of the issues also referred to here. Both the LWF as well as CEC have offered documents and webinars related to the unique role of local churches for coping with the impact of the pandemic: <https://www.lutheranworld.org/news/being-church-times-covid-19>; <https://www.ceceurope.org/epp-webinar-impact-of-covid-19-pandemic-on-churches/>

competencies in both churches and societies as we have learned again that this lived care and Diakonia is what counts in a period of an emergency.

9. The pandemic has evoked a new sense of urgency for learning and education: relearning what is essential in our model of development, learning from one another in terms of inter-contextual exchange and learning about the art of providing care with dignity, love with justice and compassion with advocacy for the vulnerable. This volume is for facilitating *learning, research and education in Diakonia* in many churches and their seminaries, theological faculties and places of theological research in the future.
10. One of the most crucial ways of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic for the churches and its diaconal institutions – apart from providing care, solidarity and practical assistance wherever possible – is to increase teaching, research and learning for the essential dimension of *being a diakonos, a go-between person between a community and the marginalised*, between the suffering or vulnerable and the powerful, building bridges of care and support, of resistance and hope in order that all may enjoy the fullness of life (John 10:10).

The Background of This Handbook Project

“The purpose of this volume is to identify, to collect and where adequate to produce leading introductory key-texts and survey articles on Diakonia and diakonic management for students from the Global South studying in theological education institutions with Diakonia studies in their home-contexts or in international study programs.” This was a key sentence from a project outline for this volume back in 2018 as it was conceptualised by representatives from four institutions who met in Berlin (EWDE in January 2018), in order to collaborate for this international, multi-contextual publication: The Institute for Diakonic Science and Diakonic Management (IDM) in Bielefeld/Bethel, The United Evangelical Mission (UEM), an international communion of 38 churches in Africa, Asia and Europe and the v.Bodelschwingh Foundation, Bread for the World, Desk for Theology and Ecumenism, the All African Conference of Churches (AACC), and – not to be forgotten – the Desk for Ecumenical Diakonia in the World Council of Churches which joined later.

The project outline, which was further elaborated in the course of 2018, explained the rationale behind this project was a key consideration which points to the need of intercultural training for Diakonia:

In the existing curricula on Diakonia and Diaconic Management a strong need was identified globally for theological texts and resources from different contexts in English language. The need for the compilation and adoption of relevant texts for diakonic competence building has a theological dimension and – given the contextual nature of Diakonia – an interdisciplinary dimension.

Relation to International Study Text on Ecumenical Diakonia

A first draft of the international study text “Ecumenical Diakonia – A Call to Transformative Action” was presented together by ACT Alliance, WCC and LWF during the Ecumenical Strategic Forum Conference in Geneva in October 2017². It stimulated a new interest in deepening global conceptual and theological dialogue between churches and agencies on theology and practice of Diakonia. Churches in Africa, Latin America and Asia since 2012 had indicated interest in enhancing their diakonic witness and to provide professional social witness to their societies in combining pioneering Diakonia projects with dimensions of advocacy and lobbying work. While different languages and terminologies were used in different denominational settings (“social services”, “integral witness”, “holistic mission”, “philanthropy”,

² See: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/other-meetings/message-of-rev-dr-martin-junge-at-the-ecumenical-strategic-forum-on-diakonia>

“community-oriented social work” etc.) and many different structural forms of diakonic work existed, a growing trend was observed towards enhancing and professionalising Christian social witness in the churches – an interest present in the global ecumenical movement from its very beginning (Life and Work Movement, New Delhi 1961: “Unity, Witness, Service”). The editors of this volume share the general conviction of the WCC/LWF/ACT Alliance study document that it is essential for church-related agencies of social service and development to keep rooted in the distinct and ancient language of “diakonia” as this is essential to protect and unfold the specific added value as Christian actors in the field of religion and development, social service and humanitarian action. Kjell Nordstokke had remarked in the first draft of the study on Ecumenical Diakonia:

ACT has (originally) not included the diakonia-terminology in its vernacular. Instead, it has opted for using a professional language that communicates with its external audience, the humanitarian sector, and with the network of back donors. The focus has been on the professional competence of the organization and its ability to respond to challenges from the structural and socio-political environment. On the other hand, this language runs the risk of under-communicating the faith base of ACT Alliance, and in particular its relations to the church network. When this happens, local churches may perceive ACT as any international aid agent, without antennas for their role as local expressions of the constituency that has brought it into being.³

This volume is a response to this interest and, at the same time, answers the request of many churches in the Global South for increased efforts in capacity building for Diakonia and Diakonic Management Leadership and for more international impulses and dimensions in diakonic training in countries of the Global North.

The MA Diaconic Management Study Program of IDM (Bielefeld)

Bringing together this volume would not have been possible without the MA Diaconic Management Study Programme, organised and carried out by the IDM (Bielefeld) and the UEM (Bielefeld/Wuppertal). This academic programme was initiated by request of churches in Africa and Asia. It is, from its inception, implemented in international partnership with universities in South Africa, the Philippines, Tanzania and Indonesia, (partly also supported by EWDE) which had been started in 2011 and is teaching courses in theology, ethics, management and economics. The network of alumni was created in 2015 as the International Community of Diaconic Management (ICDM) and through these programmes inspires a dynamic and growing international network of diakonic leaders⁴ which also motivated some of the authors of this volume to contribute.

Presently in 2020, there are only a limited number of professional training programmes on Diakonia, social work and development work in theological schools and seminaries in Global South Christianity (like Hong Kong Lutheran Theological Seminary; Makumira Theological Seminary, Tanzania; Silliman University, Philippines). It is one of the intentions of this project to link these pioneering institutions more visibly and to strengthen the availability and quality level of training for Diakonia in church-related as well as secular educational institutions around the world.

International and Ecumenical Character of the Project

Plans for the production of this volume were further specified in 2018 in collaboration with representatives also from Diakonia Germany, including a funding proposal which was successfully submitted to *Brot für die*

³ Ecumenical Diakonia, Draft Document 2017, p. 27f

⁴ See the alumni network of IDM: International Community of Diaconic Management, Available at: <http://www.icdm-alumni.org/>

Welt [Bread for the World] which authorised this project in late 2018. An Ecumenical Advisory Group of international experts on Diakonia, social services and education, was finally called together for a workshop in Bielefeld/Bethel from 24th to 26th March 2019 to give advice on the project outline and to develop a first list of both themes and selected authors to be invited to collaborate and contribute essays. The international steering committee (group of editors) was set to implement this project in early 2019, consisting of Rev. Godwin Ampony, Prof. Martin Büscher, Bishop Prof. Beate Hofmann, Rev. Félicité Ngnintedem, Prof. Dennis Solon and Rev. Prof. Dietrich Werner (Convenor), who worked until August 2020, discussing, revising and editing the relevant papers.

Editorial Principles

In the course of the editorial work, the steering committee realised certain key editorial principles and theological convictions which have inspired and guided their work:

1. *Intercontextual diversity*

Different emerging fields and major areas of Diakonia services (like care for the elderly, care for disabled, palliative care, psychiatric diseases, care and advocacy for people living with HIV/AIDS, social services for drop outs and drug addicts, diakonic services for migrants and in the context of human trafficking) are differently present and not equally developed in different regions of World Christianity, but there is immense need and openness as well as potential for mutual learning and enrichment between these different fields and area of Diakonia work within World Christianity;

- a. Learning about diakonic challenges with students from different cultural backgrounds demands for *intercultural openness in terms of pressing theological questions of Diakonia* which can be quite different depending on the context of the students. Questions students are facing in their context can reflect cultural and theological differences in the way churches perceive human suffering or the relation between God and humankind, the spiritual and the material world, modernity and traditional indigenous values – and all of these are relevant and legitimate. Questions asked during intercultural courses in Diakonia need space and intercultural sensitivity to react to the different sets of questions emerging from different cultural and socio-political backgrounds (Questions like: Why are there people born with disabilities? Is this power, love, or punishment from God? Who is stronger: ancestors or a Christian God? If God has the power and is only about love, why does God not deliver us from poverty and disease? How does the church relate to people of other faith traditions in diakonic work and how does God work in social services from other religions?)
- b. Therefore, we need *different contextual and multidisciplinary approaches to the study of Diakonia* in order to do justice to our different contexts. This Handbook project was not designed only to translate textual resources for theology of Diakonia from western backgrounds to non-western backgrounds, but to allow for a dialogical, inter-contextual approach of learning. This is methodically reflected by the principle that in many thematic areas we deliberately asked two authors from different contextual backgrounds to contribute reflections on the same subject area related to their distinct setting (*twin-authors approach*). The twin-authors approach was taken up and given shape in different forms by individual authors. Thus, readers will find two distinct and separate articles written on the same subject from authors representing different contexts, an organically integrated (co-operative) single article written by two authors from different contexts together as well as one consolidated article with two different sections each by one of the different authors.

2. *Common theological roots and terminological inclusivity*

- c. It is related to this inter-contextual nature of this global compendium that the editors – while using certain key concepts in Diakonia studies across the wider range of different articles (like vulnerability,

conviviality, poverty, empowerment, development) – have not tried to unify and consolidate *the usages of key terms* across the whole book. We decided against providing a prior chapter with definition of key terms, and rather left them within their contextualised perspectives in the way they are used and defined by individual authors in their respective environment and discourses in order to avoid a somewhat arbitrary globalisation and homogenisation of the definitions of terms. We still believe that the inter-contextuality provided by this panorama allows for a meaningful and beneficial interaction while enabling significant degrees of inner conceptual cohesion in the ways the articles correspond with each other either directly or indirectly.

The *key theological terminologies on Diakonia* might vary from context to context, but still there are common biblical and ecclesial traditions which can enrich common understanding and proper conceptual profiles of Christian Diakonia.

3. Interdenominational openness

- d. Christian faith is lived out in *different denominational settings* each with their own terms of reference and specific traditions, Orthodox, Anglican, Roman Catholic, Protestant as well as from Evangelical and Pentecostal backgrounds. While each is called to respect and to serve the unity of Christian Churches worldwide, there is a huge potential for churches from different denominational background to learn from each other. Therefore, authors from a great variety of denominational backgrounds were deliberately requested to contribute, predominantly from WCC member churches, but not exclusively.

4. Adaptability to different state-church settings

- e. Also, there are many *different socio-political settings* in which the diaconal responsibility of churches has been given visible shape, minority churches as well as majority churches, churches in diaspora situations as well as traditions which had a state church model in their past. Thus, we wanted to have a good mix in these different frameworks of reference in order to do justice to different church settings as all of them have similar legitimacy and authenticity in their own historical background.

5. Other editorial principles

We were aware that a major global resource book of this kind is not read from A to Z in one stretch, but its articles are used selectively, according to different themes and needs. It was also evident from the beginning that the wider circulation of new educational resources like this is achieved by creating an e-version of the book. This is why we have been grateful for arrangements by the publisher to simultaneously produce a limited print edition in different regions while at the same time allowing for *global circulation of the digital version of this handbook which will be made available on the website of Regnum Press as well as at Globethics.net*.

The editors were aware of several *different standards and traditions of spelling the different derivatives of the Greek term “diakonia”* as all kinds of variations emerge in different regional language realms (Diakonia/diaconal/diaconical/diakonia). While the editors tend to follow the spelling of *diakonia* as a transliteration of the original Greek term, we did not want to impose an enforced harmonisation on all authors in order to respect regional usage traditions and therefore in the overall volume there appears a certain variation in spelling styles of these terms.

- f. In international ecumenical publications and dialogue, there is also quite a variety in terms of referencing biblical texts and *general bibliographical referencing*. While the editors in collaboration with Regnum Books in Oxford decided to lean on the *Chicago Manual of Style*⁵ with some variations and also had recommended this to all authors, it was not easy to achieve full harmonisation with all

⁵ See: www.chicagomanualofstyle.org.

manuscripts. A major effort was undertaken to edit footnotes and styles of referencing in a last phase of the editorial process. However, if discontinuity or a certain degree of variation is observed by readers this should be attributed to the limitations of time and funds to achieve a 100% degree of consistency in such a multi-cultural volume.

6. *Limitations of the project*

- g. The editors are fully aware also of certain *limitations of the project*: This volume, while being fairly comprehensive and inclusive already, could not deal with all subject areas of diakonia and Christian social service in an equally representative manner. While making much effort to include all regions of this world, we are aware of the fact that certain regions (like Latin-America, Middle East and Pacific) could be more visible. While we have a significant number of female authors (50) and made every effort to apply criteria of gender balance, we have achieved this to different degrees in certain regions. While we have made significant efforts to include more recent articles reflecting on the huge challenges to Diakonia in terms of the COVID-19 crisis, this volume does not answer all questions and challenges which have newly emerged with this global crisis. We are also aware of the fact that, although we have intentionally included several contributions from Orthodox and Pentecostal as well as Roman Catholic writers, this volume is not able to cover the rich variety particularly of Roman Catholic churches involvement in Diakonia and Caritas as found in many regions of the world.

User Profiles for This Volume

As the targeted audience for this volume, the editors had identified the following groups consisting of:

- Students involved in studies for Christian social service, Diakonia, development work, lobbying and advocacy work in different contexts;
- Educators involved in teaching and courses for Christian social service and Diakonia;
- Interested Christian lay leaders and social practitioners involved in FBOs serving social concerns and social work with vulnerable groups or work in social, political and ecological issues;
- Church leaders, representatives of ecumenical organizations and political leaders interested in the social witness and role of Christian churches, in Diakonia, social witness and development work of Christian NGOs in national, regional and ecumenical levels;
- Researchers dealing with issues of ecumenical social ethics, religion and development, social witness and upbuilding social and political competency in churches.

The editors were aware of several publications by international organizations on the issue of Diakonia which were published particularly after the year 2000, some of which were consulted intensively during the working process and in some of the articles presented here.⁶ Several of the editors were also related to or

⁶ E.g., *Serving the Whole Person: The Practice of Diakonia Within the Lutheran World Federation* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2009); LWF (ed): *Diakonia in Context | Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment*. A Lutheran contribution to the ongoing ecumenical discussion regarding the understanding of diakonia and diaconal structures and practices in churches and congregations; LWF 2017; Theresa Carino: *Social Service in China*. Religious Organizations between service delivery and social change in contemporary China: The experience of Amity Foundation, Amity Press, Nanjing, 2016. Stephanie Dietrich, Knud Jörgensen: *Diakonia as Christian Social Practise – An Introduction*, Regnum Books International 2015; Rose Dowsett, Isabel Phiri and others (eds): *Evangelism and Diakonia in Context*, Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series 2016; Stephanie Dietrich (ed): *Diakonia in Gender Perspectives*, Regnum Books 2016; Stephanie Dietrich, Knud Jörgensen, Kari Karsrud Korslien, Kjell Nordstokke (eds): *The Diaconal Church*, Regnum Books 2019; Steve Bevans, Teresa Chai, Nelson Jennings, Knud Jörgensen, Dietrich Werner (eds): *Reflecting and Equipping for Christian Mission*, Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series, 2015, The editors were also in touch with the other publication project on theological paradigms of Diakonia in an international perspective, edited by Johannes Eurich, Beate Hofmann, Thorsten Moos et al., which will be published in 2022.

members of the network Research in Diakonia (ReDI), The International Society for the Research and Study of Diakonia and Social Christian Practise⁷ and many of the authors come from this network. At the same time a collection of the variety of intercultural perspectives as presented here until now has never been done. It is unique in its variety, scope and quality.

Structure of the Volume, Survey of the Sections and Character of Twin Contributions

The Publication is structured in four different sections:

- I. Theologies of Diakonia in Different Ecclesial and Social Contexts
- II. Concepts and Profiles of Diakonical Ministries in Different World Regions
- III. Trends and Crucial Concerns in Diakonia
- IV. Models and Methods for Competency Building in Diakonia

Section I presents major theological articles on biblical roots of the understanding of Diakonia as seen from various church traditions, its relation to the church as well as trinitarian perspectives, the history of the ecumenical debate on diakonia as well as an integrated understanding of its various dimensions and its transformative role and public nature and claims as well as its relation to human suffering and vulnerability. In addition, fundamental perspectives of a contextual and interdisciplinary understanding of studying diakonia are highlighted as well as different ecclesial and socio-political contexts in which different shapes and forms of diakonia service take shape.

Section II brings together a rich variety of concepts and profiles of Diakonical Ministries in Different World Regions, starting with the ancient oriental and Eastern Orthodox church traditions which are still very much alive and relevant in countries like Egypt, Syria, Russia and Rumania to a selected number of African and Asian countries, including China, Western and Eastern Europe as well as Latin and Central America, North America and the Pacific. A rich panorama unfolds showing the commitment and struggle of churches to give a credible witness and to be relevant as a vital actor in civil society in issues of social justice, peace and human rights and care for the needy in very unique ways.

Section III focusses on trends and crucial concerns in contextual Diakonia and combines a selected number of thematic issues and working areas which are of relevance for many churches and Christian development agencies around the world, such as human dignity and human rights, peace and conflict solution, poverty and social exclusion, public witness and global justice, sustainable development and eco-justice, social cohesion, changing family structures and conviviality, health, healing and trauma treatment in post-war situations and humanitarian emergencies as well as forms of social witness and services lived out in spiritual communities and monasteries and more recent challenges like the impact of digitalization and care deficit in diakonia.

Section IV finally gathers different perspectives and models of training and education for diakonia and Christian social services. How do churches enhance competency building for diakonia and development through deliberate contextualization of Diakonia learning, through multi-rational management in diakonia leadership, intentional building of ecumenical and Diaconal leadership, while not avoiding the complex issues of the dark sides and failures of Diakonia involvement in the history of the church and intentional bridge-building and empowerment for the younger generations of Christian leaders and pioneers of social commitment. Contributions include issues of financial management and fundraising for diakonia projects within churches as well as increasing efforts for global learning and global citizenship education as well as examples of curriculum development for Diakonia training. The volume is concluded with a list of selected teaching resources for general study courses on Diakonia and Christian social Services which complements the short thematic bibliographies which can be found at the end of individual articles provided.

⁷ <https://www.Diakoniaresearch.org/>

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Martin Büscher



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Dennis Solon



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(chief editor)*

DISCOVERING AND LEARNING FROM THE RICH DIVERSITY OF ECUMENICAL DIAKONIA: EXPLANATION AND MEDITATION ON THE COVER DESIGN OF THE INTERNATIONAL HANDBOOK ON ECUMENICAL DIAKONIA

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Acts of Diakonia have been part and parcel of the heritage of Christian art and iconography from its earliest beginnings. The two most widespread images referring to acts of mercy in the world are probably the Good Samaritan (Luc 10,25-37) and Jesus' Feet Washing for his Disciples (John 13:14–17). A major first list of acts of diakonia emerged out of the passage of Matthew 25, 31-45 where Jesus talks about the Last Judgement indicating that whatever his disciples have done to the least of their brothers and sisters, they have done to himself. Since ancient times Christian tradition has commemorated “works of mercy” to belong to the essence of Christian faith as practised over against neighbours in need. The so-called “*corporal works of mercy*”, which also had even more ancient Jewish roots and precedents (Jes 58,7; Tobit 1:16-22), are an important subject of Christian iconography.¹ In some representations of the Middle Ages, the seven works were allegorically juxtaposed with the seven deadly sins (avarice, anger, envy, laziness, unchastity, intemperance, pride). The pictorial representation of the works of mercy began in the 12th century. In the oldest traditions mention is made of “*seven works of mercy*”, namely: “*To feed the hungry, to give water to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to shelter the homeless, to visit the sick, to visit the imprisoned, or ransom the captive, to bury the dead*”. These works of mercy marked a visible difference of Christian culture in treating persons in need and marginalized with dignity and love. A diakonal culture emerged from Christian communities, which underlined also the missionary attractiveness of Christian churches in ancient times. Corporal works of mercy are those that tend to the bodily needs of other creatures. The church tradition in Medieval Times complemented this first table of corporal works of mercy with another table of seven “*spiritual works of mercy*”, where the aim was stated to relieve spiritual suffering. These latter ones in church tradition – still worth to be reflected upon in their contextual meaning for us today - consisted of namely “*to instruct the ignorant, to counsel the doubtful, to admonish the sinners, to bear patiently those who wrong us, to forgive offenses, to comfort the afflicted and to pray for the living and the dead*”. There is some variation in the numbering of corporal works of mercy in church tradition already in early periods: One of the Latin church fathers (and advisor to the first Christian Roman Emperor, Constantine I), Lactantius, in his writing *Epitome divinarum institutionum* in the fourth century enlarged the list to *nine works of mercy*, the elements of which could also vary a bit (and again vary a bit in our contemporary contextualized interpretation for the cover of this book on Ecumenical Diakonia).

In the history of theological and social reflection on Christian social service and Diakonia the framework of understanding constantly changed and became enlarged, as it is exposed in the contributions of this volume. Diakonia does not only include individual works of charity and mercy, but also deliberate go-between actions to express solidarity with victims of structural injustice. Diakonia today includes socio-political witness, new forms of inclusion and conviviality, forms of political advocacy and lobbying work – all of which were less visible in the ancient medieval traditions and their understanding of the Christian works of mercy. However, all activities performed in the name of Christian Diakonia and Christian Social Service come down at some stage to affect relationships between persons, to change attitudes in human

¹ Among many other works see: “Tulika Bahadur: The seven works of mercy,” in: On Arts and Aesthetics 12 November 2015, in: [https://onartandaesthetics.com/2015/11/12/the-seven-corporal-acts-of-mercy/#:~:text=The%20source%20for%20the%20first,Matthew%2025%3A31%2D46](https://onartandaesthetics.com/2015/11/12/the-seven-corporal-acts-of-mercy/#:~:text=The%20source%20for%20the%20first,Matthew%2025%3A31%2D46;); also: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Works_of_mercy

encounter, to transform individual relations between people who are experiencing suffering, marginalization and desperation – that is also why the new WCC Study document on ecumenical diakonia has the subtitle “To be Called to Transformative Action”. All Christian diakonia is meant to create a space for new breathing, for liberation, for dignity and for comfort which allows for the regenerating of life.

Thus, the ancient church tradition of nine works of corporal mercy which until today is well known particularly in Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, is by no means outdated, but it can serve as an inspiration and incentive to think and meditate about what diakonal witness and action demands from Christian churches today in contexts which have changed significantly.

The editors of this volume therefore have accepted an offer from three artists from Bavaria, Southern Germany, linked to *Diakoneo* in Neuendettelsau,² to come up with a contemporary art’s design and a modern interpretation of the ancient church tradition of nine corporal works of mercy and to bring some of its language and imaginations into contexts with contemporary challenges of diakonia in diverse cultural and political contexts. Every period and century thus is re-interpreting the tradition of nine corporal works of mercy in its own, creative and specific new ways. The team of artists which have been asked for this volume, consisted of Corinna Smok (artist, painter and draughtswoman, Fürth, responsible for the paintings) Achim Weinberg (Graphic Designer and Artist, Nürnberg, responsible for the design) and of Beate Baberske (Liturgical Designer, Neuendettelsau: responsible for the texts, together with Dietrich Werner). Thus this team has created this cover design together, combining detailed drawings to each of the nine corporal works of mercy, alluding to the liturgical colours of the church calendar as used in many Lutheran and Reformed churches around the world and also adding a convincing overall design.

Artistic expression lives from concentration and reduction. The focus is put on essential key gestures, attitudes and scenes of human encounter in acts of diakonia. The selected scenes are not illustrations, but subtle intimations, leaving space for individual interpretations of the viewers. Many of the scenes could be located in several different cultural and social contexts. They are polyvalent in terms of contextuality, although sometimes clear hints are given to certain geographical or cultural contexts. Those who view these nine segments can become motivated to reflect about the diversity of expressions of diakonal care, support and advocacy in today’s context. Where is life put to its extremes and how does its vulnerability asks for diaconal intervention, for healing or reconciling or for advocating initiatives today? The scenes depicted show that both aspects, to be utterly vulnerable and dependent, as well as to be capable to get involved in acts of genuine love, care and human support to others, essentially belong to human life. In diakonia both are at stake, the highest grandeur and altruistic potential as well as the profoundest depths, powerlessness and suffering of human existence, both relate to the fundamental essence of what makes us *human* beings.

The colours used to frame and to accompany the scenes are related to the ancient symbolic language of colours used in Christian liturgical tradition:

The colour of *Green* is symbolizing a connection with nature, with all that is growing, in the figurative sense for hope, for growth and vitality. Green has a calming effect on us, it also provides rest. In the church, it marks the periods of growth, where growth and nurture in faith is at stake. The parables of Christ, often taking up elements of nature like vinyard, grain, water, seeds, are reinterpreted again and again thereby enabling a change of perspective and renewal in everyday life.

The colour of *Red* is associated with warmth and with action. It can stand for love, for blood, for community and for fire, but is also a signal and a warning colour. Red has an activating effect on us humans. In the church this colour is used as a community colour. Palm-Sunday, Pentecost, Good Friday use red colour at the altar: Love in deed is needed for every kind of human community. In confirmation worship services we confess our “love” for faith as being renewed and confirmed. Also, the ordination of

² <https://www.diakoneo.de/>

pastors and priests or deacons is associated with the colour of red as it is a sign of the vocation, which is out of love and burning for a cause. Any Sunday, recollecting the memories of the Apostles and Martyrs, is also associated with the colour of Red, indicating the relevance of love, the intensity of the dedication to Christ or by Christ to us.

Violet represents a mixture of red with blue, bearing two contrasting effective colours in itself. Violet is not so dominantly anchored in our visual experience like red and blue. Maybe it is the contradiction between two colours or the wrestling between the two which makes this colour spiritual. In nature there are many flowers of this colour, it is part of the rainbow. But also a natural phenomenon is linked to it, which is associated with a certain mood, i.e. the experience of sunset which colours the sky violet. This mood is crucial to the effect of this colour also in the ecclesial context. All transitional, preparatory and fasting periods in the church calendar, like the period of Lent before Easter and the four Advent Sundays, are associated with dark purple or dark blue (in England). Thus, a space is created by this colour which allows for peace, a new focus on oneself and for some personal reflection, spiritual recollection and transformation. Penance, self-examination and reorientation are topics of these periods in the Church Year.

White is the intensification of the colour of yellow, signifying the presence of light. We connect this colour with innocence, with festive occasions, with cleanliness and purity. The tradition of the white wedding dress is also connected to this meaning. In the ecclesial context this colour signifies Christ, who innocently died for us. The festive effects of white are associated with the resurrection message: Hope is possible and well-founded even in the experience of struggling, of breakdown, of death. Newly baptized Christians and many Africa Independent Christians (like the Aladura churches which are spread all over the world) therefore wear white robes which remind us of the light figures in the bible as also the Alb does (white liturgical garment, used since Early Christianity and until today often worn in Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, or Methodist churches).

Black is worn only one day during the church year, which is the most important day for many Christian churches: On Good Friday this colour puts the focus and attention on infinite grief and loss, while in the Roman Catholic Church also on Good Friday the colour of red is used to point to the pain, love and blood of Christ on the cross.

In the coloured designs which accompany the illustrations and drawings for this book cover these church-influenced interpretations of the liturgical colours play a major role. They promote a profound spiritual understanding of certain scenes, pointing to the fact that diakonal actions happen during all parts of the church year and Diakonia shares in the essential experiences of Christian faith as lived through and commemorated about during the Liturgical Year. The colours also create a basic meditative mood which makes it easier to grasp and Interpret the series of nine designs and drawings in a deeper manner. The green scenes indicate moments of help, the red ones take place in the name of love, the violet are situations full of anger, hopelessness and sadness, white shines through all colours. All actions are directly related to Jesus.

Detailed explanations on the nine scenes

We complete this description and explanation with few lines of interpretations around each of the nine scenes depicted on the cover (and in black and white here). Those who look at the scenes should feel free however also to interpret them in their own ways and linking them to contextual experiences and shapes of diakonia which are relevant in their context:

1. To feed the hungry



Diakonia implies to respond to the concrete needs of those in hunger and in need. This scene could take us into the context of India where a nationwide lockdown imposed by the central government in late March 2020 to contain the spread of the coronavirus made millions of migrant workers stranded in the nowhere as neither transport was provided to bring them home nor money and food to sustain them after having lost their poorly paid jobs.³ The plight of millions of poor Indians who migrate from villages to cities in search of livelihood and their additional desperation when the lockdown has left them stranded far away from home, with no jobs or money, is evoked by this scene. In several cities of India, however, starting off from local churches, mosques or secular groups at the same time also teams of volunteers were formed to speed up local raising of funds, packing food and sharing daily meals in central places or in front of religious buildings for daily-wage workers or sending food packages out to labour colonies across the country. While the government provided some food rations and financial support to its population early on in the coronavirus crisis, many migrant workers, who were registered in their state of origin rather than in the state to which they had moved, could not access this help. This is why many tried to walk to their villages, sometimes thousands of kilometres away, and many died along the way. The Commission for Migrants of the Catholic Bishop's Conference of India⁴ for instance has cooperated with many religious and local civil society organizations, including the Sisters of the Holy Cross, the National Campaign Committee for the Eradication of Bonded Labour, the Human Rights Law Network, Distress Management Collective to provide food kits to thousands of stranded daily wage laborers all over India. In Diakonia both sharing food with the needy as well as advocacy for those who suffer because access to proper livelihood is denied to them go together.

³ <https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-indias-lockdown-turning-into-humanitarian-crisis/a-53377588>

⁴ <https://indiancatholicmatters.org/accompany-migrants-during-covid-19-a-catholic-perspective/>

2. To give water to the thirsty



Experiencing lack of proper drinking water and water for irrigation can be one of the most horrifying situations both for humans, for animals and the natural environment. This scene evokes the situation of drought in many African countries. The African woman depicted here is in extreme distress, not only because she suffers from thirst, but also she is mourning about her cattle having died of thirst and the soil and ground ripped open by drought. Southern Africa recently has suffered from its worst drought in several decades and even a century.⁵ Diminished and late rainfall, combined with long-term increases in temperatures, have jeopardized the food security and energy supplies of millions of people in the region, most acutely in Zambia and Zimbabwe, but also several other countries. Millions of people are facing food shortages due to drought. Grain production is down 30 percent, in some countries like Zimbabwe it is down 53 percent. Livestock farmers in Southern Africa have suffered losses due to starvation and to early culling of herds forced by shortages of water and feed. Christian Diakonia getting engaged in these circumstances is not only providing essential humanitarian aid, but also addresses root causes of environmental degradation and climate change which demand for fundamental changes in policies of climate justice, sustainable agriculture and reforestation efforts – this is why today (and in this volume) we speak of *Eco-Diakonia*, Christian Diakonia for suffering creation. The well in the scene intimated as being constructed in the background stands for all measures which provide hope and care for creation, new growth of plants and forests, irrigation and recultivation for people to become independent again from external help and to be able to grow their own food and rear their own cattle again.

⁵ <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/146015/drought-threatens-millions-in-southern-africa>

3. To clothe the naked



Without proper clothing people feel without protection and shelter. One feels vulnerable and as a potential object of misuse – particularly in colder and unfavourable climatic conditions. This scene evokes both the essential human need to be covered, to be protected and to be warmed as well as the poor social and economic conditions under which textile workers, the majority of them seamstress or needlewomen, in several countries of this world are producing the clothing for others. The harsh conditions under which many Asian textile workers perform their jobs have even been qualified by the International Labour Organization (ILO) as “slave labour”. More than 70% of EU imports of textiles and clothing come from Asia.⁶ In 2013, a most deadly industrial accident happened in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, when an entire eight-storey building – the Rana Plaza – containing five different clothing factories, collapsed completely, killing 1 138 garment workers and injuring over 2 500. The tender gesture of the person approaching from behind depicted in the painting (a Christian nun?, a mother?, a person from an NGO for textile workers?) is speaking a warm language of concern and compassion: The caring person approaching the textile worker from the back, wrapping a shawl or cover around her shoulders with tender care, might signify that clothing the naked today implies to be sensitive to the human dignity, the basic human rights and needs of protection for those who work for others. Ecumenical Diakonia opens the eyes to those who sit at the other end of our production and consumption lines, to practise Christian love with those in need close by as well as far away. Clothing the naked today also means to recognize the rights of textile workers, to demand for ambitious goals for supply chain legislative acts and to protect those who work under appalling conditions.

⁶ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/140841REV1-Workers-conditions-in-the-textile-and-clothing-sector-just-an-Asian-affair-FINAL.pdf>

**4. To liberate from oppression
those who are suppressed**



This scene evokes a strong sense of conflict, arising out of peaceful protests by women and men, being pushed aside by a policemen or soldier in the attempt to arrest and carry away a demonstrator who might be already wounded or has lost his consciousness because he has been beaten up by the policemen. The situation for instance of Belarus comes to mind where several thousands of women, mostly dressed in white and waving flowers, weekly marched through the centre of Minsk and other cities since end August 2020 in the peaceful protest, intentionally free of violence, against the Belarusian President who claims having gained victory in elections which were utterly fraud. The continuing struggle for democracy in Belarus as well as in many other countries and autocratic regimes around the world often has a female face. Belarusian women, many of them Christians from Orthodox or Catholic churches, have formed the “Women in White movement”⁷ which all again is taking to the streets to protest against police brutality as well as the disputed presidential elections. The flowers and flags they waved are a sign of their solidarity and their peacefulness, and simply demanded that their votes be correctly counted. The flowers seem to be offered to the soldier as a gesture of peace, asking for the violence, brutality and the detaining of persons to be stopped, but the gesture does not seem to be accepted. Involvement in public Diakonia as advocacy for the those who are oppressed can lead to situations of defencelessness and vulnerability, of rejection and of defeat. Ecumenical Diakonia is not a cheap Christian witness, but a costly witness.

⁷ <https://www.wilpf.org/the-women-in-white-and-belarus-emerging-womens-movement/>

5. To protect the widows



There is a woman in distress. Her eyes are closed in grief or pain. Her arms are wrapped around herself for protection. The scene may signify a situation where girls or women feel utterly defenceless, wounded and in need for protection. Having lost a friend or partner (becoming a widow in the widest sense) may be one of these situations, having been betrayed by somebody else is another one, having experienced violence, rape or violation of basic human rights again is another one. UN Statistics reveal that there are 258 million widows in the world, 115 million of them in deep poverty and 86 million who have suffered physical abuse by others. The All African Conference of Churches (AACC) in 2019 has seen the need to highlight the “plight of widows” on all of the African continent.⁸

In the scene visualized in the drawing the person who mistreated or exploited the widow still seems to be close, might even attack the victim once again. It needs somebody as a go-between-person, a *diaconos*, to stand between the evil powers and the vulnerable. Somebody is there who can comfort, has a capacity to listen, to intervene and to offer direct physical protection – or simply just a first gentle touch on the shoulder with the message: You do not need to be afraid anymore. There is a space for rest and for regeneration, a space for a new beginning and for healing, a space for protection and for new dignity. Thousands of women and men have raised their voices in churches and local congregations against gender-based violence today. The World Council of Churches calls for ending of violence and rape against women with the global movement Thursday in Black.⁹ Projects of diakonia provide support, shelter and a new space for regeneration for women in distress in many churches around the world.

⁸ <http://aacc-ceta.org/en/news/185-the-plight-of-widows>

⁹ <https://www.oikoumene.org/what-we-do/thursdays-in-black>

6. To welcome the refugees and the strangers



Rescuing refugees who have entered dangerous routes of transfer in the Mediterranean Sea has become a crucial Christian witness for churches supporting something like the Sea Watch mission as long as European authorities still struggle to find a common solution the issues of migration and asylum.¹⁰ A double struggle for life and death seems to be depicted here: The refugee in the waves of the sea is struggling to protect another person (a child?, a comrade?) from drowning, although struggling to survive himself. The rescuing person on the boat tries to protect another refugee reaching out to climb into the boat from falling back into the sea. Every second counts in moments like this when desperation is high and energies are low after days of futile waiting on the open sea.

Being in solidarity with refugees and strangers since very ancient times became an indispensable mark of Christian social action and diakonia of churches around the Mediterranean region as well as in many other parts of the world. Those who are utterly vulnerable and without shelter need protection and rescue – even if this may be quite controversial and provocative. But immediate humanitarian action will always be accompanied by efforts of political and prophetic diakonia which speaks truth to power and raises questions around the root causes of migration and flight which too often are silenced down and avoided.

¹⁰ <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/meet-sea-watch-4-vessel-of-hope-instrument-of-peace>

7. To visit the sick



The focus of this scene is directed to the almost intimate and close encounter between the visitor and the person lying in her sick-bed or even death-bed. Tender care and comfort are expressed by the emotional gesture of the arm put around the neck and the head getting close to the sick person as if it were the crucial period in which each word counts essentially because each moment could be the last one. The attitude and position of the person comforting is like making a circle around the person suffering. Whoever knows moments like this – being visited when you can't move or can't even speak and hardly can hear anymore and somebody still comes close to you with gestures of comfort or visiting somebody like this – will be aware that what counts in these moments is not many words, but gestures and symbolic signs which are authentic, meaningful and sensitive in loving care. Visiting services and chaplaincies in Christian hospitals, the hospice movement and the movement for clinical pastoral counselling which are spread all over the world since decades have become some of the strongest expressions of this genuine dimension of Christian diakonia.

8. *To visit the imprisoned, or ransom the captive*



The child desperately wants not to be left alone behind the metal fence: The mother, equally desperate, does not want to leave her beloved child behind the wall in a different country or in a prison. But the mother is held in the firm grip of military person who pulls both apart although this creates so massive pain and despair. But luckily enough there is another caring person in shadow right next to the child, either pulling it back or trying to provide comfort to it, holding it in this moment of forced separation and detention. What does Christian diakonia demand from us in situations full of dramatic conflicts like this? The scene could be located in any conflict situation where unequal power relations affect and distort human relations - between majorities and minorities, ruling authorities and marginalized, between legal authorities and migrants, between an occupation army and those occupied. The scene could be envisaged in the Israel-Palestinian conflict where the detention of hundreds of Palestinian youths due to demonstrations against the demolition of Palestinian houses in occupied territories has led to similar situations. The scene could also be envisaged at the heavily protected border installations between Mexico and the USA: When the American administration in 2018 declared the policy of family separation to become a legitimate political-military measure this violent separation between parents and their children became a frequent phenomenon. It was presented as a “zero tolerance” approach intended to deter illegal immigration and to encourage tougher legislation. However, hundreds of children were violently separated from their relatives and families for indefinite periods. Even by November 2020, the parents of some 666 children still have not been found again. American churches as well as Mexican churches in the regions affected put up schemes to provide visitation, comfort and support for children of migrants detained and left behind. The challenges faced in situation of minors being separated from their parents and imprisoned remains a major issue in many regional contexts for joint ecumenical action in diakonia, for prophetic witness and for ecumenical solidarity.

9. *To bury the dead*



Does the service and commitment of love end, when life ends? Christian tradition from its earliest beginnings has stated: No! Where life ends and death prevails love and the hope of faith still can go as it is the God of life who will have his final word. It is not the triumph of death which should reign our lives, but the triumph of hope against hope, of hope for resurrection from the death which inspires and transforms our attitudes towards death, the deceased and therefore informs the rituals accompanying the burying of the departed. The scene is full of the spirit of mourning and of love. The person carrying the deceased seems to be almost staggering somewhere as the task is too heavy. The ground seems to sway under his feet, the persons seems to begin to tip over as it is more than one can bear with. The scene depicted shows an attitude of utterly love and care for somebody who was loved and cared for until his or her very end. So many different scenes from various contexts come to mind where this is reality: A Philippine mother holds her boy tenderly in her arms who was shot dead by policemen in the state ordered “war against drugs” by president Duterte, one of more than 20.000 victims who died due to extrajudicial killings in 2018 and 2019, amongst them many children.¹¹ One might also recall the determined efforts of both pastors, imams and medical doctors to provide safe and dignified burial rituals for the victims of the Ebola outbreak in West African countries – the burial teams thereby saving thousands of lives due to their efforts to change unsafe community burial customs in that context.¹² Or we may think of how proper rituals of burial have become a gesture for reconciliation and overcoming of hatred in the process of dealing with the horrible aftermath of betrayal and violence in the Genocide in Rwanda (1994) even decades afterwards.¹³ We might also think of

¹¹ <https://time.com/4436655/rodrigo-duterte-philippines-drug-newspaper/>

¹² <https://www.bbc.com/news/health-40375693>

¹³ <https://www.anglicannews.org/news/2018/04/funerals-held-as-157-victims-of-the-genocide-in-rwanda-buried-in->

an increasing number of burials in western societies where elderly people are sometimes living lonely and without relatives, so that on the cemeteries it is sometimes only the pastor/priest together with the urn bearer which accompany the deceased during the funeral – thereby providing a last treatment of dignity and holding up the promise of God that each life counts in the eyes of the loving father of all. Even further back in the history one might recall that it took centuries of determined Christian and humanitarian intervention for “humanizing” military warfare methods and for agreeing on basic humanitarian principles for both the treatment and health care for war prisoners, including the burial of enemies. Both were enshrined in codified international law only with the “Hague Regulations concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land” (Haager Landkriegsordnung) of 1907¹⁴ and the “Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War” from 1929¹⁵ as well as the extended services developed after the Second World War with regard to recording, maintaining and caring for the graves of German war casualties abroad (war cemeteries services).¹⁶

Accompanying somebody for his/her last place of final and eternal rest is an act of diaconal care both for those staying behind and for the departed. Burying people in dignity and in peace has a message for both as well. In the scene depicted here the person taking care and the person deceased almost form a cross, pointing to the cross of Jesus Christ who has gone through all of this, through the suffering, through death and resurrection before us. Caring for those dying and for the departed has been one of the earliest marks of how Christianity has shown its belief in the dignity and worth of each human being affirmed in the eyes of God even beyond death. This is why it became different from other antique religious traditions. This is a key area in which Christian faith is proving its relevance until today in contexts of contemporary natural disasters or pandemics, situations of war or terminal illness: How you treat those dying and those deceased is a mirror of what you hope and the values you stand for. It also is a crucial indicator for whether you can give unlimited love and spread hope in life and in life beyond its limits in situations when you are confronted with death, but do not allow death to triumph over you.

ruhanga-memorial.aspx; <https://www.dw.com/en/rwanda-burial-remains-of-nearly-85000-genocide-victims/a-48604654>

¹⁴ <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/195>

¹⁵ <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/INTRO/305?OpenDocument>

¹⁶ <https://www.volksbund.de/en/volksbund.html>

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PART I

THEOLOGIES OF DIACONIA IN DIFFERENT ECCLESIAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXTS

1. FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE AND HER PIONEERING ROLE FOR DIACONIA AND HOLISTIC CARE IN HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCIES

Cornelia Coenen-Marx¹

Across Europe, in the evenings in March and April 2020, there was clapping on many balconies of apartment buildings. This was for the so-called “everyday heroes”, who were saving lives as doctors and nurses during the pandemic. The corona crisis reminds us again that care is relevant to the system – as much so as food supply or transportation. It reminds us that people in professions of care do not earn enough. It also draws attention to the fact that 80 percent of this systemically important workforce are women.

All this is not really new information – but it is striking that only now is there a debate regarding a rise in minimum wage for these professions. Because of the costs required to upgrade wages for the nursing and care professions, people in power, afraid of these rising costs, were happy that they have been overlooked for years. Now, in the spotlight of the crisis, the years of cuts and downsizing in the care sector are becoming apparent. And the care-facilities – often forgotten – finally come into the fore. The British nurse, Florence Nightingale, once wrote:

When I am no longer even a memory, just a name, I hope my voice may perpetuate the great work of my life. God bless my dear old comrades of Balaclava and bring them safe to shore.”



Florence Nightingale is one of the great heroines – a legend in nursing history. The 12th May 2020 marks her 200th birthday. To celebrate this occasion, the World Health Organization declared the year 2020 as a global “Year of Care”. Most strikingly, that was decided long before the first cases of Coronavirus – but suddenly it fits terrifyingly well.

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Florence Nightingale, the “Lady with the Lamp”, who in the Crimean War, which the British fought against Russia, sat at night by the bedside of the wounded and dying British soldiers. They dictated letters to her for their wives, for their mothers, to comrades, she organised financial transfers, helped those dying to give a farewell to life. Care, treatment and sanitation in the Lazarettos were disastrous in this age.² The men lay in bloody uniforms under dirty blankets, although the stockpiles were full with warm clothing. Seven times more soldiers died from contagious diseases in the Crimean War than from war-related wounds. Florence Nightingale was an outstanding pioneer and also a courageous public advocate for Christian-motivated diaconia.

During the First World War, she wrote:

I am in a state of chronic anger. The incredibly primitive healthcare system has killed more people than Russian bullets and bayonets.

In the Scutari military hospital, which the Turks had made available to the British, she performed superhuman actions. In today's Üsküdar, a district of Istanbul and the headquarters of the 1st Turkish Army, the Selimiye barracks still stand.³ It is here that, in 1854, Florence Nightingale arrived with 38 nurses. The entire army stormed into the hospitals, she wrote. Over 5000 injured soldiers were to be treated. In addition, she had to fight the military bureaucracy, who had just one major goal and interest, namely that no bad news from Crimea would reach England.

Nobody had been waiting for the nurses to arrive; at first, they were considered troublemakers. At first, the women had to be content with four tiny rooms – even less space than a single officer had at his disposal. But with patience and meat soup, with discipline, scouring pads and bandages, Florence managed to earn respect for her work. Out of the dirty barracks from the beginning, a military hospital emerged with halls which could finally cater for 900 patients. This would not have been possible without allies. Florence Nightingale wrote that it matters a lot to have the grown-ups as friends.

She had been preparing for such an assignment for years. Now, at her prime, it became clear that she was a clever manager who knew how to ally herself with the powerful in order to achieve her goals. It was thanks to her influence with officers and doctors in Istanbul, and later with military authorities and health policy-makers in London, that the mortality rate in the British army fell steadily. After the Crimean War, the soldiers finally received recognition and the nursing staff enjoyed respect – because for a long time both groups had been only looked down upon.

Nursing had long been considered a precarious job only for the poor. In many cases, it was carried out without training, and without recognition. The fact that a highly educated woman from the upper classes wanted to do such low work was considered outrageous. Social work was for ordinary people.

Florence's family, however, was at court, and they employed fifteen maids working across three residences, not including butlers, cooks and house tutors. Florence was born while her parents were on a European tour – they named her after the Italian city in which she was born. Florence recognised her calling in social work when still a child; she was involved in caring for the poor and teaching the children from the neighbouring village. As a young girl, she cared for most of her household during a flu epidemic. After that, she visited

² The British Lazarettos during the Crimean War 1853-1855 (for instance in Scutari, today a suburb in Istanbul) were a learning laboratory for new methods of hygiene for Nightingale. Like in all previous wars the victims of Cholera and Typhus by far outnumbered the victims due to military violence. Measures like the strict separation from patients injured from those suffering from infectious diseases which were introduced by Nightingale resulted in a dramatic reduction in the number of deaths from 42% to 2,2% in the British Lazarettos. See: Jörg Vögeli, Stephanie Knöll, Thorsten Noack: *Epidemien und Pandemien in historischer Perspektive* (Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, 2016), p. 153.

³ In one of its towers, there is a small Nightingale-Museum even today; see also: <https://www.nrw-stiftung.de/projekte/projekt.php?pid=661>.

hospitals across Europe, studied reports to determine the average age of the patients, diagnoses, number of beds, duration of treatment, mortality rate and refinancing. She consistently looked for mentors who could help her on the way, and these included social reformers from all over Europe, people for whom her ideas were not vague fantasies. She did all this because she was determined to follow her calling. She claims to have heard a voice which spoke to her four times – and the first time was when she was seventeen years old. She had already been dreaming of Theodor Fliedner's diaconia in Kaiserswerth. She writes, "If I am looking for refreshment, I read the annual report of the deaconess institution. My heart is already there and I hope that one day I can be there too".

In 1851, when she was thirty-one, she finally reached her goal. For three months, she learned from Theodor Fliedner himself about how nurses can access people's hearts. What she experienced there gave her the strength to consistently follow her own path – even against the expectations of her family. "God has always guided me with his own hand," she writes.

In 1853, she, a single woman, left her parents' home and took over the management of a nursing home in London. One year later, she set out to the Black Sea in order to oversee two hospitals. Her sister Parthenope wrote:

You have to believe that she was destined. Nothing out of her previous life is in vain, finally all the experiences come into play, the treasures collected over so many years, her time in Kaiserswerth, her travels, her studies of hospital questions, her knowledge of so many different spirits and classes. She was so calm and composed on the inside, as if she wanted to go for a walk.

In the German city of Kaiserswerth, in the ruins of the Kaiserpfalz, today one can find the bronze busts of Theodor Fliedner and Florence Nightingale. When the foundation stone was laid for a new hospital for the Kaiserswerther Diakonie in 1970, it was given the name: Florence Nightingale Hospital. Gudrun Zimmermann, who later became the head of the nursing school there, was at the time there as a student. She describes the working conditions in nursing today:

30 years of my professional life I was able to actively shape my professional life of care, orient myself on current social and political trends and regularly celebrate Florence Nightingale's birthday as a day of nursing: organising projects, inviting other schools, etc. The curricula however of the last legislation made that impossible. Now everything is just going exactly according to a plan! The daily agitation and rush, the dominant functionality and the lack of staff in hospitals and schools prevent serious reflection and creative and self-determined action in matters of care."

But care needs prudence and creativity, it is more than a craft. "Nursing is an art," wrote Florence Nightingale in her book "Notes on Nursing."

and if it is to be shaped as an art, it needs a sense of exclusive dedication and as hard and dedicated kind of preparation like the work of a painter or sculptor. Because what is the handling of lifeless canvas or cold marble compared to having to deal with the living body, the temple of the Spirit of God?"⁴

In fact, for Nightingale, care also had a spiritual dimension, Florence was a very devout woman, a person of faith. She saw her mission in following Christ. However, she put nursing competence before the missionary mandate. This was reflected in the composition of the sisters with whom she left for Istanbul – next to Anglican sisters there also were Catholic nuns and secular nurses as well. From her experience with prospective nurses, Gudrun Zimmermann says today:

⁴ Lynn McDonald, *Collected Works*, Bd. 6 (like Ftn. 121), p. 291.

Wanting to help, doing something meaningful and not sitting around the desk all the time are the motives why the care profession is being taken up. There is a longing for good conversations, for closeness, for trustful contact to those cared for. I have never experienced an explicit Christian career choice. The connection that was produced by the diaconess motherhouses, namely that care is inspired by Christian charity, this has provided the professional group of nurses from beginning of the 20th century a high and ambitious professional ethics, but has brought them little reward in terms of wages, even in some cases exploitative structures.

Nursing services and clinics in Germany are now largely privatised. The health facilities resemble “white factories,” says medical ethicist Giovanni di Maio.⁵ It's about input and output, effectiveness and efficiency, profit and loss accounts. Doctors and nurses have learned to separate their professional actions from their motivation and also from their feelings. But is it demanding too much to be able still to identify oneself sufficiently in what you have to do all day? If you only see your work as a job, you end up sorting out everything only according to working hours and official responsibilities.⁶

Conclusion

Anyone who sees their work in nursing and diaconia as a vocation will commit themselves to the framework conditions and will struggle to ensure that their work remains in harmony with their personal talents. Florence Nightingale saw her work as such a vocation; she was passionate about it and she fought with that passion and anger. Her fervour moved the powerful. With the conviction that care services today can still learn from her, this article understands her as a pioneer and an outstanding role model for dedicated presence in the area of diaconia and care, which has an ecumenical and international importance.

What can be done to strengthen and support the influence and the role of care in the short and long-term, both on a national as well as on an international level? Clapping alone will not suffice. And heroines are not the solution either. The Director of the Nursing School at the Florence Nightingale Hospital, Gudrun Zimmermann states:

In my perception there has always been a need for nursing care, this was known by everyone and many tried to change things on a small scale. Now during the Corona Pandemic you can't really pretend to be surprised by the significance and need for care. But nursing and care need to become organised politically. We have to improve the framework conditions and, for example, establish a commission for supervising training for nursing and care. Because the curricula are still rather heavy on medicine, the state exams are taken by medical officers of the health authority and the further training is carried out by the hospital company.

In the current global corona crisis, the value of modern medical professions and the discipline of nursing and care have once again become much more visible. Yet, infections were a much deadlier threat at the time of Florence Nightingale. In 1855, she became infected with a viral flu in the Balaklava hospital in Crimea. At that time, people called it “Krimfever”. She survived the disease, but her health was badly damaged. Marked out by the fever and also by her cropped hair, she became even more admired as a heroine. When she returned to England in 1856, her country wanted to celebrate her. But she escaped the welcome committees. She had been to an unknown land to her compatriots. More important to her was the fund launched in her honour. The fund was meant to serve education for nursing and care, and knowing Florence, what else could it have been for?

When I am no longer even a memory, just a name, I hope my voice may perpetuate the great work of my life. God bless my dear old comrades of Balaclava and bring them safe to shore. Florence Nightingale. (Recording July 30, 1890, London)

⁵ One of the renowned experts on ethics in medicine in Germany: <https://www.igm.uni-freiburg.de/Mitarbeiter/maio>.

⁶ Stated according to Catharina Bruns.

Suggestions for Further Reading

- Baly, Monica, and E. H. C. G. Matthew. "Nightingale, Florence (1820–1910)", Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, January 2011.
- Bullough, Vera L., Bonnie Bullough and Marieta P. Stanton. *Florence Nightingale and Her Era: A Collection of New Scholarship*. New York: Garland, 1990.
- Nelson, Sioban, and Anne Marie Rafferty, Eds, *Notes on Nightingale: The Influence and Legacy of a Nursing Icon*. New York: Cornell University Press, 2010. Essays on Nightingale's work in the Crimea and Britain's colonies, her links to the evolving science of statistics, and debates over her legacy and historical reputation and persona.

2. TERMINOLOGIES, LEARNING PROCESSES AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN ECUMENICAL DIAKONIA IN THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

Dietrich Werner and Matthew Ross¹

Introduction

It is the purpose of this introductory contribution to outline major facets and forms of the diakonal ministry of the churches as developed both in Church history, as well as in the early ecumenical discourse on Diakonia – seen particularly from the particular lenses of German church and diakonia history as one of the authors comes from this tradition. There is a renewed interest today in the ancient tradition of diakonal witness and services in churches in the non-western world. International gatherings and consultations have called for attention and greater emphasis on the diakonal ministry of the church and its relevance in theological training and ministerial formation.² The renewal of Diakonia has become a major issue in the ecumenical missiological dialogue focusing on Diakonia from the perspectives of the marginalised.³ Some church traditions have produced explicit framework documents to spell out theological and biblical perspectives on their understanding of Diakonia, whereas, in other traditions, the language of “social services” or “social ministries” is used to refer to the social dimension of the church’s existence.⁴ The WCC Study Document on Ecumenical Diakonia⁵ referring to different terminologies expresses the following conviction:

Reflecting on the essential relevance and biblical meaning of Diakonia, as the most ancient and binding heritage on Christian social service rooted in Biblical tradition, does not minimise the importance of other language traditions. It also does not prevent us from applying intercultural and inter-denominational sensitivity in terms of different language traditions that describe similar phenomena of social commitment in Christian churches. There are many different terminologies used. In some parts of Christianity, the terminology of “Diakonia” is new and not much used at all. Churches in Asia often speak of Christian Social Service, or Social Ministries. In other traditions, including some Orthodox contexts, Christians speak of “Christian Philanthropia” or “Social Commitment and Outreach”. In other environments, the language of “holistic or integral mission” is used. Diakonia is not only a known term for Christian social services, but even a brand name in the commercial field, as a Christian service provider like Diakonia in Protestant Churches, competing with other religious or secular social service providers. We have to realise that Christians, dependent on their cultural, political and mission-related histories, use different terminologies in their current contexts to describe similar phenomena. However, all Christian traditions have one common Biblical tradition and can be inspired to deepen their common understanding and theological vision of

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² See LWF consultation on the future of theological education in Wittenberg, 2012: <https://www.lutheranworld.org/news/lwf-general-secretary-calls-greater-role-diakonia-and-advocacy-theological-formation>.

³ See WCC consultation on Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in the 21st century, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2012, in: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/unity-mission-evangelism-and-spirituality/just-and-inclusive-communities/theological-perspectives-on-diakonia-in-21st-century>.

⁴ See for example from LWF, 2009: <https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-diakonia-context-transformation-reconciliation-empowerment>.

⁵ The WCC Study Document on Ecumenical Diaconia is available in a draft form and will be made available after formal decision of WCC Central Committee through the WCC website – www.oikoumene.org – in July 2021.

Christian social practice, relating the Christian heritage and vision of the mandate and vocation of Diakonia to contemporary challenges and learning processes.

What, therefore, is the specific dimension and added value in taking up the language of “diakonia” and “ecumenical diakonia” in the discourse on Christian social witness? The WCC in its study document looks again at the unique history of diakonia in the tradition of the church as it wants to deepen “*a theological understanding of diakonia [...] as a dimension integral to the nature and mission of the church. This perspective shows that diakonia is a key expression of the strong link between what the churches are and do. Reflection on ecumenical diakonia requires understanding of both dimensions: the churches' being and their joint action as a worldwide communion of Christians and institutions.*”⁶

Social Responsibility in Jewish Biblical Tradition

It is fascinating to contemplate the ancient biblical roots of social responsibility as it first emerged in the Hebrew Tradition. Four elements should be pointed out with regard to Old Testament traditions:

- One of the most important roots of ancient social thinking is the understanding of the *imago Dei*: Human Beings are the image of God (Gen. 1:27) and this applies to all, to children, elderly, to men and women alike. Nothing has laid a stronger foundation for an early sense of social responsibility in ancient Jewish culture than this basic belief: that there is no human being which does not bear the likeness, presence and promise of God himself in itself. And, as God is a relational being who always longs to be in communion with his chosen people, human beings themselves are essentially relational. They are created not to be in mutual isolation, but to respond to each other’s needs, to respond to calls from others, to share together in the common goods and treasures of creation. Thus, the social responsibility of human beings is already laid down in the creation narrative; it is common to people of all cultures, tongues and religious backgrounds. Human beings in principle are endowed with the capacity to listen to others, to the needs of their neighbours. All can be called: “Where is Abel your brother?” (Gen. 4:9). There is a foundational ethical responsiveness of human beings which belongs to the very fabric of what it means to be human.
- Secondly, in ancient Hebrew religious traditions, it is always presupposed that there is no relation to God without a proper relation to one’s neighbour. There is no cult without social service; there is no spirituality without social responsibility. The very structure of the Decalogue with its two major tables, one on relations to God, the second on relations amongst human beings (see Ex. 20 the Decalogue) underlines that spiritual worship and social behaviour are inseparable according to Jewish tradition.⁷
- A third element refers to the special rootedness of the sense of social responsibility in the experience of the Exodus. The basic commandment “to love your neighbour as yourself” (Lev. 19:18) remains rooted and inseparably related to the experience of being a liberated community of former slaves. The identity of God’s people, therefore, cannot be separated from the identity of migrants and strangers,⁸ as Israel itself has been a stranger in the formative period of its ancient history. The history of liberation in

⁶ WCC/ACT Study Document on Ecumenical Diakonia, 2017, Introduction p. 2.

⁷ See: Ralf Koerrenz, Armut und Armenfürsorge – ‘Hebräische Grundlagen’, in: Ralf Koerrenz, Benjamin Bunk (Hg.) *Armut und Armenfürsorge – Protestantische Perspektiven*. Paderborn: Paderborn, 2014, Seite 15-32.

⁸ See: Georg Steins: „Fremde sind wir...“. Zur Wahrnehmung des Fremdseins und zur Sorge für die Fremden in alttestamentlicher Perspektive, in: <https://www.uni-muenster.de/Ejournals/index.php/jcsw/article/viewFile/470/441>; Helmut Frenz, Das Fremdenbild im Alten Testament als Leitbild für unsere Gesellschaft, in: *Der Überblick* 02/2000 S. 98f. in: <http://www.derueberblick.de/ueberblick.archiv/one.ueberblick.article/ueberblickea63.html?entry=page.200002.098>.

Exodus is a commitment not to suppress the strangers (Ex. 22:20-22). To understand God as a God of liberation also implies the perception of him alone as the ultimate owner of property and land, which, in turn, relativises all human claims upon possessions and limits exploitation both of land and human resources. The covenant of God with his people implies that all property and wealth ultimately are not private property, but belong to God (Dt. 8:7-10). Allowing the poor and the labourers to take what they need to survive is not just charity, but their right (Dt. 24, 14f; 17-22 and Lev. 19:9ff). This is of fundamental significance to the understanding of Diakonia which already, in the earliest layers of ancient Jewish tradition, is not just about charity and individual mercy, but about the fundamental rights of the poor – a clear leaning towards a rights-based understanding of Diakonia and development re-emerging only centuries later.

- The fourth element we have to emphasise here is that the prophetic tradition of social criticism in the early Scriptural Prophetic traditions certainly should be regarded as one of the key roots of the later Christian doctrine and understanding of Diakonia.⁹ A prophet like Amos had emphasised that proper and authentic Worship and Spirituality to God can only happen in conjunction with practical commitment to real justice and mercy (Amos 5:21-24).¹⁰ The prophetic tradition of social criticism was strongly referred to in a major EKD national study document on an alternative understanding of development: “The experience of liberation in Exodus is the foundation of the entire juridical tradition of the people of God (Dt. 5:6ff). The tradition of prophetic criticism of unjust conditions as they relate to property, production and land distribution, in the time of the Old Testament, is the root of critical social thinking within the Christian tradition.”¹¹

Social Responsibility in Christian Biblical Traditions

The Early Christian tradition as reflected in New Testament writings, is both a clear continuation as well as universalisation of the passion for social responsibility and justice in the Old Testament traditions; Jesus understood his ministry as one of diakonia to the poor and marginalised. The washing of the feet is a core passage in point as it has some direct reference to the language of Diakonia: (Jh. 13:1-11 and Lk. 22:18). Jesus interpreted his own life and work as proclamation of the good news to the poor in words and deeds, according to the programmatic first sermon in Nazareth. In Luke 4:18 the famous assertion is made:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free.

This clearly is a direct continuation of the messianic tradition of ancient times, which is seen as culminating and being fulfilled with the earthly ministry of Jesus. The universalisation of this tradition of social liberation and Diakonia to the marginalised is expressed in famous passages like the one on final judgement (Mt. 25:31-

⁹ See: Klaus, Koch. 'Die Entstehung der sozialen Kritik bei den Propheten', in: ders., *Spuren des hebräischen Denkens. Beiträge zur alttestamentlichen Theologie, Gesammelte Aufsätze Bd. 1* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: 1991), pp. 146-166.

¹⁰ H. Donner. 'Die soziale Botschaft der Propheten im Lichte der Gesellschaftsordnung in Israel', in: Neumann, P.H.A. (Hg.), *Das Prophetenverständnis in der deutschsprachigen Forschung seit Heinrich Ewald* (WdF 307) (Darmstadt, 1979), pp. 493-514.

¹¹ “... that they may have life, and have it abundantly”. A Contribution to the Debate about new Guiding Principles for Sustainable Development. A Study by the Advisory Commission of the EKD on Sustainable Development, Hanover 2015, p. 14.

46) in which Jesus identifies himself with anybody (even much beyond his own religious background) to receive assistance, visit and support in a situation in need. Furthermore, this is exemplified in the narrative of the Good Samaritan which extends solidarity and assistance to somebody victimised without asking his religious background nor representing the Samaritan as one of the chosen people. It reflects the essence of God's Diakonia as being answered and continued by human beings.

It has been argued that the secret behind the fast and vast missionary success of Early Christianity to spread across the Mediterranean within such a limited time span of three centuries lies in the inner core social and alternative ethical quality and attractiveness of early churches and diakonal communities. They exposed a different attitude to those who, at that time, were regarded as weak and on the margins, the women, children and impoverished. The diakonal nature of early local congregations was probably the most convincing proof of the actual relevance and transformative character of Christian faith over the values, standards and social hierarchies of ancient Hellenistic and Roman social contexts. It is not without significance that the attractiveness of local Christian churches which are today marked by rapid church growth (such as in China, Nepal, West and Central Africa) similarly are marked by the essential character of local communities as caring, loving and diakonal, providing support, shelter, respect and a sense of dignity and hope for the marginalised. Their diakonal and caring character underlines and grounds their evangelistic strength and outreach. The clear relations between evangelism and Diakonia has been and remains an essential feature of Christianity.¹²

It is therefore quite revealing that some of the most often cited biblical references for the self-understanding of early Christianity are the following three:

1. Not to conform to the standards of this world, to understand Christian witness as living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1-2);
2. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you made me welcome (Mt. 25:31-46);
3. Love your neighbour as yourself (Lk. 10:25-37).

The diakonal and caring attitude and quality of the early Christian community was closely related to the daily experience of the Eucharist, the sharing of bread and wine in local houses as both indicated in Acts and in the letter of St. Paul. The "Summarium" of the essential dimensions of sharing and living out the meaning of the Eucharist in Acts 2:42 points to a self-understanding which regards sharing and caring as essential features of what it means to be a Christian community (see also: 1 Cor. 11:21f). In summarising the learning movement with regard to diakonal ministries, we can conclude that, already in Biblical times of Christianity, the essential conviction that any church community has to relate to and integrate the four essential dimensions of what it means to be the church was crucial. These are expressed in the four biblical terms *martyria* (missionary witness), *leiturgia* (worship), *diakonia* (social service or ministries), and *koinonia* (community or communion).

Ecumenical Diakonia in Early Church History

It would be far from the truth to argue that the international or ecumenical dimensions of Diakonia were an invention or a gradual discovery only in later periods of church history after the Constantinian transformation in the 4th century. The famous example of the collect for the mother-church in Jerusalem (Acts 20:1-5)¹³

¹² Rose Dowsett, Isabel Phiri, et al. *Evangelism and Diakonia in Context*. Edinburgh Centenary Series (Oxford Regnum International Books, 2015), available at: http://www.ocms.ac.uk/regnum/downloads/Evangelism_and_Diakonia_in_Context-wm.pdf [Last accessed: 24th July 2020].

¹³ Dieter Georgi. "Die Geschichte der Kollekte des Paulus für Jerusalem", 1965; Christfried Böttrich: Art: Jerusalemkollekte, in: *Lexikon Bibelwissenschaft*; available at: <http://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/stichwort/51864/>.

provides evidence of a first paradigm of ecumenical diakonia and inter-church aid already in the first century. This unfolded in the earliest stages of Christianity. This period was marked by a major cultural transition from being a purely inner-Jewish sect to a multi-cultural entity and global community across the Mediterranean. The apostolic exhortation on how to prepare for and how to protect the collect for Jerusalem was not only a significant example of how to understand ecumenism – as a sign of solidarity and living bond of care between different parts and traditions in the church – but also as a first general lecture and “encyclical” on ecumenical Diakonia (see: 2. Cor. 8-9).¹⁴

It would amaze many people working within professional agencies for humanitarian relief today were they to understand that international humanitarian action was not invented in the 20th century. We have an example of possibly the first humanitarian action of Ancient Christianity: Judea was faced with the devastating effects of an early drought and a resulting famine. Unfortunately, no details were noted and recorded from this first emergency relief action to the people of Judaea during this disastrous famine (described in Acts 11:27-30). However, undoubtedly this is the first organised Christian humanitarian action, the first “Action of Churches Together Alliance” in Christian history, to be followed by many more instances over the millennia.

Another lesson from New Testament scriptures is the fact that Diakonia was never an isolated individual act of mercy, charity and compassion. We have an archetype model of an institutionalised committee and even organisation of diakonal service described in Acts 6. The appointment of the deacons to solve distribution conflicts of aid between Hellenists and Hebrews in the early church (Acts 6:1-6) can truly be understood as the first institutionalised form of local diakonia and social services in local congregations. The names of these early social Christian heroes and deacons are still known and venerated in Orthodox traditions. We should never forget that their leader, the Apostle of Stephen, became the first martyr of the ancient church. This underlines the costly nature of ancient Christian involvement and the diakonal presence of the church.¹⁵ With the continuation of the appointment of deacons in the early church, a gradual process emerged towards certain forms of institutionalisation of diakonal responsibilities within the local church. The very fact that most of the Apostolic Letters from both Apostle Paul and from his unknown successors included apostolic greetings at the end to those who served in the congregations points to the fact that these apostolic letters were the reflection of an emerging Mediterranean Diakonia network – a kind of embryonic form of ACT Alliance in ancient times. Church leaders in Ancient Christianity were interested in keeping this Diakonia network and quality of mutual service alive, vibrant and mutually informed.

¹⁴ The example of the collect of the churches in Macedonia and Corinth for the church in Jerusalem provided a leading image for the unity of the one body of Christ and the spiritual motivation for ecumenical help to churches across borders for the founding fathers of ecumenical diakonia in Germany, see Christian Berg in 1959: “Der eine Leib Christi hat viele Glieder, einige von ihnen in Mangel und Bedrängnis. Der Leib erweist darin seine Lebendigkeit und Wachsamkeit, dass er zur Erhaltung seiner Funktion die schwachen Glieder stärkt, indem die kräftigen Glieder von ihrer Habe zu den Bedürftigen ‚überfließen‘ lassen. Die über die Erde zerstreute Christenheit gleicht also einem Körper, der seine Reserven als rettende Abwehrkräfte mobilisiert, weil durch die Verwundung oder Schwächung einzelner seiner Glieder seine Gesamtfunktion bedroht ist. Darf es, wenn heute die Kirche in Skandinavien oder Großbritannien, in Deutschland oder Nordamerika stark und funktionsfähig ist, der Protestantismus in Polen oder Indien, Westafrika oder Südamerika aber schwach oder gefährdet ist, bei dieser Situation bleiben, ohne dass der ‚Lastenausgleich der Liebe‘ immer neu und immer stärker erfolgt? Der Leib Christi bleibt krank, wenn nicht ‚Makedonien‘ und ‚Korinth‘ immer wieder für ‚Jerusalem‘ auf den Plan treten.” (in: Christian Berg (Hrsg): *Ökumenische Diakonie*, Lettner Verlag (Berlin, 1959, S. 16).

¹⁵ Klaus Scholtissek, “Neutestamentliche Grundlagen diakonischen Handelns”, in: Ralf Koerrenz, Benjamin Bunk (Hg.) *Armut und Armenfürsorge – Protestantische Perspektiven*. (Paderborn: Paderborn: 2014), Seite 15-32; Gerhard Schäfer, Theodor Storm (Hg.). *Diakonie – biblische Grundlagen und Orientierungen. Ein Arbeitsbuch* (Veröffentlichungen DWI Heidelberg 2). (Heidelberg, 1989); Gerhard Schäfer, Theodor Storm (Hg.). *Diakonie – biblische Grundlagen und Orientierungen. Ein Arbeitsbuch* (Veröffentlichungen DWI Heidelberg 2). (Heidelberg, 1989).

Post-apostolic writings in the 2nd and 3rd centuries point to different developments with regard to the differentiation of the understanding and forms of Christian ministry. The role of a deacon varied, sometimes accentuating a more social-service oriented role or a more clerical/priest role to assist the bishops or a more ecclesial-property managing role in dealing with the revenue and the properties of the church. The 1. Letter of Clements (96 A.D.) clearly presupposes a threefold church-related ministry consisting of bishops, deacons and presbyters. The most ancient Syrian Church Order delivered as “Didaskalia” (3rd century) explicitly mentions female deacons. Here, it is assumed that deacons will be blessed and consecrated by bishops (Diaconate here understood as ordained ministry). Later documents presuppose that deacons cared for the property and income of the church and oversaw the distribution of funds to the poor. For instance, amongst the saints in the Roman Catholic tradition, there is the Deacon “Laurentius” who is venerated as he rescued the treasures of the church from pagan robbers and redistributed them to the poor in order to serve the Lord (according to Eusebius).¹⁶ Remarkably in early periods (e.g. reflected in 1 Tim. 3), a sober articulation of core criteria for the staff qualities of deacons had already emerged. These give witness to their crucial relevance as role models for early Christian social standards of decent life and providing social responsibility for all those not joining the priesthood but who wanted to contribute to the work of the church. The following reads as an official church order for deacons formulated in summarising both good and bad experiences of the early church when it is stated:

⁸ Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. ⁹ They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. ¹¹ Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. ¹² Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. ¹³ For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

The most detailed description of the actual work and including the pastoral as well as the diakonal self-understanding of the early deacons is formulated in an ancient Syrian church order, called “Testamentum Domini” from the 5th century:

Let the Deacon do only those things which are commanded by the bishop as for proclamation, and let him be the counsellor of the whole clergy and the mystery of the church, who ministers to the sick, who ministers to the strangers, who helps the widows, who is the father of the orphans, who goes about all the houses of those who are in need, lest any be in affliction or sickness or misery. Let him go about the houses of the catechumens, so that he may confirm those who are doubting and teach those who are unlearned.

Let him clothe these men who have departed, adorning them, burying the strangers, guiding those who pass from their dwelling, or go into captivity. For the help of those in need let him notify the church, let him not trouble the bishop, but only on the first day of the week let him make mention about everything, so that he may know.¹⁷

This is a remarkable witness from an early church order which can serve as an impulse for churches to consider to what extent diakonal ministries are encouraged, given shape and professionally trained and developed within their own local churches as well as specialised institutions. Being aware of the fact that there are only some churches in ecumenical Christianity, which have preserved a distinct ministry of deacons in their church orders, it should remain a crucial task of every church today to give an account of how the

¹⁶ Annette Noller, *Die Geschichte des Diakonats in evangelischer Perspektive*, VEDD I/2011 (Verband Evangelischer Diakonen-, Diakonissen- und Diakonatsgemeinschaften in Deutschland) (Berlin, 2011).

¹⁷ *Testamentum Domini* (5th Century) No 33; p. 98, English version:
<https://archive.org/stream/cu31924029296170#page/n117/mode/2up>

diakonal ministries are strengthened, maintained and trained in contemporary circumstances. The World Association of Diakonia presents a platform in which specialised diakonal communities and different forms of deaconate can meet and exchange today.¹⁸ There is a sustained debate about how and in which forms a distinct diakonal ministry can be continued and sustained in contemporary contexts; both western and non-western churches should engage in this dialogue.¹⁹

Institutionalisation of Diakonia as Distinct from the Local Church in European Reformation History

One of the major phenomena of later centuries which clearly can be observed is how diakonal services – apart from taking place and remaining within the realm of local communities to various degrees – also found new institutional expressions beyond or even apart from the local church, sometimes even in opposition to an imperial church which had become captive to feudal authorities or corruption. During the middle ages, several religious orders and communities became centres for diakonal activities and social care for the poor and marginalised as the vows of monks included an obligation to voluntary poverty and sharing resources. The interconnection between disciplined spirituality and social care observed in the early formative periods of Diakonia was reincarnated and given shape here. It evolved into new forms as the established hierarchical church often did not provide sufficient space for the virtues and attitudes of solidarity which were part of the vocation and heritage of early Christianity. After the gradual dissolution and fragmentation of the Roman Empire, it was down to the churches to take over the social roles of the Roman authorities, especially regarding organised care for the needy and the poor. Early diakonal hospices, hospitals, orphanages and soup kitchens were the first forms of organised diakonal care outside the local church or with only loose connections to it. The Franciscan religious order had emerged in opposition to the imperial and corrupt centralised church and emerged as a protest movement to turn back to the ideals of early Christianity with its passion for lived out social Diakonia and common life. Thus, the ancient apostolic ideals of a sharing and caring community were explored again and given new shape under new historical circumstances. Hospices emerged, often in small houses, driven by a few pioneering Christians with a diakonal vocation. Later this grew into larger institutions of Christian hospitals or care centres.

The Reformation in late medieval Germany also had a profound impact on the rediscovery of the ancient apostolic traditions of diakonal service within the church. In his dialectical understanding of human freedom, Martin Luther argued that the Christian is free and justified by God and therefore subjected to nobody. At the same time, a Christian is free to serve and therefore subjected in the service of love to everybody.²⁰ As the Christians did not have to worry and struggle for their eternal salvation anymore, energies were set free to look after the immediate needs of others. The service nature of Christian faith was re-discovered again.

Luther never restricted the Reformation to the inner realm, but rather he encouraged Christians to take up social responsibilities and he challenged the political authorities to provide justice and peace under the law of God. It might be less known, but Luther also invented the first new system of common and public social care for the urban poor by installing a sophisticated common collection box (called “Leisniger Kastenordnung”).²¹ Organised funding for Diakonia became an innovation of the Reformation. Continuing the Reformation

¹⁸ See the international work of Diakonia World Federation: <http://www.diakonia-world.org/>.

¹⁹ In Roman Catholic Christianity in China, there is a considerable interest in the renewing of the Diakonate. In Hongkong, a development started some years ago to have permanent deacons in some Chinese churches: <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Permanent-deacons:-a-novelty-for-the-Chinese-Church-38647.html>; But it still is a challenge to exactly establish their role: <http://www.ucanews.com/news/hong-kong-releases-survey-on-diakonate-ministry/79041>. Also see the later contribution of Sandy Boyce on Diaconia World Federation in Section III.

²⁰ See: <http://lutheranreformation.org/theology/on-the-freedom-of-a-christian/>.

²¹ See: <http://www.kirche-leisnig.de/index.php/leisnig/leisniger-kastenordnung?showall=1>;
<https://www.luther2017.de/kr/erleben/staedte/leisnig/>.

impulses, later periods in Lutheran Pietism in Eastern Germany developed new diakonal institutions in which social relief for destitute children and their education always worked hand in hand (Halle, August Hermann Francke, 17./18. Century). The emergence of voluntary associations of Christians active in Diakonia (“Innere Mission”) and their first national platform 1848 in Wittenberg²² can be seen as a direct continuation of the Reformation principles which cultivated a strong sense of love, care and compassion as the other side of an understanding of Christian faith which regards the whole life as a gift from God.²³ Johann Hinrich Wichern, who had also founded the educational centre of the Rauhe Haus in Hamburg in 1833 as well as the Johannesstift in Berlin as major activity centres for training and education for deacons and staff to confront both spiritual and material poverty, was the organising brain behind this new national platform for bringing together regional and local pioneer institutions for diakonal work.

In the same historical context, Theodor Fliedner, a German Lutheran minister and his wife Friederike, opened the first deaconess community in Kaiserswerth in 1836. This became one of many new deaconess communities, forms of diakonal work in which common life, spiritual discipline, chastity and commitment to social service formed a new alliance. It should be noted that these new pioneering models of diakonal work, while being promoted by devout Christian pioneers and official members of the established church, started as reformation and renewal projects at the margins of the church, sometimes in conflict with church authorities. Voluntary associations and spiritual communities formed the basic social form of organisation to provide strength and solidarity for these new diakonal activities.

Towards the end of 19th century, the situation gradually changed again as the introduction of a common and compulsory health insurance in 1883 (then to be followed by insurances against accident, unemployment etc.) marked the beginning of what later became the social welfare state. Individual diakonal acts in a spirit of charity and mercy were gradually transformed into both a social obligation of the state as well as a social right of citizens.²⁴ Diakonia had to adapt to a gradually unfolding new framework of a social welfare state in which diakonal service, while continuing to be motivated by the spirit of Christian love and compassion, had to be seen as part and parcel of the social service obligations of the state. Diakonal and Social Assistance which, according to the principle of subsidiarity, would be rendered and given concrete shape and, most importantly, also partly funded by a number of different voluntary social welfare organisations,²⁵ the strongest of which became Diakonia Germany from the Protestant Churches and Caritas from the Roman Catholic Church.

Different Institutional Forms – One Christian Essence and Basis of Diakonia

In looking into the history and differentiation of different forms of Diakonia both vertically (in the history of Christianity) as well as horizontally (in the different forms of Ecumenical World Christianity today), it becomes clear that different phases and basic models of Diakonia can be distinguished have emerged in different cultural contexts, which co-exist. The following forms and raw models of Diakonia ministries can be distinguished. It is important to realise that the following list does not presuppose a uniform and natural hierarchy of progress and organic linear stages, as too much depends on the related political and social or economic circumstances in given contexts:

- a) Individual acts of diakonal charity in local Christian communities

²² Foundation of the “Centralverein Innere Mission” as a forerunner of Protestant Agency for Diakonia and Development today.

²³ See for instance: Günter Banzhaf: Diakonische Impulse der Reformationszeit: in: https://www.diakonie-wuerttemberg.de/fileadmin/Medien/Fotos/Son_Reformation_Diakonische_Impulse.pdf; or: Hammer, Georg Hinrich. 2013. *Geschichte der Diakonie in Deutschland*, 1. Aufl. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag.

²⁴ See: Art. „Sozialstaat”, in: Norbert Friedrich u.a. (eds): *Diakonie-Lexikon*, Göttingen 2016, p. 414ff.

²⁵ See: Art. „Wohlfahrtsverbände”, in: Norbert Friedrich u.a. (eds): *Diakonie-Lexikon*, Göttingen 2016, p. 465ff.

- b) Emergence of specialised vocations (professions) for diakonal work within the order of church ministries (Deacons)
- c) Mobile diakonal emergency teams visiting local congregations and places in need (apostolic humanitarian action)
- d) Individual houses and places for continued diakonal care (early hospices)
- e) Spiritual communities or voluntary associations of committed diakonal individuals for regular provision of diakonal work
- f) Larger and long-term institutionalized centres for diakonal work (e.g. hospitals)
- g) Regional or national associations of diakonal institutions or diakonal communities
- h) Professional Christian diakonal work pursued in interdisciplinary collaboration with secular experts
- i) Professional long-term diakonal services offered as part of a state-funded social welfare system.

Institutionalisation of Ecumenical Diakonia in the Shadow of European Disasters Created by the Two World Wars

While Diakonia first and primarily was a response of Christian communities to situations of need in the immediate context of local environments, we saw that in apostolic times we have examples of churches responding to situations of need in the far distance (collect for Jerusalem; Famine in Judea). Christianity did not forget that the realm of God's promises and rule of mercy is the whole earth (Ps. 24:1), the inhabited space, the oikumene and that all of those in need amongst the "least" ask for Christian response (Mt. 25:40). With inter-church aid having been a structural component of Diakonia since its early incarnations, the main factor for the discovery and unfolding of "ecumenical Diakonia" as intentional assistance to peoples and nations in need even beyond membership in the church was the ecumenical movement in the early 20th century.

The last decades of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century had seen a growing concern for Christian social thinking and the first pioneering conferences for ecumenical social ethics.²⁶ The encounter both with mass destruction and the refugee movements in the aftermath of two World Wars and the subsequent widening of horizons of the ecumenical movement to issues of unequal distribution of resources in the period of de-colonialisation paved the way for a strong commitment to the ecumenical and international dimension of Diakonia. There is a remarkable history of ecumenical diakonia which was started shortly after 1918 at the end of the first world war when Swiss theologian D. Adolf Keller founded the *European Agency for Church Aid*²⁷ in 1922. The agency worked for the reconstruction of Europe after the war and provided emergency assistance for Russian, Armenian and Assyrian refugees. The established lines of communication through The Ecumenical Movement for Life and Work also proved vital for reconnecting during the last years before the end of World War II and were likewise crucial for reorganising the work of ecumenical diakonia in Germany and neighbouring countries. Already in 1945, the final year of the war, all protestant churches in

²⁶ It is remarkable to note various important new developments in this regard: 1889 Christian Social Union in England; 1887 Association protestante pour l'étude pratique des question sociale in France; 1890 Protestant Social Congress in Germany; 1907 Walter Rauschenbusch's major and profound publication: *The Social Gospel*, which was reprinted in 23 editions; 1908 Social Creed of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America; 1914 World Alliance for Friendship through the Churches Konstanz (Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze); 1924 Birmingham: the famous Conference on Christian Politics, Economics and Citizenship (COPEC) which published 12 massive volumes on pioneering Christian social thinking); finally as a culminating event 1925 the First World Conference of Life and Work in Stockholm, which founded this crucial second wing of the early pre-institutional ecumenical movement. See for details: Ruth Rouse, Stephen Charles Neill (Editors), *A History of the Ecumenical Movement: Vol I: 1517-1948* 3rd Revised ed. Edition 2004.

²⁷ See: Gerhard Noske, *Weltkirchenhilfe angesichts zweier Weltkriege*, in: Christian Berg (Hg.), *Ökumenische Diakonie* (Berlin: Lettner-Verlag, 1959), S. 51, hier S. 77.

Germany came together to lay the foundations for the *Office of Inter-Church Aid* (Hilfswerk der Evangelischen Kirchen in Deutschland) which became an organising centre for bringing together international relief work and the needs of refugees, people returning from prison camps and other needy families.²⁸

In the same year, three years prior to the formation of the WCC in Geneva, the *Division on Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service* (later called CICARWS) was established in the “WCC in formation”. Both can be understood only considering the background of the huge influx of refugees and the immense reconstruction needs in that historical moment; Germany had to cope, not with one million refugees (as in 2015/2016), but with fifteen million refugees. Many local homes in the late forties and early fifties were forced to take in additional inhabitants, who were refugee families who had lost everything and had to start again from scratch.

The growing awareness of the mutual relationship between ecumenism and diakonia in the 1950s and early 60s stimulated a process of gradual widening and merging of both agendas (inter-church aid in Europe and missionary assistance in the global context) and their related instruments, and to the conceptualisation of ecumenical diakonia. In 1957, an *International Consultation held in the Evangelical Academy of Berlin* introduced the concept of ecumenical diakonia. It reflected a strong sense of post-war Christianity and its commitment to peace and the struggle against hunger on a global scale and also to hold together the vision of a ‘responsible society’ and the churches’ commitment on ‘social diakonia’. To be understood in global perspective, therefore the new emphasis was on ‘ecumenical diakonia’.²⁹

In 1959, a national collection of funds was organised by all Protestant churches in Germany to provide support for the global poor, mainly in West-Africa at that time (the Biafra crisis). The funds brought together were collected in the milk-powder cans, which in the period before had been used by Protestant churches in the allied countries to provide first aid to the suffering post-war generation of German mothers bringing up their children. This was a deeply symbolic action in which those who had received ecumenical diakonia from afar out of gratitude and Christian commitment transformed from receivers into active subjects providing ecumenical diakonia to those far neighbours in other parts of the world. The extent of ecumenical assistance received in German churches in war-stricken, suffering Germany from many countries in the years between 1945 and 1955 is still worth commemorating. It is astonishing to remember the fact that Brazil contributed 1 660 096 kg to the reconstruction of Germany, Honduras 1412 kg and even Palestine is mentioned to have contributed 1840 kg! (See illustration overleaf.³⁰)

Bread for the World, the Protestant development agency in Germany was born out of gratitude for the received ecumenical diakonia. In addition, it is the result of a genuine concern for the poor and a passion for new forms of ecumenical diakonia which would stretch out beyond Europe. The rights-based approach to ecumenical diakonia was strengthened and emerged as a consequence the desire to understand the structural causes of global poverty in ecumenical social ethics. While remaining a strong church-based service organisation, the approach taken saw the need to collaborate with the people in need and to finance partner organisations both from church-based background and secular agencies of civil society as these can render an effective contribution to the eradication of poverty and the improvement of human rights situations and living conditions of women, children and the marginalised.

²⁸ See for the history also: Cornelia Füllkrug-Weitzel, Art. Brot für die Welt, in: Norbert Friedrich u.a. (eds): *Diakonie-Lexikon* (Göttingen: Göttingen University Press, 2016), p. 74.

²⁹ Evangelische Akademie, *Kommunität. Vierteljahrsschrift der Evangelischen Akademie Berlin*, Oktober 1957. Christian Berg (Hg.), *Ökumenische Diakonie* (Berlin: Lettner-Verlag, 1959).

³⁰ Christian Berg, *Ökumenische Diakonie*, op. cit. p. 93.

Im einzelnen kamen von 1945 bis Mitte 1955 aus folgenden Ländern nachstehend aufgeführte Mengen von Sachspenden nach Deutschland:

	kg		kg
Argentinien	54 791	Kolumbien	537
Australien	486 539	Mexiko	2 689
Belgien	8 236	Neuseeland	90 270
Bolivien	2 028	Nicaragua	2 049
Brasilien	1 660 096	Norwegen	2 130 567
Chile	453 283	Palästina	1 840
Costa Rica	1 050	Peru	90
Dänemark	29 485	Portugal	15 628
England	596 396	Schweden	16 060 773
Finnland	600 775	Schweiz	8 022 200
Holland	204 024	Spanien	103 840
Honduras	1 412	Südafrika	1 927 562
Irland	956	Uruguay	5 616
Island	72	USA	80 977 003
Italien	11 000	Sonstige	341 278
Kanada	870 881		
			114 662 976**)

*) Solberg a.a.O. S. 110.

**) „Dank und Verpflichtung“ S. 164. — Vgl. Umseite.

In a programmatic publication also in 1959 under the title “*Ecumenical Diakonia*” (“*Ökumenische Diakonie*”), a first detailed conceptual outline of the different forms of church world service was presented. This is interesting as it presents a church-based notion of ecumenical diakonia before the term “development” was brought in. The umbrella term used at this stage was *Weltkirchenhilfe* (church world service) which was explicitly characterised as an aim of the ecumenical movement.³¹ *Three major forms of church world service (Weltkirchenhilfe)* were identified:

- Church world service for emergency assistance and relief services (“*Weltkirchliche Karitative Nothilfe*”).³²
- Church world service as social diakonia, advocacy and social political ethics (“*Weltkirchliche Sozialdiakonie (Sozialanwaltschaft und Sozialtheologie)*”).³³
- Church world service as Inter-Church Aid for strengthening church witness and service within and between the denominational churches (“*Gegenseitige Kirchenhilfe zur Stärkung des kirchlichen Lebens*”).³⁴

³¹ “Gerhard Noske. “Das Besondere der Weltkirchenhilfe der letzten Zeit ist die Tatsache, daß sie von den offiziellen Kirchen und Kirchenbünden und deren Gemeinden unmittelbar als eigene Verantwortung empfunden und durch eigene Organe durchgeführt wurde. Darin ist sie ein Kind der ökumenischen Bewegung”, in: Gerhard Noske.

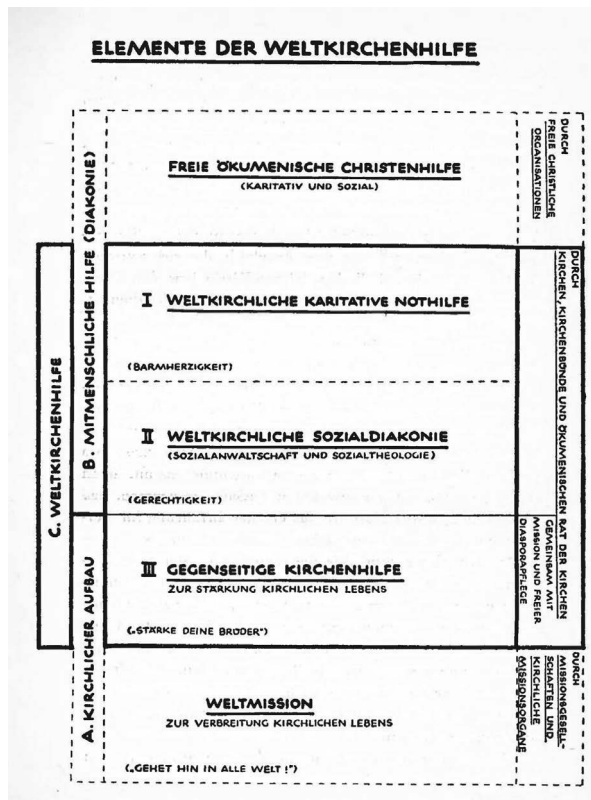
“Weltkirchenhilfe angesichts zweier Weltkriege”, in: Christian Berg (Hg.), *Ökumenische Diakonie* (Berlin: Lettner-Verlag, 1959), S. 51ff, hier S. 54.

³² Gerhard Noske. “Im Zeichen der Barmherzigkeit kann die Weltkirchenhilfe besonders in Katastrophenzeiten und besonderen Notlagen vordringlich karitative materielle Nothilfe für Hungernde, Frierende, Heimat- und Obdachlose, Kranke und Gefangene sein. Sie kennt hierbei im allgemeinen hinsichtlich der Empfänger ebenso wenig Konfessions- wie Nationalitäts- oder Rassegrenzen, sondern geht nach dem Beispiel des Barmherzigen Samariters rein nach der Dringlichkeit der Not.” (ebd. S. 55).

³³ Gerhard Noske: „Im Zeichen der Gerechtigkeit kann sie als weltweite Sozialdiakonie gemeinsames Ringen von Kirchen und Christen vieler Bekenntnisse und Nationalitäten um eine möglichst gerechte Ordnung der sozialen und internationalen Verhältnisse und damit vorbeugende Hilfe gegen vieler Massennöte...(und) auch soziale Anwaltschaft ... (und) für das verletzte Recht bestimmter Menschen oder Menschengruppen”. (sein ebd. S. 56).

³⁴ G. Noske: „Neben akuter Notstandshilfe und vorbeugender Sozialdiakonie gehört zur heutigen Weltkirchenhilfe...drittens die gegenseitige Kirchenhilfe materieller und personeller Art zur Stärkung und Erhaltung des kirchlichen Lebens” Sie ist als Bruderhilfe innerhalb der engeren Konfessionsfamilien eine Hauptaufgabe der bekenntnismäßigen Weltbünde...geschieht aber auch überkonfessionell durch die Abteilung für zwischenkirchliche

It was absolutely vital for the understanding at this early stage that emergency social assistance and advocacy work should never be dissociated from the other third dimension which was oriented towards the mutual assistance of *churches* to strengthen each other in their contextual witness and service.³⁵ In a graph accompanying the conceptual outline a continuum was envisaged bringing together the dynamic of world mission, the three dimensions of Church World Service (“Weltkirchenhilfe”) and individual Christian charity and social witness as belonging to one single continuum of different expressions of ecumenical diakonia in the ecumenical movement:³⁶



In a related paper from the same early publication in 1957, an additional terminological difference was made. The author (G. Noske) distinguishes “*Ecumenical Diakonia*” which refers to all forms of cross-border social assistance, help, advocacy and inter-church aid as developed within the ecumenical movement for others, i.e. diakonia with global outreach, from “*Diakonia in the oikumene*” which refers to different forms of diakonal action within churches belonging to the ecumenical movement by which churches learn and take up innovative models from each other (e.g. the emergence of deaconess-communities in Tanzanian Lutheran

Hilfe beim Ökumenischen Rat der Kirchen”, in: Gerhard Noske. 'Weltkirchenhilfe angesichts zweier Weltkriege', in: Christian Berg (Hg.), *Ökumenische Diakonie* (Berlin: Lettner-Verlag, 1959), S. 51, hier S. 56 und 57.

³⁵ “So verbindet sich in der heutigen Weltkirchenhilfe diakonische Verantwortung für den hilfsbedürftigen Mitmenschen am den Brennpunkten der Weltnot mit gegenseitiger Kirchenhilfe zum Aufbau von Gemeinde und Kirche”, in: Gerhard Noske. 'Weltkirchenhilfe angesichts zweier Weltkriege', in: Christian Berg (Hg.), *Ökumenische Diakonie* (Berlin: Lettner-Verlag, 1959), S. 51, hier S. 58.

³⁶ From Christian Berg, *Ökumenische Diakonie*, op. cit. p. 57.

churches). The third distinct dimension is called “*Ecumenism within Diakonia*”, which according to this early study was referring to federations of similar forms of diakonia supported by different denominational traditions within World Christianity (like the World Diakonia Federation, which brings together deaconess communities from different countries).³⁷

From Early Ecumenical Diakonia to Development Cooperation in the Process of De-colonialisation

Thus, the early ecumenical movement in the post-war period was confronted with two major challenges, for which distinct early instruments of ecumenical diakonia were developed (although the terminology was not fully realised in that period): The first major challenge was the reconstruction of Europe and the refugee crisis. CICARWS was the main instrument of engaging in inter-church aid and ecumenical Diakonia in this regard. The second major challenge, which soon followed, was the one related to de-colonialisation and the growing conflict between rich and poor countries in the global context. The main instrument developed in this regard were the missionary assistance programs of the International Missionary Council (IMC), which have existed since 1922. It was the world missionary movement and the debates in the IMC which then paved the way towards a new relevance of the development discourse which was the result of a growing significance of Christian churches raising their voices on behalf of the Global South. A major paradigm shift emerged with the formal integration of the IMC into the WCC in 1961 during the assembly in New Delhi. Now the ecumenical movement became truly global, and inter-church aid (defined until now mainly within the framework of North Atlantic relations) was irreversibly enlarged to include newly emerging issues concerning development, liberation and structural economic injustice. It is interesting to see that with the integration of the IMC and the WCC the mandate of CICARWS changed and expanded so as to combine inter-church aid with global or ecumenical diakonia. The new mandate of CICARWS was stated in 1961 as follows:

The aim of the division shall be to express the ecumenical solidarity of the churches through mutual aid in order to strengthen them in their life and mission and especially in their service to the world around them (diakonia) and to provide facilities by which the churches may serve men and women in acute human need everywhere, especially orphaned peoples, including refugees of all categories.

National and regional instruments of Christian Church World Service (like Bread for the World, based in Stuttgart, Germany) grew in close collaboration with global ecumenical instruments like CICARWS which was further developed in the sixties and seventies in the spirit of a new sense for the global dimensions of a “responsible society”. The IMC-based global study project “Rapid Social Change” (1955-1961) provided a first entry and opening into the growing debate on development issues. The Uppsala Assembly of WCC in 1968 can be regarded as the beginning of a formal engagement of the institutionalised ecumenical movement in the global development discourse. The transformation of “inter-church aid” into “development aid” was critically discussed at that time, indicating that, despite the changing political framework and new opportunities for cooperation between church-based ecumenical diakonia and state development programs (and funds), a theological concern remained vital in many circles. The priority concern was to keep the churches international work for social justice with a clear Christian profile and close to its original grounding in the mandates for ecumenical diakonia and not to lose its distinctive marks as a *church based* activity – a debate continued and taken up today with the new study document of WCC and ACT Alliance on “ecumenical Diakonia”.

What is implied by a fair and mutuality-oriented approach to ecumenical diakonia in a context which suffers from continued dependency between some churches operating mainly in a giving and other churches

³⁷ Gerhard Noske. “Ökumenische Diakonie, Diakonie in der Ökumene, Ökumene der Diakonie”, in: Christian Berg (Hg.). *Ökumenische Diakonie* (Berlin: Lettner-Verlag, 1959), hier S. 112.

mainly in a receiving role? Who sets which priorities and formulates the conditions determining who sits at the table and in which role? These were questions taken up in the study process on “Ecumenical Sharing of Resources” (ESR) which was initiated in WCC and its program on CCPD (Churches Commission on Participation in Development) after the 1976 Nairobi Assembly. This was both a reaction to the so-called “moratorium debate” on sending of personnel and funds, raising critical questions about the selfhood and identity of churches challenging the static division between and portraying of ‘receiving’ churches and ‘sending’ or ‘giving’ churches. It was also an echo to the plea of early conceptual approaches to ecumenical diakonia demanding that development cooperation should not be completely dissolved and separated from the priorities of inter-church aid and the concerns for strengthening the churches’ witness and service should remain a strong component in the overall work on ecumenical diakonia.

The ESR study project aimed at a new framework of relationships that would free the churches from traditional roles of being either a sending or a receiving body and should enable them to overcome structures of inequality and dependency between rich and poor. Also, a broader understanding of what is meant by resources was projected, including spiritual, cultural and human resources as well as financial and material goods. The ESR Study called for just relationships based on equality, which would allow for mutual accountability, sharing of power and true interdependence. It requires a holding together of the dimensions of mission, development and mutual service, which often were seen as moving apart and being treated separately, both in theology and in organisational structures. The study materials of the ESR process³⁸ are still worth re-reading as they include burning questions which still on the table. However, even the guidelines on ecumenical resource sharing finally presented at WCC³⁹ could not present a breakthrough in the mechanisms of ecumenical diakonia on a broader and international scale, as too many partners were involved and an official common implementation of these goals in all churches and agencies involved in WCC until now could not be agreed upon. Furthermore, they were only taken up in some regional or bilateral networks or international mission boards (such as UEM; CEVAA and others).

Recent Developments in Ecumenical Diakonia after 1976

Developments in the understanding of ecumenical diakonia can be illustrated from events the last few decades, perhaps most notably in the conclusions from several conferences and in the creation of ACT Alliance in 2010. As well as in theological and ecclesial contexts, these can also be seen in the context of social change, response to high profile catastrophes (such as the Ethiopian famine of the mid 1980s) and the urgent need for the better co-ordination and greater effectiveness of diakonal and development work. This has culminated in the need to actively address perceptions of possible tension between the model of highly-professionalised diakonal work in the Global North (often through specialised agencies) and the diakonal work of churches in the Global South, hence the need to stress a common and uniting approach through ecumenical diakonia.

In 1978, CICARWS held a consultation on “*The Orthodox Approach to Diakonia*”⁴⁰ in Chania on the Island of Crete. This helped to focus on viewing diakonia as a “liturgy after the Liturgy”, thus an integral part of Christian life, work and care in the context of service and worship. This placed a renewed emphasis on the spiritual dimension of diakonia and concern to ensure that specialised agencies did not operate so distinctively from the churches that they cease to be distinguishable from secular development agencies other than in name.

³⁸ See: *WCC Study: Empty Hands. An Agenda for the Churches. Study Guide for the Ecumenical Sharing of Resources* (Geneva, 1980).

³⁹ In 1988, the WCC adopted “A Common Discipline of Ecumenical Sharing” (WCC Consultation on Koinonia: Sharing of Life in a World Community, El Escorial), which can be seen as the culmination of ESR process.

⁴⁰ <https://www.ecupatria.org/articles/an-orthodox-approach-to-diakoniadiakonia/>.

A further consultation was held in Geneva in 1982 on “*Contemporary Understandings of Diakonia*”.⁴¹ This consultation called for a much greater emphasis on liberative diakonia – the need for justice and empowerment in diakonia. The ethos of some diakonal services was castigated as being insufficiently critical of prevailing socio-economic norms, particularly the effects of capitalism and colonialism.

Existing models of development were now starting to come under increasing scrutiny. By the 1980s, an increasing amount of concern was being expressed at the lack of progress by the existing development model, often perceived as overly focused on economic growth rather than alleviating poverty with care and welfare. This was sharply illustrated in 1985 when “Band-Aid” (initiated by some of world’s highest profile pop and rock musicians of the era) caught the popular imagination by providing famine relief in Ethiopia, as well as highlighting the perceived ineffectiveness of some development work.

Vancouver 1983

The developmental and diakonal work of the Church has to be sensitive to changing needs, aspirations and demands, whilst retaining its ecclesial nature and theological foundations. Mere benevolence is insufficient, as expressed at the 6th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, held in Vancouver in 1983:

Diakonia as the church’s ministry of sharing, healing and reconciliation is of the very nature of the Church. It demands of individuals and churches a giving, which comes not out of what they have, but what they are. Diakonia constantly has to challenge the frozen, static, self-centred structures of the Church and transform them into living instruments of the sharing, healing ministry of the Church. Diakonia cannot be confined within the institutional framework. It should transcend the established structures and boundaries of the institutional church and become the sharing and healing action of the Holy Spirit through the community of God’s people in and for the world.⁴²

The distinctive ecclesial, pastoral, prophetic, theological and missiological dimensions of diakonia thus came into sharper focus. The need for a greater sharing of resources was increasingly emphasised in ecumenism, thus making ecumenical diakonia a sign and a witness to the Church’s call to serve. The prophetic dimension emphasised the promotion of human dignity and work for justice, peace and the integrity of creation. This led to tensions between some advocates of a rights-based approach to diakonia rather than a faith-based approach, the challenge for ecumenical diakonia is to show that the faith-based and rights-based approaches are not rivals or opposites, but complementary and indivisible.

In 1986, a consultation was held in Larnaca, Cyprus. The CICARWS director, Klaus Poser, described the processes towards a greater conceptualisation of ecumenical diakonia as follows in the report from the consultation:

There was relatively little discussion of development or projects; rather, discussion centred on the struggle for life and solidarity for justice. The consultation demonstrated that the manifestations of Christian love assume many diverse forms, and witness to the comprehensiveness of diakonia in the discipleship of Jesus Christ.⁴³

The prophetic and political dimensions of diakonia were emphasised. The prophetic dimension comes through the inspiration of Biblical texts emphasising human dignity, the rights of people, justice and peace. The political aspect comes from a recognition of socio-economic and socio-political contexts of how people live their daily lives, including the naming of injustice and the quest for justice.

⁴¹ *Contemporary Understandings of Diakonia*. A Report of a Consultation held in Geneva 1982, WCC (Geneva, 1983).

⁴² Quoted in: Kjell Nordstokke. Diakonia and diakonate in the World Council of Churches, *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, Volume 13, 2013 – Issue 4 Dec 2013, pp. 286-299.3.

⁴³ <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/justice-diakonia-and-responsibility-for-creation/ecumenical-solidarity/larnaca-declaration>.

The 1990s

In 1991, the 7th Assembly of the World Council of Churches was held in Canberra, Australia. The Assembly decided to dissolve CICARWS and replace it with a new WCC department – Unit IV on Sharing and Service. The future emphasis would be to network processes of reflection (rather than an emphasis on the concept and word diakonia).

In the aftermath of the 8th WCC Assembly, held in Harare, Zimbabwe in 1998, the WCC programme on Diakonia and Solidarity was established in 2002. This placed a renewed emphasis on the development of the concept of ecumenical diakonia, in particular aiming to show that concepts and terminologies may have changed over time but the essence remains the same. Genuine acts of solidarity, through Biblically-inspired mutuality and sharing, are required if the ecumenical vision is to be credible and authentic. An authentic diakonia must therefore be one of justice and peace.⁴⁴

The Emergence of ACT Alliance

With the ending of CICARWS, alternative mechanisms were needed to promote cooperation. Heads of development agencies from the global North continued to meet, especially in the context of response to emergencies. In 1995, ACT International (Action by Churches Together International) was founded, based at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva – the same location as the World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation (with both playing a major role in the creation of ACT International). This created a new locus for the coordination of diakonal work. In 2000 the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA) was created to co-ordinate advocacy by churches and church-related agencies at the global level.

In 2007, ACT International was joined by a new sister organisation, called ACT Development, with a particular emphasis on co-ordinating development work by churches and their agencies. Although created as a separate body, this was with the expressed aim of integrating the two. Accordingly, ACT International and ACT Development united to become ACT Alliance in 2010, again with the active support of the World Council of Churches and Lutheran World Federation. Members of ACT Alliance include *Brot für die Welt* (Germany), *Christian Aid* (UK and Ireland) and the *Amity Foundation* (People's Republic of China). As of 2020, ACT Alliance is a coalition of 156 churches and faith-based organisations working together in over 120 countries. According to the ACT Alliance website:

ACT Alliance is the largest coalition of Protestant and Orthodox churches and church-related organisations engaged in humanitarian, development and advocacy work in the world, consisting of 155 members working together in over 140 countries to create positive and sustainable change in the lives of poor and marginalised people regardless of their religion, politics, gender, sexual orientation, race or nationality in keeping with the highest international codes and standards.⁴⁵

The creation of ACT Alliance has given greater prominence to specialised development ministries in the ecumenical movement. It has also facilitated much closer co-operation and co-ordination, which is essential for effective development work. The relationship between ACT Alliance and the World Council of Churches continues to evolve. Differing emphases can lead to different approaches, yet the two organisations are emphatically not rivals.

⁴⁴ See also: Esther Hookway. *From Inter-Church Aid to Jubilee: A brief history of ecumenical Diakonia in the WCC*, available at: <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/europe/diakoniahistorybook.pdf>.

⁴⁵ ACT Alliance website (accessed 4 February 2020): <https://actalliance.org/about/>.

In September 2014, the WCC and ACT Alliance jointly organised a consultation in Malawi⁴⁶ on the relationship between churches and specialised development ministries. This aimed to address tensions that can emerge in the operation of internationally-organised church-related development work, where local churches sometimes claim to have been bypassed or marginalised in their own diakonal endeavours. This leads to a need to clarify the nature, meaning and scope of such work in the context of ecumenical diakonia. A particular consequence of the Malawi consultation was the perceived need for a major study on Ecumenical Diakonia, which would eventually emerge in 2020 as a document entitled “*Called to Transformative Action – Ecumenical Diakonia*”.⁴⁷

“Called to Transformative Action – Ecumenical Diakonia”

Jointly published by the World Council of Churches and ACT Alliance in 2020, this study paper is not intended to be a prescriptive document or a theological convergence paper. Instead, “*Called to Transformative Action – Ecumenical Diakonia*” aims to describe the history, theology and development of ecumenical diakonia offering areas for discussion and observation in a global context. The ten chapters of the study are:

1. Introduction
2. History
3. Diakonia in today’s polycentric ecumenical movement
4. Theological reflection
5. The changing landscape of diakonal action
6. The distinctiveness of diakonal practice
7. Contemporary challenges
8. Ecumenical diakonia in different confessional contexts
9. Ecumenical diakonia in different geographic contexts
10. The way forward

The document was subject of considerable revision during the writing period, including input from two reference groups, a consultancy, several members of staff and many others. Initial concerns that the draft paper could inadvertently appear too Europe-centric, were addressed by a decision to include the new chapters 8 and 9, looking at Ecumenical Diakonia in differing confessional and geographic contexts respectively, as well as a review of all other chapters.

As a closing thought for this chapter, this quote from “*called to Transformative Action – Ecumenical Diakonia*” describes the fundamental and context nature of diakonal work:

The object of Christian diakonia is to overcome evil. It offers deliverance from injustices and oppression. When the church fails to offer its witness and to be prophetic, the reaction of the world will be indifference and apathy. Diakonia is therefore an essential element in the life and growth of the church.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/church-organizations-explore-ways-of-strengthening-relationships>.

⁴⁷ The WCC study document which is available in a draft form will be made available on WCC website after formal decision of Central Committee in July 2021 www.oikoumene.org.

⁴⁸ See final version of the Ecumenical Diakonia document: to be released by Central Committee of WCC in 2021.

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3. MAIN BIBLICAL THEMES OF DIACONIA FROM EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVES

Renate Kirchhoff¹

Reference to biblical texts and the results of exegetic research is a feature of diaconal studies and practice. Any account of biblical principles is shaped by a contextually determined view both of the circumstances in which humans live today, and of biblical texts. Neither the interpretation nor the use of biblical texts can be derived from the biblical texts directly; it is the recipients themselves who are responsible for both.²

This article presents a selection of texts and traditions indicating that there are groups of people who are unable to satisfy their basic needs (food, physical safety, community etc.). These texts assure the persons concerned that they have a right to solidarity, and motivate people who have resources (financial resources and other ways of making a difference) to use these resources to benefit those who have none or fewer. Acting to assist others in this way is acting in solidarity with other people; choosing not to use one's own resources in this way is understood biblically to be a breach of faithfulness to God.

The Greek Word *Diakonia*³

The English word “diaconia” comes from the Greek *diakonia*, which is usually translated into English as “service”. In German research, the interpretation of the word had been shaped by the idea that the original meaning of *diakonia* was “table service”. As the work of women and slaves, it was regarded as an inferior activity. Only in the New Testament was it seen positively. Since the 1990s, however, the research consensus has been that the word not automatically denotes the lowliness of service, and the use of the lexeme in the NT corresponds to the secular Greek and Jewish Hellenistic Greek usage. *Diakonia* denotes a (temporary) assignment in the context of a hierarchical relationship; the assigned persons have a mediating role whereby they deliver an object or a message to the addressees. The words for men and women are used without any apparent gender-specific differences. Since the male form *diakonos* is used to designate women (Rom. 16:1-2), the masculine form cannot be used directly to infer the masculinity of the person designated. Texts in which the lexeme is used are well suited to discussing mandates and licences in today's conflicts, as well as the interests and motives of the parties involved.

The Shaping of Helping Action

Provisions for the protection of particular target groups⁴

The Bible mainly mentions the elderly, widows and orphans, aliens, slaves and the poor as being in need of protection. Its provisions concerning behaviour towards these groups can be found in a relatively systematised form in Exodus 20:22-23,33; Leviticus 17-26; Deuteronomy 12-26. Hence the idea of “social laws” is often

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² This article is based in large part on: Renate Kirchhoff, “Biblische Grundlegung diakonischen Handelns aus neutestamentlicher Perspektive”, in Johannes Eurich and Heinz Schmidt, Eds. *Diakonie: Grundlagen – Konzeptionen – Diskurse*. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), pp. 39-75.

³ Anni Hentschel, *Diakonia im Neuen Testament*, WUNT 2 / 226 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).

⁴ Kirchhoff, “Grundlegung”, pp. 60-62.

discussed.⁵ The provisions did not have the character of law in the modern sense of the word, however. The groups in need of protection could not sue for their rights. Instead, they depended on men and women of legal and financial means to follow the instructions. The texts promote the following of these instructions by describing faithfulness to them as “loving God” and holding out the prospect that God will reward this faithfulness (e.g. Ex. 20:6; Lev. 18:5; Deut. 15:10,14). Such provisions are common across the Oriental world and therefore were not exclusive to Israel; but they were regarded as necessary elements of Israel’s self-image (Deut. 4:8).

In classical antiquity, the target groups for protection are people with whom there is direct contact; here there is a key difference to today’s global societies.

The protective provisions relating to *aliens* are aimed at actively preventing exploitation of their lack of integration into social systems (e.g. Lev. 19:33f; Ex. 22:20; Ex. 23:9). *The elderly*, unless they were rich, were dependent for survival on the support of subsequent generations (Ex. 20:12; Lev. 19:3, 20:9; Deut. 27:16). A duty of care existed not only towards one’s own birth parents, but also towards other relatives (Ex. 19:3; Ruth 4:15; Tob. 14:13). *Widows* are women who – for various reasons – live without a husband. They have as little legal capacity and status as orphans and aliens and may therefore be particularly exposed to exploitative situations. In their case too, the provisions are aimed at preventing active exploitation of an underprivileged status (Ex. 20:12; Lev. 19:3, 20:9; Deut. 27:16; Mark 12:38-40; James 1:27). *Slaves*, in the Biblical sense, are generally better off than day labourers (Deut. 24:14-15), who own no land and have no master to ensure their livelihood. The rule that people who have fallen into *debt slavery* have to be freed after six years was intended to prevent such persons having to remain slaves for the rest of their lives (Ex. 21:2-11; Deut. 15:12-17). The *poor* are people who can belong to all of the groups listed above.

Provisions shaping economic relationships⁶

The *ban on interest* and the *remission of debts* are attempts to contain increasing impoverishment associated with the unequal distribution of land and financial resources, by means of solidarity. Taking interest means, for example, collecting more seed or money than was lent (Lev. 25:37; Dt. 23:20). This practice was forbidden because it drove the poor into debt. The profit mentioned in Matthew 25:14-30 and Luke 19:11-27 reflects this form of systematic money-making. The intrinsic dynamics associated with debt, which favour the creditor to the disadvantage of the debtor, are the subject of prophetic social criticism in particular. Thus Isaiah 3:14 says to the elders and officials: “The spoil of the poor is in your houses.” There were no policy measures that generally and effectively limited the charging of interest, or legal measures that structurally protected against indebtedness. However, there are instructions intended to guarantee a minimum level of rights for the poor in an organised and public way, in the context of taking interest. For example, the warming coat should be taken in pawn only during the daytime (Ex. 22:26f; Lev. 19:8f; Dt. 24:12; Ruth 2; Mt. 5:40parr. requires this), and equipment needed for everyday existence should not be pledged (Dt. 24:6-11). If debt has already led to a complete loss of livelihood, the remission of debts should be used as an instrument to allow debtors to make a new start and also to protect creditors against losing their capital (Dt. 15:1-11). The ban on interest, the remission of debts and the *freeing* of debt slaves are responses to dynamic forces that make the rich richer and drive the poor into debt. It is uncertain to what extent these compensating measures were put into practice or how effective they ultimately were.

⁵ Rainer Kessler. *Sozialgeschichte des alten Israel. Eine Einführung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006), pp. 37-38.

⁶ Rainer Kessler. “Verschuldung” <https://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/stichwort/34131/> (accessed 24 February 2020).

Organisation of Assistance and Solidarity⁷

The primary locus of support is the family. When family support mechanisms are in crisis, there is an increased risk of individuals becoming impoverished (Isa. 58:7,10; Ezek. 18:7,16; Matt. 25:35-38,42-44). In times of increasing impoverishment, systems arise to provide the hungry with money and food. Those who give are mainly the rich (Luke 16:19-31; James 2:1-13), because they can give without sinking into poverty themselves (Luke 3:10f; 21:1-4; Acts 2:45; 9:36; 10:2). Precisely in order not to shame or display superiority over the poor, a requirement develops stipulating that the giving of alms should not be seen by others (Matt. 6:1-4). Already in the 2nd century B.C., there is evidence that temples and synagogues offered structures which enabled the collection and distribution of alms. Regardless of the question to what degree almsgiving was organised, its ranking with prayer and fasting (Matt. 6:2,7,16) shows that almsgiving was self-evidently a practice of faithfulness to God (Matt. 6:1).

Paul refers to this regularly putting aside for others that which is not needed for oneself, as a “gift of the blessing” (*eulogia*) (2 Cor. 9:5); if more is kept than is needed, the gift is tainted by greed (*pleonexia*) and is described as an “extortion”. This means that those who keep more for themselves than absolutely necessary are enriching themselves at the expense of the poor, and actively helping themselves to that which belongs to the poor.

The Relevance of the Jesus Tradition in the Justification and Interpretation of Diaconal Action

Jesus as a representative of the kingdom of God⁸

Jesus “announces” the kingdom of God in the sense that he is actively establishing it on earth and, like a Roman governor, he locally enforces the rule of an emperor over the people of his dominion. This is done by means of instructions that specify the citizenship requirements for the kingdom (Mark 10:29-31,34).

Jesus did not think in structural terms. This is why his actions did not aim to put an end to discrimination and exploitation as such, or enshrine opportunities for participation in law. However, the criteria for how one becomes a citizen of the kingdom offers clear guidance: the rich should use their property for the benefit of the poor (Mark 10:21); the respected should show solidarity with the marginalised (Mark 10:15); resources should be used in such a way that people are assured of survival (Mt. 25:31-46); suitability for a leading position in the community is determined by whether power is used for the welfare of those who are subject to that power (Mark 10:35-45).

Healings and exorcisms⁹

Biblical accounts of healings are a challenge for a diversity-sensitive reception. Sick and disabled people are healed and therefore seemingly made to fit the dominant standards of normality, as though the goal were normalisation and conformity of the sick and disabled. A reception of the texts will use these accounts to make people aware of the extent to which sickness, disability and possession are social constructs, and structural conditions are responsible for exclusion and stigmatisation.

The main diseases and disabilities that appear in New Testament healing narratives are *blindness* (Mark 8:22-26), *paralysis* (Mark 2:1-12parr.), *muteness* (Luke 11:14parr.), *deaf-muteness* (Mark 7:31-37) and

⁷ Rainer Kessler, “Armut / Arme (AT)”, <https://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/stichwort/13829/> (accessed 24 February 2020).

⁸ Angelika Strotmann. *Der historische Jesus. Eine Einführung* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2012), pp. 99-119.

⁹ Jürgen Ebach, *Biblische Erinnerungen im Fragenkreis von Krankheit, Behinderung, Integration und Autarkie*, in Annette Pithan et al. Eds, *Handbuch integrative Religionspädagogik*. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2002), pp. 98-111; Annette Weissenrieder, *Images of Illness in the Gospel of Luke*, WUNT 1/164 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), pp. 23-42.

leprosy (Mark 1:40-45parr.) This series bears similarities to the typifying way of talking about disease and disability that is found in the Old Testament (Isa. 29:18-19; 35:5-6f; 42:18). Describing people according to their respective impairment places them together with people who are poor or aliens; this is aimed at expressing their entitlement to solidarity (Lev. 19:4; Matt. 25:31-46).

Possession describes a phenomenon in which the affected person is possessed by a demon, who largely takes over control of that person. The person should be exorcised if the effect is harmful, i.e. if the demon damages the person through illness, self-injury or a compulsion towards anti-social behaviour in such a way that he or she becomes isolated and impoverished (e.g. Mark 5:1-20).

Jesus' role, on a selective basis and as an initial step, is to establish a new social and also cosmic order. At the same time, Jesus is part of this world, in which good and evil spirits are at work. He does not advocate freedom from dominion, but he enforces the rule of God, as whose representative he acts.

The relevance of social relationships to the healing of persons affected by disease, disability or possession is reflected in some of the accounts (Mark 2:1-12; John 5:2-9), and Jesus can also directly assign a new social status to the healed (Luke 8:43-48).

To this day, the question arises, with regard to those affected directly or indirectly by disease or disability, as to whether there is a connection between sin or bad behaviour on the one hand, and illness or disability on the other. A series of Biblical texts take up the discussion on this point (cf. e.g. 1 Kgs. 5:27; John 9:1-3; 1 Cor. 11:30). The Book of Job and John 9:1-3 reject any such causal connection. The story of the healing of the paralytic in Mark 2:1-12 is different only at first sight: sickness is not the consequence of sin, but healing serves to make visible the authority of Jesus, which he has used – invisibly – to forgive sins.

*The commandment of charity towards our neighbour*¹⁰

Love and particularly loving one's neighbour is a key concept of self-legitimation in the practice of Christian charity and solidarity. The commandment to love one's neighbour is suited to this purpose in part because there is a foundation of diaconal action referencing this commandment that runs through the history of the church. It is also suited to this purpose because, for people who do not identify as Christians, it places the motives of providing assistance and solidarity in a context that is greater than the individual.

The commandment to love one's neighbour appears in the Old Testament in the concise formulation "... you shall love your neighbour as yourself" only in Leviticus 19:18b. The Hebrew word *'ahab*, translated as "love", describes a fundamental attitude that is realised in such concrete actions as benefitting one's neighbour. In the context of enforcing the law in court proceedings, for example, the aim is to give people the rights they are entitled to. In hierarchical relationships, the love of the subordinate person consists in loyalty, faithfulness and obedience to the superior "lord". The superior loves the subordinate with protection and care (Deut. 6:5 and for its combination with Lev. 19:18 e.g. in Luke 10:27). The neighbour (*rea'*) is anyone of your kin (Lev. 19:17a), of your people (Lev. 19:18) and (fellow) Israelites. However, this description of belonging does not aim to exclude non-Israelite men and women, and nor does it imply this. Thus, the alien (*ger*) should be loved as much as fellow Israelites (Lev. 19:34; cf. Deut. 10:18-19). The gospels set different emphases in the reception of the commandment to love one's neighbour – those found in Luke are discussed below.

In the Gospel of Luke, the double commandment appears in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). The parable criticises the interest in reducing the target group for acts of assistance. Jesus answers the lawyer's question "Who is my neighbour?" (Luke 10:29) with the counter-question "Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" (Luke 10:36). The lawyer asks about characteristics of those people who are to be described as neighbours, in order to specify and limit the target group. This seems an obvious thing to do insofar as the commandment is so general that it always

¹⁰ Gudrun Guttenberger, *Nächstenliebe* (Freiburg: Kreuz, 2007).

requires a concretisation in order to be implemented. But Jesus' counter-question directs attention away from the man who was robbed, and hence away from the target groups, towards the people who have the ability to help. Definitions of characteristics of those who are entitled to receive help are required today too; but they should be accompanied by self-critical reflection on the selection criteria on which the action is based. Human action generally tends to reduce the requirements made of people who have resources, at the expense of those who need assistance.

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4. DIFFERENT SHAPES OF *DIAKONIA* IN BIBLICAL TRADITION FROM AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES

Msafiri J. Mbilu¹

Introduction

The Bible as a sacred text for Christians and Jews presents a variety of teachings on how one is supposed to take care of the needy and also holds some constructive ideas on how to make the poor enjoy the life of salvation. It is an undoubted truth that one of the most frequent themes in the biblical canon is that God is especially concerned for the poor and that God's people must be likewise. This shows that poverty was a problem for ancient Israel as it is today. Hence, to help the poor was an agenda of the prophets of the Bible, Jesus of Nazareth and his apostles. The Bible is very clear that every person has the responsibility of acting as servant of God in high positions and therefore carries the title *diakonos* which denotes that the duty performed by such a person on caring for the needy has been assigned from a higher authority, God.² Under this reality, *diakonia* is to be viewed as an important agenda of the church so as to take some needed measures in poverty eradication.

This article will present some vivid examples on how texts from the Old Testament and the New Testament were used to address the issue of poverty and *diakonia* as a neighbour's hand in helping the needy to alleviate their situations.

Diakonia in the Old Testament

The words *diakonia* and *diakonos* are not clearly found in the Old Testament. In the rare places in the Septuagint when the root word *diakonos* is attested, it means messenger or servant (Neh. 1:10; 6:3, 5 Prov. 10:4a). However, in its nature, the Old Testament is full of concern for the poor, the oppressed, widows and orphans, and others with special needs. This can be seen in God's instructions to the people of Israel as one of their obligations and duties over against these groups of the needy in their midst. In His relationship with Israel, God did not allow any of them to forget this important obligation. In their day to day activities and relationship with God, Israelites were given detailed social and economic legislations in order to make sure that marginalised groups would be helped in concrete and effective ways.³ In His instructions to Israel, God insisted that, if Israel truly continues to live according to good law, then the poor would cease to exist in Israel (Deut. 15:4ff.), but due to disobedience, this could never be realised (Deut. 15:11). The Old Testament emphasises that God hears the cries of the poor and considers their needs by setting up justice for them and creating righteousness (Ex. 23-25; Ps. 12:5).

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² Msafiri Mbilu. *Christian Communities and Civil Authorities in Romans and Philippians: An Exegetical Analysis and Hermeneutical Reflections in the African Context*. (Logos Verlag: Berlin, 2012). p.109.

³ C. Van Dam. "Some Old Testament Roots and their Continuing Significance" in Gidley, James, Ed. *Ordained Servant*. Vol. 1 No. 1 Publication of the Christian Education Committee of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (Pleroma Press: Carson, 1992) pp. 14-21.

The Reasons for Caring for the Poor in the Old Testament

God's Commandment: Taking care of the poor and the needy will always be a reminder to them that they were in the bondage of slavery and oppression in Egypt and that He, the Lord, had claimed them as His own precious possession and His covenant people. It is in this reality that this same Lord who saved them from that oppression and bondage does not want to see any of His people bound in any way. It is under this fact that God puts strong emphasis on presenting laws regarding the poor stipulating that Israel should continue helping the poor and the needy in their midst.

One of the dominating texts that intensively presents laws aimed at promoting the character of giving to the needy, thereby making it easier for the poor to cope with their situation is Deuteronomy 15:7-18. In this text, the statement "but you shall open your hand to him" v. 8, is the core message of this passage. A person who is ready to open his hand is considered to be a generous person with a liberal heart. On the contrary, if one has closed hands, it is the visible sign that he is not willing to give and therefore not ready to help the needy. It is under this behaviour that Israelites are challenged to give to their fellow people in need rather than tightening their hands. The act of generous giving stands as God's command with the view that the presence of the poor is an inevitable reality as there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, "For the poor will never cease out of the land..." (Dt. 15:11).

Under this rule of taking care for the poor, the slaves are also to be set free after serving for six years (Deut. 15:12-18). This rule is given to benefit and protect those who were slaves to show the right attitude which should be exhibited by Hebrew masters towards their Hebrew slaves, particularly when they are to be set free in the sixth year of their service. It was commanded that a slave who has faithfully served his master for six years has to be dismissed fully furnished.

Escaping the Wrath of God: The Old Testament presents rules expressing God's great concern for the needy in Israel and warns Israel of His great wrath and vengeance to those who neglect the needy. These rules continued to emphasise to all Israelites that the stronger ought to help the weaker in the community. The rules demanded ways for Israel to continue to support the poor and the needy in society. In Exodus 22:22-24, God shows clearly that His wrath shall be upon those who do not show humility, compassion and tenderness to the widows, instead practicing oppression and injustice.

Understanding of Poverty: Generally, poverty was understood as the visible scarcity of human basic needs or the inability of a person to acquire his basic needs for existence such as food, shelter and clothing. A person therefore, who is incapable of making provisions for his food, shelter and clothing, is regarded as a poor person. Poverty in the biblical and social understanding could affect an individual, a group, a community or a nation.⁴ The Old Testament presents widows and orphans as the group of poor who most need support from others (e.g. Ex. 22:22-24, Deut. 16:11-14). God of Israel is the God who keeps a careful eye on the widows, He is profoundly concerned for them, together with the stranger and the fatherless. God commanded that Israel should care for widows, paying attention not to isolate them or take advantage of their vulnerability. Israel should take into consideration that widows are not excluded, instead, they have to enjoy full participation in the Feasts as God's people.

Poverty Eradication as Freedom from Bondage: In the eyes of God, poverty, fear and loneliness are to be seen as bondages. Since Israel had been set free from these bondages, they have to carry the same obligation freeing others from them. Taking care of the poor and the needy will stand as a remembrance to their past deliverance and a sign of appreciation of what God has done for them (Lev. 26:1-13; Deut. 24:19-22; 28:1-14). This implies that everything and all resources that God had provided were to be used to keep all His

⁴ Onyekachi G. Chukwuma. "Reducing Poverty in Nigeria in the Light of Deuteronomy 15:7-18" Nigerian Journal of Social Sciences 13: 1. 2017: p1.

people free, unburdened by poverty and want. Here, the emphasis lies on the sense of fair treatment for the poor because God did not want any of his people to be yoked to bondage.⁵

In reality, poverty continued to prevail in the ancient Israel as a result of individual's failure to understand the significance of charity and compassion. The assurance of God in Psalm 113 could be actualised through people's behaviour when taking care of the needy: "He raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people" (Ps. 113:7-8). This could only happen in a situation where the privileged open their hands to enable that poor people meet their daily needs such as provision of food and shelter for the immediate family.

Specific Responsibilities of Kings: The Old Testament outlines very clearly that it is the responsibility of kings in Israel to make sure that command of taking special care of the poor and the needy is put into place. This is to say that the behaviour of kings was measured in accordance to their exclusive loyalty to YHWH which includes the absolute care for the needy. It was one of the important obligations and responsibilities of kings in Israel to strive for a society without poverty. With these rules, the king is not only obliged to abstain from exploiting the poor, but should positively care for them (Deut. 17:19). Kings were also meant to control the proper implementation of the laws which deal with the remission of debts to benefit the poor and the positive caring for the poor who should be regarded as siblings (Deut. 17:14-20).

In the prophetic literature, it is emphasised that the rich, and both the political and religious leaders are heavily criticised for exploiting or neglecting the poor. Amos and Isaiah strongly warned kings who praised injustice and oppression by supporting the systemic abuse of the most vulnerable people in the community by those in power. It is clear that there had been a clear kings' obligation to care for the poor in the ancient Israel whereby the king is obliged to positively care for the poor (Amos 5:21-24).

Rights of the Poor: The Old Testament in general had a system in place to make sure that the poor in society were protected. As an assurance for the poor to have food and other basic needs, they were allowed to harvest corners of any field and collect gleanings without restrictions (Lev. 19:9-10). These laws were made very clear as a procedure of taking care for the poor because of their lack of owning land and thus were dependent on their own manual labour for food. If the poor have borrowed anything from the haves, their debts were to be cancelled every seven years. Israel was to learn from experience that although God wanted no poor people, there would always be some poor people who needed extra assistance and attention from others. Due to the fact of economic inequalities which would grow from time to time, there were these laws of occasional debt forgiveness and land distribution from the haves to the have-nots.⁶

In general, the Old Testament in its consideration for the poor had created a system which reduced corruption and ensured justice for all. In this way, the rules favoured the disadvantaged, including widows, orphans, strangers, aliens and slaves, and put limits to the more advantaged such as kings, judges and others.

As is evident here, the Old Testament has a very strong emphasis on taking care of the poor and the needy which should be taken seriously by all covenant people. This is to say that such actions are counted as one of the central obligations of the Law. It was the responsibility of all kings and rulers to make sure that the rights of the poor were upheld by giving them such treatment as to aim to reduce the burden on their shoulders and hence eradicate poverty. Some of the important treatments are:

- The poor had the right to receive their wages without delay on the same day after working (Dt. 24:14-15).
- The poor should not be charged interest on loans (Ex. 22:25; Lev. 25:36; Dt. 15:7).

⁵ Van Dam, 1992.

⁶ Rowland Van Es. "Moses' and 'Solomon' on Corruption and the Use and Abuse of Power: Old Testament Laws and Proverbs as a Source of Guidelines for Ethical Behavior" in *Agang, Sunday Bobai, et al, Eds. Multidimensional Perspective on Corruption in Africa: Wealth, Power, Religion and Democracy*. (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019) pp. 354.

- They should be allowed to purchase food at a non-profit price (Lev. 25:37).
- They have special permission to present less costly sacrifices (Lev. 14:21f.; 27:8).

It is through these laws and legislations that the poor and the needy were enabled to function as any other Israelite so as to fulfil their responsibilities and calling. For any Israelites, therefore, to care for the poor was a visible sign to show themselves that they are God's people who showed God's image by doing His will.

Diakonia in the New Testament

Emerging ministry of diakonia: In the New Testament, the word diakonia is very common and has a four-fold definition:

- a) Waiting at table or provisions for bodily sustenance (Lk. 10:40).
- b) Any discharge of service in genuine love e.g. charitable giving (2 Cor. 9:12).
- c) Discharge of certain obligations in the community e.g. apostolic office as service (1 Tim. 1:12).
- d) Collection made for the Jerusalem saints during Paul's missionary journeys (1 Cor. 8-9).

The notion and concept of *diakonia* in the New Testament started in Jerusalem as the church started to grow in size and in numbers. As the church grew, there was a visible tendency of neglecting some widows in the daily distribution of the bread. This resulted from the fact that the apostles could no longer oversee everything in their larger congregations. In other words, the growth of the church had created difficulties, especially in relation to the service to the needy, as a result of which the church had to choose people responsible for *diakonia*. In Acts 6:1-5, Luke mentions the work of the seven as *diakonia*. The work of the seven was to make sure that none of the brethren and sisters would be neglected as to fulfil the Old Testament promise to God's people that there would be no any poor among them (Deut. 25:4). In its verbal form, *diakonew* is given a special quality to indicate the service rendered to another person.⁷

Diakonia as the Action of Justice: In the New Testament, *diakonia* is regarded as a concept of justice to be rendered to all. With regard to the historical Jesus, justice is to be accepted and understood in the sense of acceptance and caring for all who suffer in society. These aspects can be understood even more, as Jesus himself did, in the Golden Rule, "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets," (Matt. 7:12; Lk. 6:31). *Diakonia* can also be understood in relation to the command to love God and one's fellow human beings (Mk. 12:29-31; Matt. 22:37-40; Lk. 10:27-37). Jesus was concerned with preaching of the gospel of the kingdom of God and the healing of the sick as a sign to show that the gospel is both in the doing of the word and the preaching of the deed (Mk. 4:23-24).

The whole mission of *diakonia* begins with the affirmation of Jesus that he was anointed "[...] to bring good news to the poor... to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (Lk. 4:18-19). It is through the advent of Christ that the good news is announced to the poor and captives, healing for the blind and delivering the oppressed. This good news includes a holistic understanding of all human enterprise as understood in connection with the consideration of God's grace of righteousness in the Old Testament (cf. Isa. 61:1,2) which calls people to uphold a corresponding praxis because faith in the God of Torah is active and effective in love and service of human beings and care for the creation.⁸

Diakonia as a Motive for Interpersonal Relationship: Christians should put into action their relationships with one another as they live in a world full of hardships. By providing diakonia, those in need will also have the chance to experience the life-giving power of God within them. Christians are therefore obliged to practice

⁷ H. W. Beyer. '*Diakonew, Diakonia, Diakonos*', in Gerhard Kittel, Ed. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1964).

⁸ Paul S. Chung. "World Council of Churches' Model of God's Mission and Diakonia in the Signs of the Times: From a Global South Response", in *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 44(2), 2017. pp. 20-22, <http://currentsjournal.org/index.php/currents/article/view/65/84> [Last accessed 06/01/2020].

mutual love, which includes forgiveness, hospitality and readiness for service. In doing so, Christians are equipped to live a life which manifests that the wealth of God is to be manifested to those who do not believe (1 Pet. 4:7-11). It should be noted that persons are not isolated individuals whose essential purpose is self-fulfilment. Every person is made in the image of God and therefore each will only reach fulfilment intended by their Creator when all are living in right relationship with their neighbours. It is in this regard that diakonia is also linked to love and compassion.⁹ Paul in his teachings encourages Christians to take care of the need of others so as to strengthen interpersonal relationships (Rom. 12:13). This is due to the fact that Paul understood the church as community (*koinonia*) in which the needs of one member are to be carried by all and the privileges of one are to be enjoyed by all: “If anyone claims to serve, let it be as by a command received from God” (1 Pet. 4:11—12; cf. Rom. 12:8; 1 Cor. 12:5).

Diakonia as a Means of Poverty Eradication: The New Testament also shows that Jesus’ priority in his mission was to turn his attention to the poor, who seem to have dominated the Palestinian population at that time. To overcome poverty, each individual should feel responsible for others. Jesus insisted that this kind of feeling when he urged His followers not to be concerned only for their immediate neighbours, normally members of their own ethnic or religious group. Instead, he commands His followers to imitate God, who cares for everyone (Matt. 22:35-40). By emphasising love for the neighbour, Jesus reminds his followers of the level of care that is expected toward one’s neighbour by adding that as one wishes to be loved, he must also love his neighbour, meaning that as a man naturally wants what is best for himself, so he must equally desire the best for his neighbour.

Concluding Remarks

Looking into all demands of *diakonia*, it is obvious that there is a need for the church to have several measures for combating poverty in its society. People suffer from different types of poverty according to their particular situation, ranging from *extreme or moderate poverty* which can be fatal, to *relative poverty* whereby people’s household income is a given proportion below the national average. In these levels of poverty where people have even less than \$1 per day, life is unimaginable to the rich; these people are chronically hungry, deprived of safe drinking water, basic shelter health care and education. The church under its ministry of *diakonia* must consider how to reach these people, to aim to eradicating poverty and to allow the marginalised to thrive.¹⁰

In a broader sense, the Scripture can be understood here as reflecting on the transformed economic relationships whereby the haves feel the burden of helping the have-nots. It is necessary for the church to implement the scriptural principles that bring total eradication of poverty and bring people to a sense of wholeness with inherent dignity. Through *diakonia*, the church ought to be a religious centre which creates provisions for widows, orphans and all who suffer in their trouble. Through this, the church will continue to stand as called to be God-like, imitating His example and obeying His commandments.¹¹

It is therefore important for the church to know that poverty eradication is one of its major responsibilities through the ministry of *diakonia*. This is to say that it is the responsibility of the church, the body of Christ, to care passionately and genuinely for the poor. The church must step up its responsibility and be the first line in addressing poverty, knowing that the struggle to end poverty should start with the community of believers by addressing the real needs of an individual or a group.

⁹ G. Breed. “The *Diakonia* of Practical Theology to the alienated in South Africa in the light of 1 Peter”, in *Verbum et Ecclesia* 35(1), Art. 867, 2017. pp. 1-9.

¹⁰ Eben Scheffler. “Poverty eradication and the Bible in context: A serious challenge” *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 39 (1), 2013.

¹¹ Erica Meijers. “Come and Eat: Table Fellowship as a Fundamental Form of *Diakonia*”, *Diaconia: Journal for the Study of Christian Social Practice*, 10 (1), 2019.

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5. DIAKONIA IN A TRINITARIAN PERSPECTIVE AND AS DIMENSION OF THE *MISSIO DEI*

Kjell Nordstokke¹

Within the Ecumenical Movement, it is often stated that diakonia is an expression of the Church's nature and mission:

God's mission is about the realisation of God's vision for the world [...]. The Church, as a community called into being through baptism and led by the Holy Spirit, participates in this mission through its very being, proclamation and service. Commonly understood as service, diakonia is a way of living out faith and hope as a community, witnessing to what God has done in Jesus Christ.²

This understanding implies that diaconal action is faith-based; it expresses in practice the very identity of the Church and the faith in the Triune God: God the Creator, God the Liberator, and God the Giver of Life. At the same time, the statement above affirms diakonia as an integral dimension of the Church's mission. In what follows, both the Trinitarian and the missiological nature of diakonia will be further elaborated, grounding the view that diakonia in a distinct way holds together what the Church essentially *is* and *does*.

Transforming the Traditional Model of Diakonia

When the modern diaconal movement emerged in Germany in the 1830s, emphasis was on the example of Jesus as main motivation for a Christian who felt called upon to serve people in need. In many ways, this reflected the pietistic spirituality that oriented many of the pioneers of the diaconal movement. They were marked by what they experienced as a personal meeting with Jesus, interpreting it as a vocation to humble service, following the ideals of poverty, chastity and obedience.

The new orders of deaconesses and deacons, intending to renew ministries that had already existed in the time of the New Testament into a modern Protestant context, had a key role in carrying out the diaconal vocation. For a long time, the concept of diakonia was linked to these ministries; diakonia was simply understood as what deaconesses and deacons would do, with the consequence that it eventually would be conceived as professional work within the area of health and social services. This development caused a kind of separation between church and diakonia – the latter being understood as institutionalised services performed by diaconal specialists.

The social-ethical awakening that marked many churches in the late 1960s profoundly questioned this model of diakonia. In the first place, it questioned diaconal practices that took the form of charity work without considering the root causes of human suffering. In a time that criticised paternalistic and authoritarian structures, diaconal institutions were often judged as old-fashioned and servile, not sufficiently committed to the cause of justice and to the challenge to be prophetic in its public witness.

Could diakonia respond to these critical reactions and regain its relevance in a new socio-political context? In different ways, it did! The 1980s brought renewed reflection on diakonia, generating a new paradigm

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² Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in the 21st Century. Message from World Council of Churches Conference, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2012.

regarding its theological basis and societal role. In this endeavour, the World Council of Churches had a leading role, in the first place by organising meetings where churches and diaconal practitioners from different parts of the world would bring together a rich variety of experiences and insights. One decisive event in this process was the Larnaca consultation in 1986, under the theme “Diakonia 2000: Called to be Neighbours”, organised by the WCC Commission on Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Services (CICARWS).³

The Larnaca meeting underlined the importance of the local church as diaconal agent, thus shifting the focus of diaconal performance from professional agents to all Christians in their local context. This paved the way for a broader understanding of its theological foundation and of rooting it in the faith in the Triune God:

Jesus Christ is the Lord. We pledge again to obey him in the power of the Holy Spirit. We accept no other lordship. God’s kingdom is one of Trinitarian sharing of love.⁴

The affirmation of the Trinitarian character of diakonia did not imply a wish to restrict its action within an ecclesial or spiritual framework. On the contrary, the reference to God the Creator reminded the diaconal actors of God’s loving care for all of creation and of their vocation to be God’s co-workers promoting common good. This meant a call to work together for all people of good will for that cause, and to engage in solidarity with oppressed and marginalised people struggling for human dignity, justice and peace.

In particular, the issue of justice was rediscovered as a central biblical theme; it now became a key term when seeking to discern the signs of the time, and when connecting diaconal engagement to ongoing struggles for justice.

The participants of the Larnaca consultation, many of them representing Western church-based development agencies, recognised that they in the past had not paid due attention to the issue of justice:

[...] The suffering in the world has increased. We confess our sin and confess our complicity in upholding, tacitly or implicitly, structures and systems in the churches and society that oppress human beings, causing suffering for the people of God. We believe that diakonia – in all its authentic forms – cannot be separated from the struggle for justice and peace.⁵

It makes sense to describe this period as a turning point, or even a paradigm shift, in diaconal practice and theory. It established the basic principles for seeing diakonia *as faith- and rights-based action*. At the same time, it confirmed the Trinitarian fundamental for its being and doing.

Diakonia in the Perspective of Faith in God the Creator

The narratives about creation told in the two first chapters of Genesis bring several motifs that are relevant for diaconal practice and reflection.

From the very start, they affirm creation as a move from chaos to order, repeating at the end of every day that God saw that what was created was good. To confess that “the earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it” (Ps. 24:1) proclaims God’s lordship of all creation, but equally important, it recognises the dignity of “all that is in it” as well as God’s continuous care for its wellbeing.

According to the creation narratives, the human beings were created as part of this divine project, with the task of “hav[ing] dominion over” all other creatures (Gen. 1:26) and to “till and keep” the garden (Gen. 2:15). In the past, these expressions have been wrongly interpreted as a *carte blanche* to exploit and waste the gifts

³ See: <http://archives.wcc-coe.org/Query/detail.aspx?ID=6437>.

⁴ Klaus Poser (ed), *Diakonia 2000: Called to be neighbours. Official report WCC World Consultation Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service. Larnaca, 1986*. (Geneva, WCC Publications, 1987), p. 123.

⁵ Poser, 1987.

of nature, even fellow creatures. What they in fact express, is rather the task to administer and be responsible for creation, having in mind the relation to the Creator that empowers human beings to be stewards that care for creation.

The verb “till” (Gen. 2:15) is the Hebrew *ebed* which also can be translated “to work” or “to serve”. When Moses tells Pharaoh to set the people of Israel free, he explains that the aim of liberation is to serve the Lord (Ex. 7:16), using the term *ebed* which some Bibles translates as “worship”. This translation can conceal the intimate relation between worship and service as God’s stewards in the world. On the other hand, rightly held together, it underscores care for creation as an integral dimension of a living relation to the Creator.

Christians share this vocation with all human beings; at the same time, their Christian faith assures them that by grace they belong to the people of God with a special call to serve, thus witnessing to God’s care and good will for all creation. The Hebrew word *abodah* and its derivatives (among them the verb *ebed*) occur more than one thousand times in the Old Testament. It is absolutely possible to see a connection between this terminology and today’s concept of diakonia.⁶

According to the Bible, creation is not just an event in the beginning of time, but a continuous action (*creatio continua*) by which God renews and upholds life. The narrative about God’s covenant with Noah (Gen. 9) affirms the generosity of God’s care from generation to generation, with the rainbow as a sign for “every living creature of all flesh that is in the world”. This sign continues to inspire diakonia to care for creation and defend life, especially in times when the ecological system is under severe pressure. One actual way of bringing this commitment into practice is to engage in the UN Agenda 2030 and its sustainable development goals (SDGs), as many churches and diaconal agents already are doing.

The other significant covenant in the Old Testament is the one God established at Mount Sinai with the people of Israel. It reveals another dimension of God’s project for creation, namely to call a nation to be witness to God’s good will and zeal for justice and peace. This covenant expresses, on the one hand, God’s gracious love and faithfulness, on the other hand, it commits the people to observe the commandments and build a just society where all can live in peace. The prophets publicly criticised authorities, political as well as religious, who abused their power and oppressed the poor. God would side with the poor and defend their cause, the prophets proclaimed. They denounced injustice and warned that it would bring destruction to the nation (Mic. 3:1-4, 9-12). As harsh as these words would sound, the prophets also conveyed a message of hope, based on the promise of God’s compassion and faithfulness (Mic. 7:18-20).

Prophetic diakonia is nurtured by the tradition of the Old Testament prophets and their courage to denounce injustice and lift up the cause of poor and marginalised people as well as their proclamation of God’s compassion and justice as a transformative and liberating power in the midst of human reality, promising a new and better future for all of God’s creation.

Diakonia in the Perspective of Faith in Jesus, God the Saviour

The memory of Jesus has always inspired diaconal actors to follow him and his example of caring for sick and marginalised persons. In that sense, diakonia expresses Christian discipleship and a response to the call: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (Jn. 20:21).

To be a disciple implies to be incarnated in human reality in the same manner as Jesus was. The gospels tell stories about his way of seeing those in need, sensing both their suffering and hope, recognising their dignity and faith. Through acts of healing, Jesus liberated people from bonds of prejudice and shame. He restored relationships that had been broken; he empowered people who had been excluded so that they could re-establish their role as members of society.

If we describe this ministry as the diakonia of Jesus, some important traits become evident:

⁶ Paulos Mar Gregorius. *The meaning and nature of diakonia*. Geneva: WCC Publications, 1988, pp. 8-13.

One is that diakonia is an integral part of Jesus' sending to the world. This is clearly expressed in passages that give an overview of his ministry, holding together proclamation, teaching and healing (e.g. Mt. 4:23-24; Mk. 1:32-34). It affirms both the Messianic dimension of his diakonia and the diaconal dimension of his Messianic mission. Diakonia belongs to what constitutes the gospel, it cannot be reduced to a possible consequence, it is – as Jesus shows in his ministry – the gospel in action.

Another is the reference to the kingdom of God that Jesus announced to be near (Mk. 1:14-15). The healings are signs of the newness of life that the kingdom brings to hand (Lk. 4:18-19). As Jesus answered John the Baptist who had sent his disciples to ask, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?":

Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me. (Mt. 11:4-6).

In this answer, Jesus recognises that his ministry is disputed, not at least his diakonia. The way he approached persons that were considered unclean and sinful, provoked the religious authorities.

Diakonia, in our modern traditions, is sometimes portrayed as humble service, but we should learn from the passages in the New Testament that underscore the prophetic tone of the diakonia of Jesus; his authority would both impress and provoke (Mt. 9:8; Lk. 20:1-2), in particular in challenging the moral standards of his time that would legitimise practices that excluded suffering people. Both in word and in action, Jesus turned the ruling value system upside down by announcing the last to be the first, and the first to be the last (Mt. 20:16). This is well illustrated in the parable about the good Samaritan, a despised outcast who acts according to the divine commandment to love "your neighbour as yourself", thus setting an example for all, including the "lawyer" who wished to test Jesus (Lk. 10:25-37).

In the perspective of faith in Jesus Christ, diakonia will seek to testify to the values of the kingdom; according to Paul they are summarised as "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17). This kingdom is already present and still to come, diaconal action – incarnated in human reality – bring signs that testify to this faith and the hope that it proclaims.

Hope is here not to be understood as mere human optimism, but as a deep conviction that the ministry of Jesus continues to bring the gifts of the kingdom, salvation and renewed life, in our time, as well as in all times and places. Christian hope refers to the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus, as events of cosmic significance, as acts of solidarity, redemption and liberation. It reflects the saying of Jesus, that he "came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk. 10:45), a mission which brought him to the depths of human suffering and exclusion, including experiencing to be forsaken by his heavenly father (Mk. 14:34). The forces of death, however, were not able to keep him in their dominion, his resurrection marks his victory over evil, destruction and death.

Paul proclaims Jesus as the new Adam who fulfils that which was lost by the first Adam as consequence of human disobedience and sin in the Garden of Eden. Christ's victory gives hope to all creation, it "will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21). This points to the intimate relation between creation and salvation, to the cosmic dimension of the redeeming mission of Jesus, and to hope as liberating power in midst of human suffering.

Diakonia is achieved through action called to witness to this hope and "always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet. 3,15). This means that diakonia is action that is meaningful in itself, always remaining rooted in the gospel and its message of newness of life and hope for all creation.

Diakonia in the Perspective of Faith in God's Spirit, the Giver of Life

The third article of faith does not seek to describe the Holy Spirit. Instead, it points to its work, in the first place related to the Church and the Church's mission as sign and instrument of God's saving project for creation and humankind:

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

The narrative of the first Christian Pentecost (Acts 2) gives fundamental insights into the work of the Holy Spirit. Luke tells that the disciples were gathered behind closed doors, they feared their religious and socio-political environment, they had no idea about what to do. The coming of the Spirit changed that completely; the Spirit energised them to move outside and to speak publicly about their experiences as followers of Jesus. Not only were they empowered to be witness to these events, they also could interpret them as "God's deeds of power" (2:11) and as fulfilment of the prophetic promise of new times to come (2:16).

In the view of diaconal practice, the story of Pentecost illustrates the deep meaning of transformation, as a gracious moment of receiving new energy and being empowered to assume roles and tasks that often would be regarded as impossible. It echoes the saying of Paul who encourages his readers not to be "conformed to this world, but be transformed", in other words, not to submit to what the surroundings consider normal or possible, but have minds that are inspired by God's will and focus on what is "good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2). This is how the Spirit inspires, transforms and empowers.

The passage from prophet Joel that Peter quoted on the day of Pentecost refers to this transformative and energising power of God's Spirit. Children, women and slaves are mentioned among those the Spirit will empower. In other words, where the newness of life and the values of the kingdom come to the fore, those considered the last are lifted up, their voices are heard.

The new community of believers that was born on the day of Pentecost day adopted a lifestyle that reflected this message. They "were together and had all things in common", they practiced sharing, envisaging that all had enough according to their needs (Acts 2:44-45). Certainly, this is an idealistic presentation of the first Christian church. Luke, the author of Acts is well aware of that. In a later chapter, he tells of how the ignorance of vulnerable groups within the congregation created conflicts (Acts 6:1-6). In that situation, the group of Apostles had the wisdom to share its leadership with a new established group of seven, in the tradition of the church interpreted as the first deacons. They were given the responsibility for the "diakonia of the table" (NRSV translates: "to wait on tables"), a ministry of sharing and inclusion, clearly in line with what the first Christians remembered as the way Jesus performed hospitality at the table. It did not only intend to be way of practicing social justice, which is important, but the newness of life that Jesus had brought near.

One decisive criterion for choosing the seven was that they were "full of the Spirit" (Acts 6:5). This underscores the role of the Spirit in the exercise of diaconal leadership with its mandate to include, share and empower. Its function is, on the one hand, to secure the wellbeing of those at the margins of church and society, but equally, on the other hand, to contribute to the wellbeing of the church, so that the congregation is able to be faithful to its diaconal vocation.

The marks of the Church (*notae ecclesiae*), unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity, can be interpreted in this diaconal perspective. Each of these marks are gifts of the Spirit that the members of the church enjoy; at the same time, they are tasks that challenge every Christian community to be self-critical regarding its way of being a church. Are unity and the other marks visible in the daily life of the church, as care for those at the

margin and commitment to include people suffering from mechanisms of exclusion? Or are they interpreted by the powerful elite in the church in a way that disqualify the vulnerable and marginalised?⁷

In Jesus' farewell speech to his disciples, he promises the coming of the Holy Spirit, an "advocate" sent by the Father, to "be with you forever" (Jn. 14:16). The task of the Spirit is to give continuity to Jesus' liberating presence among his disciples, empowering them to discern between right and wrong, between truth and lie (Jn. 16:7-11). This points in the direction of the diaconal mandate of advocacy and public witness. That particular dimension of diaconal service is not something new inspired by secular ideas, on the contrary, it is rooted in the diaconal ministry of Jesus and the mission given to his followers, in the power of the Spirit.

Conclusion

To reflect on diakonia in a trinitarian perspective does not mean to see creation, salvation and sanctification as three separate areas of divine action. The Triune God is one, God's action as creator, liberator and giver of life can only be fully understood when held together, allowing one perspective to bring light to the two others.

Several biblical passages affirm this understanding, as for instance the narrative of the baptism of Jesus. The importance of this event which announces the beginning of the ministry of Jesus is manifested when the heavens opened and the Spirit of God descended on him, and a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased" (Mt. 3:16-17). Here the Triune God is actively present, as creator, as saviour, as giver of life.

In the form of a mystery that only faith is able to grasp, something similar happens in the life of the church. In baptism and in the celebration of the Holy Communion, ordinary gifts of creation – water, bread and wine – are sanctified by the Word and the Holy Spirit, in a way that includes women and men in God's kingdom of grace and at the same empowers them to participate in God's mission in the world.

From a diaconal point of view, word and sacraments are powerful signs and instruments of the transformative, reconciling and empowering presence of the Triune God.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Dietrich, Stephanie and Knud Jorgensen (eds). *Diakonia as Christian Social Practice: An Introduction*.

Oxford: Regnum Studies in Mission, 2015.

Nordstokke, Kjell. *Liberating Diakonia*. Trondheim: Tapir Academic Press, 2011.

Nordstokke, Kjell. *Council and Context in Leonardo Boff's Ecclesiology: The Rebirth of the Church Among the Poor*. New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996.

⁷ Kjell Nordstokke, 'Diakonia as Mark of the Church'. In: Stephanie Dietrich, Knud Jørgensen, Kari Karsrud Korslien and Kjell Nordstokke (eds), *The Diaconal Church*. (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2019), pp. 27-40.

6. THE *DIAKONIA DEI*: SERVICE OF THE WORLD AND FORMS OF DIACONAL MINISTRY AMONG BAPTISTS

Darrell Jackson¹

Introduction

In 1989, I was ordained to the ministry of pastoral oversight by British Baptists and I have fulfilled that ministry as a theological educator for the last twenty years. My understanding of the ministry of the deacon is shaped by my primary experience as a Baptist and, secondly, as an evangelical missiologist.

Baptist *diakonia* shares similar characteristics, though not necessarily identical, with the broad range of evangelical understandings of *diakonia*. This follows from the simple observation that evangelicalism as a *theological* tradition has taken root in a variety of *ecclesial* traditions: episcopal, synodical, congregational, and independent.² Historically, Baptists are part of a dissenting, free-church tradition convinced that authority in the church, under the rule of Christ, is properly vested in the local congregation, which exists interdependently with all other such churches.

Evangelical ecclesiology reflects all four ecclesial forms and, hence, reflects a variety of diaconal practices and theology. Consequently, Haymes *et al* suggest that baptistic accounts of the theology and practice of deacon require presentation in a distinct ‘accent’³ that nuances its relationship to other evangelical accounts of diaconal ministry. That is what we hope to achieve with this article. It will begin with a brief historical review, then explore the more significant theological influences upon Baptist diaconal ministry, and conclude with several constructive proposals by which Baptists might arrive at a more adequately covenantal and missional practice of diaconal ministry.

A Historical Review of Diaconal Ministry among Baptists

Writing from Amsterdam in 1612, followers of the Baptist pioneer, John Smyth (d.1612), describe ‘...two forms of ministers: viz, some who are called pastors, teachers or elders, who administer in the word and sacrament, and others, who are called Deacons, men and women: whose ministry is to serve tables and wash the saint’s feet...’⁴

Thomas Helwys (1575-1616), equally important to the establishment of early Baptist congregations in England, intends ‘that the Officers of everie Church or congregation are either Elders... or Deacons Men, and Women who by their office releave the necessities off the poore and impotent brethre(n) concerning their bodies.’⁵

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² See David Bebbington’s widely cited account of evangelical distinctives in his *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*, revised edition. (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2005).

³ B. Haymes, B., R. Gouldbourne, and A. Cross. *On Being the Church: Revisioning Baptist Identity* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2008) pp. 177-179.

⁴ ‘Propositions and Conclusions Concerning True Christian Religion, 1612-1614’ in W.L Lumpkin (ed) *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969) p. 138.

⁵ Helwys, T., ‘A Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining at Amsterdam in Holland’ (1611), in W.L. Lumpkin (ed) *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969) p. 121.

Smith and Helwys shared a conviction that ministry consists of two offices, a pastoral office and a diaconal office. Their early declarations and statements describing a two-fold ministry provide a theological understanding of ministry that has informed the drafting of local Baptist Church constitutions, denominational Statements of Faith, and regional Baptist Confessions, in a remarkably consistent manner, both historically and geographically.⁶ Equally, Baptists since have shown little variance in describing those who hold the diaconal office as ‘deacons’, despite some accompanying variance in describing those who hold the office of pastoral oversight.⁷

Where diversity among Baptists is most obvious, can be seen in two significant aspects of this basic formulation of ministry offices; Baptists disagree over the extent to which their congregations should *ordain* deacons (in a manner parallel to the ordination of those set aside for pastoral oversight)⁸ and over the extent to which they feel able to appoint women to the diaconal office.⁹ This diversity reflects either ignorance of, or a hesitation in engaging with, the vision of either Helwys or Smyth.

Where diversity of opinion and practice exists among Baptists, frequently this can be explained with reference to the respective authority that Baptists accord biblical texts, historical precedent among Baptists, emergent baptistic theologies, non-Baptist ecclesial practices, contemporary approaches to leadership and organisational governance, as well as legal and regulatory requirements. Some of this will be addressed briefly in the following section but a more adequate treatment of these matters awaits further research and reflection.

A Theological Review of Diaconal Ministry among Baptists

The more extensive studies of diaconal ministry among Baptists have generally been confined to the application of relevant biblical texts;¹⁰ historical studies;¹¹ handbooks for deacons;¹² or incorporated within

⁶ For example, the *General Baptist Orthodox Creed* (1679), Benjamin Keach’s *The Glory of a True Church* (1697), Benjamin Griffith’s *A Short Treatise* (1743), Samuel Jones’s *Treatise of Church Discipline* (1805), J.L. Reynolds *Church Polity or the Kingdom of Christ* (1849), the *Religious Doctrine of the Evangelical Christian* (Union of Evangelical Christian-Baptists, former USSR, 1924), the *Statement of Faith of the Southern Baptist Convention* (1925), the *Malaysian Baptist Convention Statement of Faith* (1979), *Forms of Ministry among Baptists* (Baptist Union of Gt Britain, 1994), *The Beliefs, Policies and Practices of the Nigerian Baptist Convention* (2014), and the *Singapore Baptist Convention Statement of Faith* (2016), for example, all describe a two-fold office of ‘Pastor/Elder’ and ‘Deacon’.

⁷ In contrast, there has been, and continues to be, variance in describing those who have exercised a ministry of pastoral oversight, including the use of titles such as ‘pastor’, ‘minister’, ‘bishop’, ‘elder’, and ‘overseer’.

⁸ See Everett C. Goodwin. *The New Hiscox Guide for Baptist Churches*. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1995) 92-93. Also see George Beasley-Murray, ‘The Diaconate in Baptist Churches’ in *The Ministry of Deacons, World Council Studies No.2* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1965), pp. 72-81.

⁹ See, for example, Charles Deweese. *Women Deacons and Deaconesses: 400 years of Baptist Service*. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2006).

¹⁰ For example, Alexander Strauch. *Paul’s Vision for the Deacons: Assisting the Elders with the Care of the Church*. (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth Publishers, 2017). See also John Hammett. *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2005).

¹¹ See John Loftis, ‘The emerging identity of deacons, 1800-1950’ in *Baptist History and Heritage*, 25, 2, 1990, pp. 15-21. Bill Pitts. ‘Women, ministry, and identity: establishing female deacons at First Baptist Church, Waco, Texas’ in *Baptist History and Heritage*, 42, 1, 2007, pp. 71-84. See also Mark E. Dever. *Polity: biblical arguments on how to conduct church life*. (Washington, D.C., Center for Church Reform, 2001).

¹² The greater majority of these are written for Baptist churches in the USA. For example, Henry Webb. *Deacons: Servant Models in the Church*. (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001). Also *The Ministry of a Baptist Deacon: A Handbook for Local Church Servant Leaders* (Lancaster, CA: Striving Together Publications, 2010). Marvinna McMickle. *Deacons in Today’s Black Baptist Church*. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2010).

manuals of congregational practice.¹³ What these texts generally reveal is a relative failure to approach the nature and responsibilities of the diaconal office with consensus around what might constitute appropriate theological and methodological rigour.

Biblical narratives and diaconal ministry

Biblical references to the origin of the diaconal office as well as to the functions of that office are relatively sparse and Baptist commentators are divided over the relevance of key passages in the discussion. Is, for example, the appointment by the Apostles of seven men to ‘wait at table’ and distribute food to the widows from among the Gentile converts’ in Acts 6:1-7, to be seen as an appointment to diaconal office?¹⁴

Furthermore, the *function* of those called to diaconal office is derived frequently by Baptists from the *qualities* listed for those who hold the office (1 Tim. 3:8-13). Cautious commentators do little more than highlight the supporting / assisting / and waiting [at table] role of a group of individuals who are essentially ‘helpers’.¹⁵ Various, the biblical references have been taken to imply that Baptist deacons are pastoral and welfare workers,¹⁶ pastoral servants who ‘appear to have a pastoral ministry’,¹⁷ those who serve or wait at table,¹⁸ those who look after the material affairs of the church,¹⁹ or who work as ‘assistant to the elders’.²⁰

Whilst the preceding paragraph is intended as an illustrative summary, it suggests the need for a sustained intertextual hermeneutic that interprets Paul’s epistolary exhortations concerning *diakonoi* alongside Luke’s account of ‘the Seven’, incidences of biblical service, Jesus’ own acts of service, the Servant passages in Isaiah, and the nature of messianic service to humanity. Only such a reading will adequately resource a constructive theology of the diaconal ministry that is suited for contextual variation and adaptation. This is precisely the basis for a more adequately covenantal and missiological theology and practice of *diakonia*. We will return to this theme later.

Practices of diaconal ministry

In 1697, Benjamin Keach summarised the function of the NT deacon as a threefold exercise of table service; service at the Lord’s table, at the pastor’s table, and at the table of the poor.²¹ His summary has provided a resource for the recontextualising of Baptist diaconal practice in a wildly varied range of circumstances, historical and geographical. Perhaps it was somewhat inevitable, however, that due to their congregational ecclesiology, Baptist churches struggled to conceive of the diaconal office as anything other than a service of the congregation to the congregation, for the congregation, among the congregation. Keach retained a

¹³ Goodwin, *The New Hiscox Guide* (1995), pp. 87-92. James M. Pendleton *Baptist Church Manual* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1966) 22-40. Mark Dever (ed), *Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-institutional Age*. (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), pp. 227-330.

¹⁴ See, for example, the discussion at W.L. Payne, *The role of a New Testament deacon – office or ministry* (Lynchberg, VA: Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, Unpublished PhD, 1996), pp. 63-82, pp. 362-381.

¹⁵ Stanley Grenz, *The Baptist Congregation*. (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1985), pp. 62-63.

¹⁶ Derek Tidball. ‘Leadership and Baptist Church Governance: Contemporary Application’ in Graeme Chatfield (ed), *Leadership and Baptist Church Governance* (Eastwood, NSW: Morling Press, 2005), pp. 7-28.

¹⁷ Paul Fiddes, *A Leading Question: The structure and authority of leadership in the local church* (London: Baptist Publications, 1983), pp. 28-36.

¹⁸ William H Brackney, ‘Ordination in the Larger Baptist Tradition’ in *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, 29(3), 2002, pp. 225-239.

¹⁹ J.L. Reynolds, ‘Church Polity’, in Timothy and Denise George (eds), *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1996), p. 358.

²⁰ Strauch, *Paul’s Vision for the Deacons*, 2017, uses this term consistently of the deacons in his discussion of the biblical texts describing the function of the deacon.

²¹ Benjamin Keach, ‘The Glory of a True Church and its Discipline Displayed’ in George, *Baptist Confessions*, 1996, p. 66.

reference to ‘table of the poor’ in his catechism but, for many churches, this quickly became little more than an institutional nod to monitoring church offerings and distributing occasional gifts to the needy within the congregation.

Timothy and Denise George’s survey of ten historic texts demonstrates that the role of the deacon has developed over time and continues to develop. From the earliest texts, we can see that deacons were expected to oversee the temporal affairs of the congregation, including its building; to care for the pastors needs; to provide for the financial and material care of the poor; to prepare the practicalities necessary for a celebration of Lord’s Supper and for services of Baptism.²² Today, this might mean that deacons serve on the Church Board or its committees, welcome visitors to Sunday worship, serve the elements at the Lord’s Supper, teach, offer pastoral care, assist at funerals, count the weekly offering, offer administrative support, provide counsel at the ‘altar rail’, serve on committees, and provide leadership of various church activities.²³

Theologies of diaconal ministry

We’ve already seen that Baptists have been remarkably consistent in understanding diaconal ministry as an office, exercised on behalf of, and with the blessing of, the local congregation. Among Baptists, diaconal ministry is a *non-priestly office rather than a priestly order of ministry*. Occasionally, non-sacerdotal sentiments have been made explicit, ‘By the Ministry we mean an office within the Church of Christ (not a sacerdotal order)’.²⁴ For non-sacerdotal congregational Baptists, the diaconal ministry is an office properly exercised with the authority granted it by the local congregation.²⁵

Characteristically, Baptist polity acknowledges two ministry offices.²⁶ Seeking to dispel some of the confusion that arises in the inconsistent and occasionally incoherent discussion of the titles of ‘pastor’ or ‘deacon’ and the exercise of these two forms of ‘the ministry’, Paul Fiddes has provided arguably the most succinct formulation of how best to describe and refer to these two offices of ministry.²⁷ Fiddes describes the ministry of *the diaconal office as a ministry of ‘pastoral service’* and the ministry of *the episcopal office as a ministry of ‘pastoral oversight’*. This distinction can be seen in his *Leading Questions* (1985) and substantially shapes his argument in *Forms of Ministry among Baptists* (1994), and has reappeared.²⁸ For Fiddes, serving and oversight are complementary offices, although the congregational authority granted to individuals discharging the episcopal office of ‘pastoral oversight’ tends towards them reserving the primary responsibility of ministering through ‘Word and Sacrament’. When coupled with notions of ordination to office, this point continues to generate discussion among Baptists.

Among Baptists, the issue of ordination to office is commonly discussed with close attention to the ministry, or priesthood, of all believers. Our congregational polity is characteristically cautious regarding lay-clergy distinctions and this can be seen in accounts of the theology and practice of the diaconal office of

²² George, *Baptist Confessions*, 1996. Their survey includes Keach (1697); Griffith (1743); Jones (1805); and Reynolds (1849).

²³ See, for example, Chappell, *The Ministry of a Baptist Deacon*, 2010, p. 33. Fiddes, *A Leading Question*, 1983, 32-37. Also Paul S. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology. Studies in Baptist History and Thought* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2003), pp. 270-273. Also Grenz, *The Baptist Congregation*, 1985, pp. 63-66.

²⁴ R.L. Child, ‘Baptists and Ordination’ in *Baptist Quarterly*, 14(6), 1952, p. 245. Also see Henry Cook, *What Baptists Stand For, 5th ed.* (London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1964), p. 107.

²⁵ Paul S. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, 2003, p. 91.

²⁶ Although most Baptist authors give greater attention to the episcopal office normally associated with the title of ‘Pastor’ or ‘Minister’.

²⁷ The role of ‘elder’ and the utility of the idea of ‘leadership’ are further complicating factors in constructing a Baptist theology of ministry. This task falls outside the scope of the current work but is nevertheless closely related to our discussion here, especially where the role of elder assumes certain of the ministry functions formerly associated with the pastoral service exercised by the diaconal office.

²⁸ See Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, 2003, pp. 83-106; 270-274.

pastoral service. For example, Webb argues that all lay members who serve are deacons,²⁹ whilst Clarke insists that the individual who exercises the episcopal office of pastoral oversight also remains a part of the laity.³⁰ For Baptists, the episcopal office is a congregational ministry which, along with the diaconal office holders, remains accountable to the congregation.³¹

Whilst the diaconal office may be an office to which an individual is set apart by the congregation, the ministry of pastoral service exercised by that individual is nevertheless co-located with all forms of service exercised by, with, and for the congregation, as the people (*laos*) of God. The ongoing search for theological clarity in this aspect of congregational polity and practice continues, and is perhaps most evident when discussing the propriety of ordination for those individuals called to the diaconal office of pastoral service as deacons of the congregation.

Ordination to the diaconate has been more common among North American Baptists than it has among British and most European Baptist churches.³² In both instances, deacons are commonly ‘voted’ into office by a majority decision of the church members gathered for a church meeting³³ and, although ordination might follow, Webb (a Southern Baptist), makes it clear that in his view, ordination to a diaconal ministry confers an office and not substance.³⁴ British practice has been to reserve ordination to the episcopal office of pastoral oversight. The holders of that office are commonly titled ‘Pastor’ or ‘Minister’ with the accompanying honorific ‘Reverend’.³⁵ The British Baptist Union refers, for example, to the *appointment* of deacons, a role which is ‘not normally stipendiary *unlike most ordained ministries*’.³⁶

Ordination to episcopal and diaconal ministries became a point of discussion among British Baptists during the mid to late 1990s, following the publication of the Baptist Union report ‘Forms of Ministry among Baptists’ and the move by the Baptist Union to ‘accredit’ forms of ministry other than the episcopal office of ‘pastoral oversight’.³⁷ Among these were a number of ministry positions, including ‘youth minister’ and ‘evangelist’ each of which was then able to self-style with the honorific title ‘Reverend’. The precise theological nature of these ministries remains unresolved, although Fiddes argued that they were, in fact,

²⁹ Webb, *Deacons*, 2001, Loc 152. But, see Strauch, *Paul’s Vision for the Deacons*, 2017. Loc 829, who rejects the notion that ‘anyone who serves in the church is a deacon.’

³⁰ ‘Clearly the fact that a man(*sic*) is ordained to the ministry does not make him any less a layman. He remains a baptised member of the People of God (*laos*)’. See Neville Clarke, ‘The Pastoral Ministry’ in *Baptist Quarterly*, 20(6) 1964, p. 264.

³¹ The 1679 *Orthodox Creed*, using the episcopal terminology of its era, states that the ‘bishops’ so elected are only responsible for the governance of the congregation that called the bishop to the office of pastoral oversight. See Article XXXI of *An Orthodox Creed 1679*, quoted in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, p. 320.

³² Though it is not unknown in Europe and elsewhere. For more on this, see Brackney, ‘Ordination in the Larger Baptist Tradition’ 2002, for a discussion of the different practices regarding the offer of ordination and the withholding of ordination from those entering the diaconal office. Also W.H. Brackney, ‘Deacon’ in W.H. Brackney, *The A to Z of the Baptists* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009), pp. 178-179.

³³ Though anecdotal evidence suggests that in some instances, a small but growing number of diaconal appointments are made at the request of the Senior Pastor or a leadership team.

³⁴ See, for example, Webb, *Deacons*, 2001, Loc 261.

³⁵ See, *The Meaning and Practice of Ordination Among Baptists* (London: Baptist Union of Gt Britain and Ireland, 1957) for a short historical overview of the practice of ordination among British Baptists.

³⁶ Nigel G. Wright, *Baptist Basics 8: Leadership in the Local Church* (Didcot, UK: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2016), p. 7. Emphasis mine.

³⁷ Within the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Baptist Assembly confers ‘accredited’ status upon appropriately qualified women and men whose ministry it considers may be exercised across the Union of Churches. Doing so is an acknowledgement that ‘ordination’, properly understood and practised among Baptists, is always within the context of the local congregation which sets the ‘Pastor’ to the episcopal office of pastoral oversight.

diaconal ministries of pastoral service.³⁸ In practice, these alternative forms of ministry convey the appearance of being ministries of pastoral oversight.

Despite the early intentions of John Smyth and Thomas Helwys in the early seventeenth century, there are still parts of the Baptist community around the world that do not permit women to hold diaconal offices. This is resisted all the more strongly where appointment to that office is accompanied by ordination.³⁹ Whilst acknowledging that Baptists might retain a reluctance to appoint women to episcopal offices of pastoral oversight, there seems relatively little in the wider Baptist tradition or its understanding of the biblical texts that limits pastoral service to only men. Indeed, Charles Deweese invites his fellow Southern Baptists to a healthier ‘discussion of New testament evidence for women deacons’ on the basis of ‘the New Testament concept of “service” (diakonia)’.⁴⁰

Theological reflection by Baptists upon our practices of diaconal ministry has mostly constrained these within the confines of the local congregation; it remains a ministry largely directed towards other members of the same congregation. Consequently, diaconal ministry has been construed as anti-missional, has been described as adrift from its biblical origins, has assumed administrative tasks related to church governance, has proven highly susceptible to leadership discourse, and for some, ‘the fundamentally ministerial function of the deacons has given place to a fundamentally administrative one’.⁴¹

Towards a Missional Practice of *Diakonia* among Baptists

In the first two sections of this essay, we have briefly outlined an historical and theological overview of diaconal ministry as commonly practised by Baptists. Further nuance and a fuller account are certainly required, but the evidence presented here demonstrates that the ministry of *diakonia* among Baptists has remained a largely ecclesial practice, a *diakonia pro-ecclesia*.

In this final section, we will attempt to focus the contours of an emerging, constructive theological account of the ‘diaconal office of pastoral service’ around the primary agency of God in all forms of ministry and mission to, for, and within the created order.⁴² Ecumenical and evangelical theology have each been re-engaging over the last five or six decades with the primary agency of God, whether in mission or more generally in God’s action towards the world and its inhabitants, whether human, animate, or inanimate. Missiology has widely embraced the idea that the primary agency in mission is God’s agency, allowing us to talk of the *missio Dei*.⁴³

³⁸ *Forms of Ministry among Baptists: Towards an Understanding of Spiritual Leadership* (Didcot, UK: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1994), pp. 44-45. This report from the BUGB Doctrine and Worship Committee was authored in large measure by Fiddes at a time when the author of this article was a staff member of the Baptist Union.

³⁹ See R. Stanton Norman, *The Baptist Way: Distinctives of a Baptist Church* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2005), p. 121. Norman writes from within the biblically conservative Southern Baptist Convention; ‘My own opinion is that, if a local church ordains its deacons, then women cannot serve in this capacity. In SBC life, ordination carries with it implications of authority and oversight, and I believe the Bible relegates authority and oversight to men.’

⁴⁰ Deweese, *Women Deacons and Deaconesses*, 2006, p. 38.

⁴¹ George Beasley-Murray, ‘The Diaconate in Baptist Churches’, 1965, p. 78.

⁴² A more adequate account of the primary agency of God will necessarily begin with the trinitarian extension of the character and being of God, but this awaits further elucidation.

⁴³ Karl Barth introduced the view of God as the prime agent of mission at the Brandenburg Missionary Conference (1932). German missiologists adopted this view as a way of preventing the secularisation of the mission of the church. Barth persuaded the Willingen Missionary Conference (1952) where he set up mission in the context of the trinity rather than ecclesiology or soteriology. Lesslie Newbigin developed a more coherent and sustained use of the *missio Dei* throughout his leadership of the Conference for World Mission and Evangelism with the WCC (from 1961). See David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), pp. 399-400.

This final section, similarly, proposes an understanding of God's primary agency in service of the world, what we might describe as a *diakonia Dei*. The implications of this for a constructive Baptist theology and practice of diaconal ministry lie in its potential for re-imagining it as a primarily covenantal and missional practice.

The diaconal ministry and the missio Dei

The practice of a *diakonia pro-ekklesia* leaves little space for the consideration of the missional character of either the diaconal office or of its intended pastoral service. If one were to compare, in the most simplistic of ways, the distinctions between a Baptist practice of *diakonia* and that of other Christian traditions, one would have to conclude that the Roman Catholic Church,⁴⁴ the Lutheran Churches,⁴⁵ the Orthodox Churches, United Churches,⁴⁶ and the Anglican Communion⁴⁷ have all been more successful in locating the diaconate within the scope of the mission and witness of their Churches.

In contrast, some Baptists seem to have abandoned any hope that a traditional, inherited model of the diaconate, however renewed, will ever make any contribution to the mission of the Church or the *missio Dei*,⁴⁸ whilst others have obscured its value and significance by substituting for it the discourse of leadership.⁴⁹ Other Baptists express some hope that a properly functioning diaconate might contribute to the overall missional task of the Church by releasing other ministers (ordained or lay) to further the congregation's mission.⁵⁰

Baptists who have set out a vision of *diakonia* as a missional practice includes leaders of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina, who encourage deacons to 'lead churches in the area of missional engagement' and explore their 'potential spiritual impact of the diaconate on the congregation and community'.⁵¹ British theologian, Paul Fiddes, draws upon insights from Eastern Orthodoxy to conceive of Baptist *diakonia* as a form of martyrria (witness), hence missional.⁵² Each approach distances itself from the widespread poverty of imagination and lack of theological creativity in typical accounts of the diaconal office. Characteristically, such accounts also fail to convey any missional possibility.

Diakonia Dei and the baptistic commitment to covenantal mission

Distinctions between denominations and Christian traditions usually consist of a particular alignment and ordering of shared theological and biblical commitments that gain institutional continuity across time and

⁴⁴ See *From the Diakonia of Christ to the Diakonia of the Apostles* (Vatican City: Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, 2002).

⁴⁵ Chung's Evangelical Lutheran discussion of *diakonia* moves it into a trinitarian framework that overlays *missio Dei* with the *diakonia Dei*. Chung describes God of Israel as *diaconus* (Isa. 61:1), Jesus Christ as the true *diaconus* (Mt 20:28), and the Holy Spirit as the one who enthuses the *spirit of diaconus* (Phil 2:1-5). See Paul S Chung, *Reclaiming Mission as Constructive Theology: Missional Church and World Christianity* (Eugene OR: Cascade Books, 2012).

⁴⁶ Alison McCrea, *De-Centred Ministry: A Diaconal View of Mission and Church* (Melbourne: Melbourne College of Divinity. Unpublished thesis, 2009).

⁴⁷ Gill Kimber, *Deacon by Design: The ups and downs of an Anglican deacon* (Goring by Sea, UK: Verite CM Ltd, 2019).

⁴⁸ Winston Crawley, 'Traditions of Church and Ministry as an Obstacle in Christian Missions', *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, 30 (3), 1988, pp. 32-39.

⁴⁹ For a critique of this move and its impact on the offices of ministry among Baptists, see Anthony Clarke, *Forming Ministers or Training Leaders? An Exploration of Practice and the Pastoral Imagination* (Chester, UK: University of Chester. Unpublished DMin, 2017).

⁵⁰ Nathan Rose, 'The Role, Requirements, and Reward of a Deacon', www.9marks.org, 4th May 2019. <https://www.9marks.org/article/the-role-requirements-and-reward-of-a-deacon/>.

⁵¹ Cited in Jeff Brumley, 'Role of deacons changing as churches embrace missional focus', *baptistnews.com*, 6th September, 2016, <https://baptistnews.com/article/role-of-deacons-changing-as-churches-embrace-missional-focus/>

⁵² Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, 2005, pp. 270-273.

geographical space. Baptists generally hold the church to be a gathering of believers, called together under Christ, into a covenanted community, free to exercise liberty of conscience in all matters of faith, and governed according to a congregational polity. The diaconal office of pastoral service is generally exercised within these parameters, along with a commitment to the primacy of the laity, plurality of leadership, and service to the world.

To imagine a new missional impulse, a re-orientation towards the world, will require a Baptist theology of the diaconal office to take its lead from the *diakonia Dei*. A practice modelled on the *diakonia Dei* will learn from Jesus of Nazareth as the human embodiment of *diakonus*.⁵³ His ministry is presented in the NT as a contextual expression of the Servant figure of Isaiah. After his resurrection and ascension, the NT church re-contextualises the ministry of service and appoints individuals as *diakonia*, to serve among them as ‘deacons’.

The historical narratives and epistles of the New Testament are more than mere blueprints for our contemporary practice; they underscore the necessity of contextual appropriations of service, patterned on the *diakonia Dei*, as a ministry in each and every new context. For the sake of the world, Baptists must reimagine a missional appropriation of the *diakonia Dei*. Over the last forty years, Baptists have given a growing attention to the theological resource of covenant,⁵⁴ including the historic practice of Baptists ‘walking together’ as recipients of the privileges and blessings of the covenant community.

The diaconal ministry of pastoral service is an invitation to covenant privilege and blessing

A radical re-imagining of the biblical notion of *diakonia* as ‘waiting at table’ in a missional context lends itself to a covenantal reading of the table as a place of deep relational hospitality. An invitation to table is a relational gesture, an invitation to relationship. At the tables of Acts 6, the early church encountered the poor and the widowed. Through the *diakonia*, it offered the blessing of welfare and practical service to both disenfranchised groups. The recipients of this pastoral service were individuals ‘out-of-relationship’; nobody ‘walked with them’ or ‘watched over them in love’.⁵⁵ The popular assumption that widows in the NT period were financially destitute has been recently challenged as a misconception.⁵⁶ Despite this historical reassessment, the fact remains that some widows would certainly have experienced financial destitution and that those living alone were clearly ‘out-of-relationship’. Economic isolation and deprivation were genuine possibilities, possibly underlined by Luke’s parallel mention of the poor benefitting from the service of the *diakonia*. The causes of poverty during the NT period were doubtless varied and many, but several of these point to a disengagement from the Jewish covenant community and only limited access to its privileges. Economic marginality and poverty might be associated with the experience of being an alien, physically disabled, expelled or shunned by the community for ritual reasons, landlessness, living without surviving kin or family, or being a bond-servant.⁵⁷

⁵³ Chung, *Reclaiming Mission as Constructive Theology*, 2012, pp. 125-135.

⁵⁴ For the developing use of covenant as a theological heuristic by Baptist authors, see, for example, Keith Clements et al, *Bound to Love* (London: The Baptist Union, 1985); BUGB, *The Nature of the Assembly and the Council of the Baptist Union of Great Britain* (Didcot, UK: Baptist Union of Gt Britain, 1994); Richard Kidd *On the Way of Trust* (Oxford, UK: Whitley Publications, 1997); Anthony Clarke (ed), *Bound for Glory? God, Church, and World in Covenant* (Oxford, UK: Whitley Publications, 2002); Myra Blyth and Christopher Ellis, *Gathering for Worship: Patterns and Prayers for the Community of Disciples* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2005).

⁵⁵ See the historic reference to early covenanting in Blyth and Ellis, *Gathering for Worship*, 2005, p. 108. ‘We come this day to covenant with you | to watch over each other in love | and to walk together | in ways known and still to be made known.’

⁵⁶ Susan Hulen, *Women in the New Testament World* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 65-93.

⁵⁷ Walter Pilgrim, *Good News to the Poor: Wealth and Poverty in Luke – Acts* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), pp. 147-159; K.C. Richardson, *Early Christian Care for the Poor: An alternative subsistence strategy under Roman imperial rule* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018), pp. 101-139.

The pastoral service offered through diaconal ministry at the table is a sign of covenantal inclusion for the so-called ‘poor’ or ‘widow’. The widow and the poor, where there is little or no prospect of a sponsor or provider, might find in the Christian community, the privileges and blessings of a new covenant. Understood in this way, the pastoral service of the *diakonia* in the early church is radically covenantal in its orientation.

This radically covenantal orientation of the *diakonia* is also simultaneously missional. Where diaconal ministries are conceived as pastoral service of the world, the accompanying missional move is a step towards the possibility of covenantal ‘walking together’ for individuals previously out-of-relationship. The vision of a diaconal office of pastoral service that responds to every new context and situation with the setting apart of individuals to pastoral service in such settings, is expressed most clearly in the careful theological attention given these matters by Fiddes.⁵⁸ He understands the diaconal office of pastoral service as a way of providing theological substance to the Baptist evangelist, parish nurse, cross-cultural missionary, community worker, or youth specialist, for example. Where these ministries are oriented towards the contemporary ‘poor’ and ‘widowed’, they begin to more adequately reflect the *diakonia Dei* and they allow for a new missional expression of the diaconal office.

Whither the diakonia Dei?

A theological programme to rehabilitate the diaconal office of pastoral service among Baptists, framed with reference to biblical and covenantal distinctives, is unlikely ever to be a guaranteed vehicle for winning universal consensus among Baptists, even with the intent of missional renewal. However, such would offer a route towards a more coherent theology and practice of the diaconal office, a pastoral service exercised on behalf of the Baptist congregation towards, and in missional solidarity with the *oikumene* – a service of witness to the prior agency of the *diakonia Dei*.

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⁵⁸ Fiddes, *Forms of Ministry*, 1994, pp. 34-40.

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7. TOWARDS A COMPREHENSIVE CONCEPT OF DIACONIA: CARE, TRANSFORMATION, EMPOWERMENT, ADVOCACY AND CONVIVIALITY

Wanda Deifelt¹ and Beate Hofmann²

In the past decades, it has become evident that, although much needed, charity work is neither sufficient nor sustainable in order to address the complexity of social inequalities that humanity faces. Drawing from a variety of contexts, a more comprehensive understanding of diaconia has emerged: mercy and justice take shape not only by feeding those in need but also through education and political action. These changes in the concept and scope of diaconia stem from an epistemological shift and entail an ongoing learning process. This process draws from the knowledge and wisdom of individuals and groups who, for too long, were perceived as recipients of charity, such as communities from the Global South, inner-city dwellers, or at-risk populations. It also reveals a more holistic understanding of diaconia from the perspective of development agencies and mission organisations, realising that their best intentions are potentially fraught with toxic dependence.³ As a result, diaconia expanded its scope by moving from charity to a theory-praxis that addresses human dignity in a comprehensive manner, including care, transformation, empowerment, advocacy and conviviality.

Varieties of Contexts and Modalities of Service

The concept of diaconia has its root in the early Christian tradition, whereby the faithful extended care to their community. Throughout history, diaconia has taken different forms, but at its core is the attempt to convey good news and witness God's love. The biblical tradition has helped to develop this notion, particularly those passages that contain the words *diakonia*, *diakonein*, and *diakonos*, often translated as "service", "to serve", and "servant".⁴ Although the Greek word refers to a mission given to a person (Acts 6:1-6), the term has been widely associated with neighbourly love and how the church carries out its social work.⁵ From the outset, it was clear that Christian discipleship and ministry included a public witness of love. Diaconia was "an intrinsic element of being Church" and "deeply related to what the Church celebrates in its liturgy and announces in its preaching."⁶ It was understood that diaconia – extending compassion and care towards those afflicted and affected by physical, mental and spiritual ills – was to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

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³ Robert Lupton, *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help* (New York: HarperCollins, 2012).

⁴ Kjell Nordstokke, "Diakonia According to the Gospel of John," *Diaconia* 5(1) (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 2014), pp. 65-67.

⁵ John N. Collins, *Diakonia. Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Anni Hentschel, *Diakonia im Neuen Testament*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament Reihe 2, no. 226 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).

⁶ The Lutheran World Federation, *Diakonia in Context* (Geneva, 2009), p. 29, <https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-diakonia-context-transformation-reconciliation-empowerment>, [accessed 16 April 2020].

While agreeing on the need to do so, there is no uniformity in how this act of service is carried out. Since diaconia became a theological subject reflecting upon the longstanding ecclesial practice of service, it has taken root and branched out in different parts of the world. It often describes charitable works carried out by persons connected to the Protestant church, although there are equivalent initiatives in other Christian denominations – namely Roman Catholic and Orthodox – as well as in the context of other world religions and philosophies of life. Even if the nomenclature “diaconia” is not employed, there is a shared imperative that believers live out their faith by helping those in need. In the European Protestant setting, particularly in 19th century Germany, diaconal institutions were founded and orders of deaconesses and deacons were formed. Similar initiatives were established in other parts of the world, through church-structured networks and grassroots organisations. Today, there are a multitude of different ways in which diaconia can be carried out given the particularities of context, historical backgrounds, and cultural configurations.⁷ These initiatives have a commonality in that they all attempt to offer a public witness of the core values of their faith.

In the Latin American context, for example, embodiment is a lens through which diaconia can be understood and carried out.⁸ Caring for bodies – whether the personal body, the social bodies of community and society, as well as the bodies of natural habitats and biospheres – is a form of service that honours both creation and incarnation. The care for bodies was at the forefront of Jesus’ ministry and his gospel proclamation. In Latin America, this is translated into concrete actions which seek to ameliorate the lives of people, ranging from initiatives to enable access to clean water, affordable housing and basic education, to designing policies that affect the population and the environment. To illustrate, among the projects endorsed and supported by the Lutheran Foundation of Diaconia (FLD), in Brazil, there are farming communities operating with sustainable and ecological practices, initiatives to address domestic violence, and micro-lending to economically disadvantaged populations. As part of the work carried out through diaconia, there is a community in the outskirts of the metropolitan area of Porto Alegre, Brazil, that for many years lived on and from the landfill site. Through one of the outreach programs carried out by FLD, the families living there started a recycling plant that improved not only their livelihoods but their overall quality of life.

Conversely, in the European context, diaconia can be described as an organisational “face” of Christian love. Diaconia is not only individual action of care and support, but also “love in structures” through social organisations related to the church.⁹ Some are connected to congregations, others are independent Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) or social enterprises. The structural visibility of diaconia is evident by the number of people it employs and volunteers it assembles.¹⁰ They take care of elderly people and people with disabilities, run hospitals and nurseries, and provide support at schools and counselling services. In Germany, these initiatives are part of the social welfare system and, according to public law, receive funding from insurances, the state, and local governments. This is a hybrid model of diaconia that combines the love of one’s neighbour and professional social services (to which people are entitled).

As the service carried out by a community of faith, diaconia requires integrated approaches that combine theory and praxis, institutional and grassroots initiatives, establishes a dialogue between theology and other

⁷ These commonalities can be articulated through an intersectional rubric, identifying them through *liberation*, *contextual*, *public* and *political* theologies, for instance. These distinct approaches may share similar concerns involving global citizenship, since they attempt to foster greater participation, visibility, accountability, transformation, and service.

⁸ See Wanda Deifelt, “Citizenship, Otherness and Religious Care: Embodied Diaconia” in Trygve Wyller (ed), *Heterotopic Citizen: New Research on Religious Work for the Disadvantaged*. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), pp. 158-171.

⁹ The term *love in structures* was used at the WCC meeting in Uppsala in 1968 to describe how Christian love changes the world and aims for sustainable support. See Werner M. Ruschke, *Spannungsfelder heutiger Diakonie*, Diakonie 4 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2007), p. 10.

¹⁰ In Germany alone, there are around 500 000 people employed and 700 000 volunteers supporting the work carried out by various diaconal institutions. See “Diakonie in Zahlen”, www.diakonie.de/auf-einen-blick (accessed 16 April 2020).

fields of knowledge, and bridges the gap between faith communities and society at large. As the social work carried out by the church, diaconia addresses and responds to the challenges of our times, both at a local and global levels. Among these challenges are the realities of globalisation, the lack of access of individuals and communities to the fulfilment of their basic needs, the disparities in gains and distribution of wealth, rampant destruction of biospheres and environmental degradation, and the overall denial of human dignity. To counter these, there has been a greater intentionality and coordinated efforts in tackling social, economic, cultural, and political problems. Ecumenical and inter-faith initiatives, as well as a move from a mission organisation into a model of partnership and intercultural encounters, have created an awareness of how interrelated social situations are and how intersectional the solutions need to be. Care, transformation, empowerment, advocacy, and conviviality are potential entry-points for such a comprehensive approach.

Care

When asked about the greatest commandment, Jesus paraphrased the Torah, stating that the greatest commandment is love: to love God with all one's heart, soul, and mind and one's neighbour as oneself (Mark 12:28-31). This love translates into care for the neighbour, addressing the concrete reality of the needs and sorrows of those around us. However, this care for the neighbour has often been reduced to its individual or spiritual facet. Diaconia is a reminder that reducing love to an eschatological dimension (such as salvation of the soul) detracts from the commandment itself. The love extended to one's neighbour is part of Christian discipleship, following in the footsteps of Jesus. The neighbour's wellbeing might require care in the form of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, housing the homeless, tending the sick, welcoming the stranger, and consoling the suffering. But care is not an isolated action.

Care is an attitude towards a world in need of grace, acceptance, and love. In the early church, one of the many roles of the *diakonos* was to be a messenger, to carry letters and greetings from one community to the other. Today, the work done through the church and diaconal organisations also communicate *good news* to the society at large. This can happen through institutions that provide care for elderly people, mosquito nets for populations affected by malaria, or literacy programs for disadvantaged communities. Care can also reflect relationships within families and communities, extensive to social organisations and professional support systems (including, among others, volunteer work and professional services). While care takes many different shapes, one important aspect is its holistic dimension. Care not only implies food and clothes but also spiritual and emotional wellbeing. It describes an attitude of turning to the other and perceiving their needs when they are in a situation of vulnerability.

This holistic dimension of care is further explained by Lewis, Williams, and Baker by understanding care as an acronym for a faith committed to life and leadership, which also fosters change. CARE, the authors assert, can stand for:

- C – Create hospitable space;
- A – Ask self-awakening questions;
- R – Reflect theologically together: and
- E – Enact the next most faithful step.¹¹

While care is a witness of God's love, it can also be misconstrued and entail unwanted burdens. For instance, care can lead to relationships of dependency and feelings of incapacity instead of helping people to help themselves. It can exacerbate cultural norms and gender stereotypes when, for example, care is seen as

¹¹ Stephen Lewis, Matthew Wesley Williams and Dori Grinenko Baker, *Another Way: Living and Leading Change on Purpose* (Saint Louis: Chalice Press, 2020), p. 3.

women's task, is poorly payed, and is not well respected.¹² In these cases, care runs the risk of exploitation while employing virtuous terminology such as altruism, self-sacrifice, devotion, and obedience. Care involves compassion and hospitality, but it also invites posing questions and collaborative reflection regarding how to care for those who care,¹³ to which extent care is a professional attitude in care relationships,¹⁴ and whether the outcome of care is dependency and asymmetry rather than reciprocity and mutuality.¹⁵

Care relationships need to carefully address issues of power, powerlessness, self-determination, and dependency among individuals as well as groups, organisations, churches, and countries.

Transformation

Following Jesus' discipleship, Christians are not called *out of the world* but precisely *into the world*, to offer witness to the message of love that restores hope, dignity, and wellbeing for the entirety of creation. This is a prophetic message, denouncing wrongdoings and injustices while also announcing hope and wellbeing. It requires the transformation of individuals and communities, the changing of minds, hearts, and actions. This transformation is "a continuous process of rejection of that which dehumanises and desecrates life and adherence to that which affirms the sanctity of life and gifts in everyone and promotes peace and justice in society."¹⁶

John Hick points out that all major religions teach the golden rule (treat others as you want to be treated) and promote love and compassion.¹⁷ These teachings can take many forms: to be selfless and live for others, to affirm the dignity of human life in spite of racism, classism or sexism, to abide by God's desires for humanity, to forgive one's enemies, and to establish peace on earth. At the root of these notable teachings is a call for transformation or, in Christian terminology, a *metanoia* (conversion). Since humanity is continually deviating from its true call and has a propensity to sin, it needs to be constantly called to be transformed and transform the world around it. This *metanoia* is a transformation from what Martin Luther named a self-centred creature (*incurvatus in se*) to a new creation centred on God and concerned with the wellbeing of others.

This commitment to transformation both engages and changes those who are part of it. Diaconia as transformation indicates that it does not only "tend to the poor" but also seeks the root causes of poverty and also tries to transform them. Sturla J. Stålsett suggests that the struggle of the poor and disenfranchised (those living in precarious conditions) for recognition, representation, and redistribution must "address the precarious situation of the precariat and, from its experienced predicament, propose and mobilise

¹² Carol Gilligan points out that the identification of women with care (that women are care-givers) leads to another ethical perspective: an ethics of care is mainly oriented towards acting not according to ethical norms but according to relationships aiming at not hurting others as an example of a teleological ethical approach. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

¹³ Wolfgang Schmidbauer, *Die hilflosen Helfer* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1977). The helper syndrome is described by Schmidbauer as the inability of care professionals to express their own feelings and sense of helplessness. They look for care relationships to compensate their own emotional inability, creating dependence to support their own self esteem.

¹⁴ See Hans-Ulrich Dallmann, 'Fürsorge als Prinzip? Überlegungen zur Grundlegung einer Pflegeethik,' in *Zeitschrift für evangelische Ethik* 47 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2003), pp. 6-20.

¹⁵ Christine Globig, "Zur Reetablierung des Fürsorgebegriffs in der evangelischen Ethik", in Anna Henkel, Isolde Karle, Gesa Lindemann and Micha Werner (eds), *Sorget nicht – Kritik der Sorge. Dimensionen der Sorge* (Baden Baden: Nomos, 2019). pp. 181-195.

¹⁶ Kjell Nordstokke, *Diakonia in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment*. (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2009), p. 43. Text available at <https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-diakonia-context-transformation-reconciliation-empowerment> [accessed 16 April 2020].

¹⁷ See John Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), chapters 3 and 4.

alternatives.”¹⁸ This transformation can take the shape of a diaconal economics, as Stålsett suggests, or any of the multiple initiatives that restore dignity and promote rights. “Diaconia,” states the Tanzanian bishop Stephen Munga, “is much more than charity. Diaconia is a tool of transforming the world by confronting it so as to change its unjust social-economic, political and cultural systems which are victimising many and lend them in severe poverty and pains while privileging few.”¹⁹

This also has global ramifications. Poverty in one country may be caused by an economic system that benefits people in other countries because goods are sold cheaply and trade regulations are not fair. Migration from poorer to richer countries is one of the many consequences of unequal access to the means for survival. Climate change has also sharpened our awareness toward the global effects of decisions in one country and the entanglement of our living conditions. In order to stop poverty, one has to think globally and work on the global economic system.²⁰

As a tool of transformation, diaconia invites individuals and communities to envision and strive for a different world, one in which human beings are neighbours and no longer separated by a mentality that pits human beings against one another or sets humanity as in opposition to environmental wellbeing. This transformation is both personal and structural. When people can rally around a sense of community and common purpose, no longer debilitated by opposition and competition, they can work towards a just and equitable society.

Empowerment

The reality of our world is that the worth of human life is conditioned by skin tone, mother tongue, place of birth, gender, economic status, age, education, physical mobility, and religion (to name but a few sources of discrimination). Also, amongst Christianity, the question of neighbourly love is often permeated by additional sub questions: Who is our neighbour? Is diaconia only directed toward those of the same faith, the same church, the same ethnic group, or is it directed to everybody in need? Biblical wisdom demonstrates that there should be no hierarchy in love: everybody who is in need is a neighbour and deserving of compassion, as evidenced by the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).

One of the pitfalls of assistance work is to reduce it to charity, with a one-sided approach in which, for instance, donor agencies have a predetermined agenda, are not attentive to the needs and gifts of local communities, and end up creating dependencies. A careful analysis of power dynamics is paramount, noticing who has power, from where power flows, and which power structures prevent people from living with

¹⁸ Sturla J. Stålsett, “Precious and Precarious: Exploring Diaconal Economics,” in *Diaconia* 10, no 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019), pp. 67-84, quote from p. 70. Text available at <https://www.vr-elibrary.de/doi/pdf/10.13109/diac.2019.10.1.67> [accessed 16 April 2020].

¹⁹ Stephen Munga, “Perspectives from Tanzania” in *Diaconia Takes the Pulpit to the Market: Documentation of the International Symposium on Diaconia Work. Bielefeld-Bethel 12 May 2017* (Wuppertal: UEM 2018), p.17. Text available at https://www.vemission.org/fileadmin/Text/180608_diako-symposium-alternativ.pdf [accessed 16 April 2020].

²⁰ To illustrate the complexity of addressing poverty on a global scale, see Ulla Schmidt, “Poverty: A Challenge to Human Dignity?” in *Diaconia* 1, no. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2010), pp.7-31: “Not only is it the origin of conflicting recommendations on poverty-combating policies and practices, depending on how dignity is linked with autonomy. Far more, a currently dominant trend in the conception of human dignity and autonomy, namely one that links dignity to self-determination, presupposes an ideal model of human life. As such, it becomes involved in practices of distinction whereby forms of life that fall short of this ideal model of a self-determining human life, are implicitly denigrated. A notion of human dignity that is grounded in human life's relational and multidimensional character, it is argued, will be less vulnerable to the accusations of implying such practices of differentiation, and better able to articulate dignity in relation to the concrete, bodily human life's various dimensions.” (quote from the article's abstract).

dignity.²¹ Every person stands at an intersection in the flow of power. As Michel Foucault stated, “power is everywhere” and “comes from everywhere.”²² Some aspects of one’s identity and experience place them in a position of privilege (such as having white skin in a racist society) and others impose hurdles (being a woman in a patriarchal society, for example), but all human beings have some degree of power.

Empowerment is particularly relevant in contexts of power hierarchy, where oppression is accepted as normal and inevitable. This is the case, for instance, for colonialism and neo-colonialism, with an occupation of lands, people’s bodies and minds. In his analysis, Franz Fanon observes that one of the ways oppression is perpetuated is not always by force, but by making the oppressed believe the worst about themselves.²³ Empowerment is the process of becoming more confident about one’s possibilities and assertive of one’s rights, working together with others to dismantle structures of unjust power. A well-known proverb states that we should not only give a hungry person a fish, for that would feed them for a day. Rather, we should teach them how to fish, so they could feed themselves for a lifetime. But diaconia, through the notion of empowerment, goes a step further: it is also necessary to work together so that everybody has access to the fishing pond, since many people are prevented accessing the means necessary for their livelihoods.

An awareness of power structures and dynamics allows us to constantly ask: Does Diaconia give a voice to those who are not heard in society or does it tend to their needs to silence their cries? Is diaconia a tool to empower people with regard to participating in society or is it seen as a neoliberal tool to enable people to develop their own capacities instead of demanding their rights via government and social organisations for assistance? Are those in need seen as a subject of development or as an object of development? And with so many people facing harsh situations, does diaconia create a hierarchy of needs? How can people involved in diaconia deal with the overwhelming amount of work that requires attention? How can a sense of shared power and governance prevent the “burning out” of activists and organisers, or the “donor fatigue” encountered among many agencies?

Diaconia aims to empower people to stand up for their rights and let their voices be heard. The mission of the church is “to struggle with the people and empower them to achieve their fairly good life. [...] At certain times and situations, the churches engage in empowering the people to know their rights and to stand for them.”²⁴ This is a consequence of the incarnation of God. As Jesus became part of the world, his embodiment made not only divine love visible, but also gave us the promise of steadfast solidarity and consolation. As we wrestle with the questions of our time, we are assured of God’s presence in our midst.

Advocacy

To know that we are loved by God persuades us to love others. Similarly, to be received by God’s grace prompts us to be compassionate towards ourselves and the people who surround us. Because believers look out not only for their own interests but for the wellbeing of all, communities of faith are vocal in defending the wellbeing of those who are vulnerable and disenfranchised. Through local and global exchanges, individual and communal settings, human and environmental approaches, advocacy entails voicing injustices, working to rectify wrongs, and heal a broken world. When love and compassion are acted out in the body politic, advocacy enables us to meet a world in need. Advocacy is a commitment to act in a just manner so that all human beings can live with dignity: to stand in solidarity with those who suffer, to vindicate the rights

²¹ Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), p. 26: “intersectional frameworks understand power relations through a lens of mutual construction. In other words, people’s lives and identities are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways.”

²² Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge* (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 63.

²³ See Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004).

²⁴ Munga, “Perspectives from Tanzania,” p. 17.

of those who are disenfranchised, to console those who are neglected, to alleviate the suffering of those in pain, and to comfort the afflicted.

In all of this, advocacy requires us to be accountable for our own actions and the actions of our community so that all life may flourish. In a process of self-reflexivity, those involved in diaconia grapple with questions of accountability. Who holds us responsible in our activities? Whom do we serve and whose interests are at stake? Knowing that there are multiple stakeholders – ranging from those in need, those in positions of power, donors, churches, and our own interests – how do we ensure that a multiplicity of interests are coordinated and serve to improve the lives of the disadvantaged?

As a component of diaconia, advocacy indicates that its practice does not deal only with helping the needy through charitable acts, such as soup kitchens or shelters for the homeless. As faith communities engage in actions which seek to promote human and environmental wellbeing, rallying around rights, dignity, and sustainability (values that are at the core of diaconia), they draw from the core of their ethical and theological values. As part of civil society, the advocacy that diaconia engages in does not impose a political agenda.²⁵ Ultimately, advocacy is a matter of public witness, bringing “the pulpit out of the church to the market place, where the whole world can see.”²⁶ Through its service, diaconia reaches out to the broader society – the body politic – to develop partnerships and programs that ensure the common good.

Advocacy has a political dimension but it is not reduced to the political agenda of any single political party or ideology. Getting involved in political action can create a difficult double bind. Nadine Bowers Du Toit reflects on this challenge from a South African perspective. In the attempt to create a new rainbow society after Apartheid, churches were active participants in designing this society, but their role is now also under scrutiny regarding the interests of the poor. She points out the difficulties of advocating for people’s rights by getting involved in diaconia: “Both the charity and pragmatic approaches appear to have unwittingly divorced their engagement with poverty from advocacy for justice and peace – in a scramble for reconstruction and partnership rather than resistance”.²⁷ The reason for this divorce is a shift from a position of resistance to a position of cooperation with the government, favouring a culture of assistance that ties back to the charity and welfare approach.

Through advocacy, compassion takes the shape of struggling alongside people who are fighting for their rights, making their plight visible, and getting involved in public discourse or initiatives that guarantee land titles, fair wages, and human dignity – depending on the issue at hand.

Conviviality

The word conviviality is often understood as pleasantness, but at its core there is a stronger ethos: to extend hospitality and live together as friends, not foes. This notion becomes even more significant in light of the increasing conflicts generated due to cultural and religious differences. Historically diaconia has a strong Christian component, and that needs to be nurtured. However, Christianity is not the only matrix for social engagement. The golden rule (one should treat others as one would like others to treat oneself) is a core

²⁵ See Sturla J. Stålsett, Arnhild Taksdal, Per Kristian Hilden, “Research as Diaconia: Commitment, Action and Participation” *Diaconia* 9, no. 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018), pp. 165-180 as an example of how diaconal practices in liberation theologies, particularly those employing Paulo Freire-inspired methods of “participatory research,” can challenge and develop diaconal practices in the context of large diaconal service organisations, such as the Oslo Church City Mission, in Norway, while also having an impact on civil society.

²⁶ Munga, “Perspectives from Tanzania,” p. 18.

²⁷ Nadine Bowers Du Toit, “The Elephant in the Room: The Need to Re-Discover the Intersection Between Poverty, Powerlessness and Power in ‘Theology and Development’ praxis”, *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 72(4) (Cape Town, 2016), pp. 1-9, 5. Text available at <https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/article/view/3459/8162> [accessed 16 April 2020].

teaching of all religions and philosophies of life. Our societies are growingly more multicultural and multi-religious, and this presents a new set of challenges and possibilities for diaconia. It invites a new approach for thinking about social practice in terms of an ethic of reciprocity based not only on Christian terms but rooted also in inter-faith dialogue.

Conviviality could draw from academic hypotheses of *convivencia*, under the Umayyad Conquest of Hispania – the period in which the Iberian Peninsula was under Muslim rule. Allegedly, the Muslim-ruled areas, known as *al-Andalus*, fomented peaceful coexistence between Christians, Jews, and Muslims. There is little historical evidence that *convivencia* was actually implemented, or whether tolerance was practiced primarily out of fear rather than conviction. Instead, for many Christians, the blueprint for conviviality is established by Jesus himself (Mt. 25:35-45): feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned are acts of compassion and solidarity that go beyond cultural or religious identities.

Conviviality indicates an attitude of cooperation with people of different backgrounds, who share a similar vision and work with the same concerns. Similar to the narrative account of Acts 15, ensuring the wellbeing of the neighbour is not dependent on their subscribing to one's religious views. It is possible for people from different faith traditions to live together, cooperating with one another and working for peace and justice. The same applies for people with no religious affiliation, who seek to improve people's quality of life while also safeguarding the environment. For instance, in order to mitigate the climate crisis or to change unjust economic systems, faith initiatives (such as churches) may cooperate with NGOs and create global networks in support of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).²⁸

This interreligious cooperation is evident also in organisations that focus on diaconia. Being trained in a social profession is not necessarily linked to being a Christian or working from religious motivation. Professional social practice is not limited to Christianity. Cooperation amongst people from multiple religious backgrounds can happen within a secularised professional ethos (in the European setting, for instance) but it can also come from the context itself, where people from different religious backgrounds work side by side because their call to serve is at the root of their vocation.

There are many points of connection, and it is important that diaconia emphasises conviviality as a belonging in community, recognising the gifts coming from all those engaged in transformative work. Difference is not refuted, but celebrated, in the spirit of Acts 15:8-9: "God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith." We all live in the same world, connected economically and ecologically. Each action may affect others.

Concluding Remarks

Diaconia (service) is particularly important in the Christian setting because it expresses the sense of transformative care and commitment that enables communities to flourish. It draws from the biblical and historical inquiries on diaconia, the relation between theory and praxis, as well as with other fields of knowledge. In order to address the issues of our time, diaconia needs to be contextual, contemporary, and grounded.

Diaconia is a being-in-the-world, an awareness of what is going on from a personal, inter-personal, communal, and structural perspective. Diaconia is a transforming presence that encompasses the transformation of individuals and communities. Even if we take diaconia to be the subject of our research, the focus of our activities, or our professional engagement, nevertheless goes beyond that. Diaconia is an

²⁸ See, for instance, <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html> [accessed 16 April 2020].

awareness and sensitivity, a state of consciousness and commitment, a longing and belonging that seeks to promote transformation and wellbeing. It is a way of life.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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See also: article of Christine Globig: Care and Care Deficit - Reflections from a German Context and Tony Addy/Ulla Siirto on Conviviality as a vision and approach for a diaconal society in Section II.

8. THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF DIAKONIA – THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS FROM SOUTH AFRICA

Ignatius Swart¹

Diakonia or “service”, the diaconal literature often reminds us, is an integral dimension of being a church, alongside and equal to the other recognised dimensions of being a church.² Yet, while remaining firmly committed to this conviction, participants in the broad ecumenical movement have, in more recent times, also felt the pressing need to offer a corrective to the way diakonia has come to be understood and practised in the Christian tradition. Essentially, this has led to an ever-growing movement that is no longer content with merely confining diakonia to humble and silent service to the poor and the sick.³ On the basis of new theological affirmation informed by a rereading of the Bible, diakonia has, for this movement, instead come to signify something profoundly more, an expression of the kind of service that can be empowered to become a more compelling means of transformation in service of God’s transformative mission.

This article tries to capture the new theological affirmation of diakonia’s transformative power in the light of a number of key insights or themes that can be drawn from the existing ecumenical literature. The cursory nature of this undertaking is acknowledged, given the limited space available.

The Triune God as the Source of Power and Empowerment

“Being church in diakonia implies the God-given mandate of participating in God’s mission to the world.”⁴ This short statement by the eminent scholar of diakonia, Kjell Nordstokke, aptly summarises what may today be considered the most fundamental theological orientation in ecumenical thinking about diakonia. The act of being involved in diakonia starts with God and it is in the diakonia of God,⁵ which is an integral part of God’s mission, that the church is called to participate.

In the present ecumenical conversation on diakonia, therefore, recognition of the divine call to participation implies nothing less than a faithful response to God’s diaconal mandate. To be involved in diakonia ought to be seen as an act of faith that should necessarily lead the faithful to acknowledge their dependency on God to be empowered for their task. “[W]e pray that God may empower us to help transform all that leads to human

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² See e.g. Lutheran World Federation, *Diakonia in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment*. An LWF Contribution to the Understanding and Practice of Diakonia (Geneva: LWF, 2009), pp. 27-31; Theresa J. White, “Diakonia,” in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, eds. Nicholas Lossky et al. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1991), pp. 275-276.

³ See e.g. Stephanie Dietrich et al., “Introduction: Diakonia as Christian Social Practice,” in *Diakonia as Christian Social Practice: An Introduction*, eds. Stephanie Dietrich et al. (Oxford: Regnum, 2014), pp. 1-4; Carlos E. Ham, “Colombo: Theological Perspectives on *Diakonia* in the Twenty-First Century,” *The Ecumenical Review* 64, no. 3 (2012), p. 389; Kjell Nordstokke, “Prophetic Diakonia – A Response,” in *Prophetic Diakonia: “For the Healing of the World,”* Report, The Lutheran World Federation (Geneva: LWF, 2002), pp. 30-31; Kjell Nordstokke, “Diakonia and Diaconate in the World Council of Churches,” *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 13, no. 4 (2013), pp. 295-296.

⁴ Nordstokke, “Prophetic Diakonia,” p. 30.

⁵ Ham, “Colombo”, 387; World Council of Churches, “Ecumenical Diakonia,” WCC Executive Committee, Doc. No. 17 App, Bossey, 7-12 June 2017, p. 35.

greed, violence, injustice and exclusion,”⁶ the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), for instance, declared at its international consultation on “Prophetic Diakonia” in November 2002, in Johannesburg, South Africa. And, as similarly proclaimed in the summative reflection of the 2012 WCC conference on “Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in the Twenty-First Century” in Colombo, Sri Lanka: it is through its empowerment “by what faith celebrates” that “diakonia involves actions of care, relief and service, but ... [also] goes further and addresses the root causes of injustice embedded in oppressive systems and structures.”⁷

In the present ecumenical understanding of diakonia, God is thus proclaimed to be the source through which the church is empowered to become an actor of transformative diakonia. Transformative diakonia, in other words, becomes a reality because of “God sharing power (*dynamis*) with people for participating in God’s mission.”⁸ In terms of a full understanding of diakonia, however, it needs to be understood as power shared by the Triune God.⁹ In this dynamic, the church and the faithful, through their faith in God the Creator, in Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit, become shareholders of a collective power that empowers and sensitises them to a kind of diakonia that will be transformative in nature. Carlos Ham, elaborates on the significance of this:

The Trinity as a *Divine Community* is revealed by God as the source of power, by Jesus as the presence of God’s power in the world and by the Spirit as the outreaching of God’s power. Consequently, this *theology of empowerment* acknowledges the divine purpose to bring life in fullness to the whole creation, for which the church is being capacitated and strengthened to become an agent or instrument of transformation.¹⁰

Biblical Revelation

If the diaconal church is assured of sharing in God’s transformative power through its faith in the Triune God, then the Bible ought to be recognised as the resource par excellence that informs and guides that faith toward greater theological insight and affirmation. This emphasis on what the Bible reveals about the Triune God as the source of diakonia’s transformative power is an indispensable further element in the present ecumenical conversation on diakonia that necessarily needs to be recognised as part of the discussion in this article.

Indeed, it becomes evident from a closer study of the relevant ecumenical literature that a biblical understanding of diakonia is today derived from a comprehensive reading of the Bible. Instead of focusing on a few selected passages or texts, noticeably from the New Testament, the whole Bible has become a resource to draw from.¹¹ It is clear that this has led the diaconal conversation not only to find relevance in the way power and empowerment figure as a central theme throughout the Bible, but to also develop a

⁶ “A Letter from the Global Consultation ‘Prophetic Diakonia: For the Healing of the World’,” in *Prophetic Diakonia*, p. 6.

⁷ Ham, “Colombo,” p. 385.

⁸ Kjell Nordstokke, “Empowerment in the Perspective of Ecumenical Diakonia,” *Diakonia* 3, no. 2 (2012) p. 190.

⁹ There are various conceptualisations of the Trinitarian perspective in the ecumenical literature on diakonia. Here the discussion essentially draws on the conceptualisation of Carlos Emilio Ham, “Empowering Diakonia: A Model for Service and Transformation in the Ecumenical Movement and Local Congregations,” PhD diss. (Amsterdam: Free University Amsterdam, 2015), pp. 32-42; cf. inter alia Hannes Knoetze, “*Diakonia Trinitaris Dei* as/and Transformational Development: A South African Perspective,” *The Ecumenical Review* 71, no. 1-2 (2019), pp. 152-159; LWF, *Diakonia in Context*, pp. 24-27; Nordstokke, “Empowerment,” pp. 191-193.

¹⁰ Ham, “Empowering Diakonia,” p. 43 (original italics).

¹¹ See Stephanie Dietrich, “‘Mercy and Truth Are Met Together; Righteousness and Peace Have Kissed Each Other’ (Psalm 85:10): Biblical and Systematic Theological Perspectives on Diakonia as Advocacy and Fight for Justice,” in *Diakonia as Christian Social Practice*, pp. 28-45.

Trinitarian perspective on this finding.¹² The following four clusters of texts, although by no means exhausting the richness of the perspective drawn from the Bible in the ecumenical conversation, illustrate the point:

The *first* is a cluster of texts from which a *biblical theology of creation*¹³ can be drawn. At the centre here is the biblical revelation about God the Creator who, as the ultimate source of power, has brought into life the whole of creation (Gen. 1-2; Ps. 8). This includes human beings who, in the biblical account of God's ongoing purpose with creation, are empowered (energised) by God's Spirit (Gen. 2:7)¹⁴ for what diaconal scholars interpret as nothing less than a distinctive "diaconal responsibility".¹⁵ Human beings and by implication the church are called to exert themselves for the wellbeing of creation's total web of life as God's care-takers and co-workers (Gen. 1:26-31; Gen. 2:15; Lev. 25; Ps. 8:4-8; Isa. 11:1-9).¹⁶

The *second* is a cluster of texts which deals with the *tradition of the Old Testament prophets*. Here, the same Creator God (see e.g. Am. 4:13) is depicted as the source of power empowering the prophets to become advocates of social justice by fearlessly speaking out against the powerful and their way of treating the poor and the meek (e.g. Isa. 1:1-17; Jer. 1:1-10; Ez. 3:16-27; Am. 5; Mic. 2). In this way, they become influential advocates and visionaries of societal change and it is their example the diaconal church is called upon to follow by doing "prophetic diakonia" through God's enabling power.¹⁷

The *third* is a cluster of New Testament texts dealing with the *person and work of Jesus during his earthly ministry*. Here a similar account unfolds: Jesus is empowered by God's Spirit to take up his earthly ministry (Lk. 4:1, 14; Jn. 1:32-33). Yet, as the one sent by God (Jn. 1:34; Jn. 20:21), as the Messiah, Jesus' ministry becomes the ultimate manifestation of God's diakonia and, therefore, the ultimate mode of diakonia to be imitated by the church. It is a ministry that manifests "the servant nature of power"¹⁸ in its fullest sense, where power is exercised "to lift up, include and dignify".¹⁹ As such, it is a ministry which prioritises society's marginalised, lowest and excluded, including the sick and the disabled (e.g. Mat. 8:1-17; Jn. 5:2-28), children (e.g. Mk. 10:13-16; Lk. 9:47-48), women (e.g. Lk. 7:36-50; Lk. 8:1-3; Jn. 4), and the poor and the generally despised (e.g. Lk. 4:18; Lk. 14:13-14; Lk. 10:25-37).²⁰

The *fourth* is a cluster of New Testament texts which offer a recollection of the *earliest Christian congregational life* across the ancient Roman Empire. Here the Holy Spirit again takes central place – in this instance, as the fundamental source of empowerment (Acts 1:8; Acts 2:1-12; Acts. 8; 1 Cor. 12:6, 11; Gal. 5:22-26) from which a Christian congregational life emerges in which diakonia is "an intrinsic element"²¹ of the teaching and practices of the first congregations (e.g. Acts 2:42-47; Acts 4:32-35; Acts. 6:1-6; Acts. 11:27-30; Rom. 12; Rom. 15:25-28; 1 Cor. 11:20-22, 33; 1 Cor. 12: 1-11, 24-27; 2 Cor. 8-9; Eph. 4:11-13). Read in this way, this recollection rightly forms an indispensable part of the biblical revelation upon which the

¹² See e.g. Ham, "Empowering Diakonia", pp. 32-43; Nordstokke, "Empowerment," pp. 191-193.

¹³ Dietrich, "Mercy and Truth," p. 3-31.

¹⁴ Cf. Ham "Empowering Diakonia", pp. 34-35; Nordstokke, "Empowerment," pp. 191-192.

¹⁵ Dietrich, "Mercy and Truth," p. 31; Knoetze, "*Diakonia Trinitaris Dei*", p. 155.

¹⁶ Dietrich, "Mercy and Truth," pp. 30-31; Ham "Empowering Diakonia", p. 34; Knoetze, "*Diakonia Trinitaris Dei*," p. 155; Nordstokke, "Empowerment," pp. 191-192.

¹⁷ See Nordstokke, "Empowerment," p. 192; Nordstokke, *Liberating Diakonia* (Trondheim: Tapir Akademisk Forlag, 2011), pp. 49-53; also Dietrich, "Mercy and Truth," pp. 34-37; Knoetze, "*Diakonia Trinitaris Dei*," p. 155; LWF, *Prophetic Diakonia*.

¹⁸ Ham "Empowering Diakonia," p. 35; cf. Ham, "Colombo," p. 385.

¹⁹ Nordstokke, "Empowerment," p. 193.

²⁰ See Dietrich, pp. 38-40; "Mercy and Truth," p. 36; Ham "Empowering Diakonia", pp. 35-37; Knoetze, "*Diakonia Trinitaris Dei*," pp. 156-158; Nordstokke, "Empowerment," p. 193.

²¹ LWF, *Diakonia in Context*, p. 29.

ecumenical conversation continues to draw for ecclesiological and pneumatological insight into what it means to be a “diaconal church” today.²²

The Diakonia of the Marginalised

This article would not be complete without alluding to a third key insight or theme that has, especially in more recent times, begun to inform and direct the new theological affirmation of diakonia’s transformative power in the ongoing ecumenical conversation. This concerns the idea that, from the point of view of human agency, the praxis of transformative diakonia most pointedly emanates from a notion forged at the already mentioned 2012 WCC conference in Colombo, Sri Lanka as “The Diakonia of the Marginalized People”.²³

Attended by over fifty participants involved in diaconal initiatives from around the world, this conference has come to be recognised as a landmark ecumenical event,²⁴ which at first glance gave rise to theological ideas not different from those presented so far in this article. As evident from its summative reflection, similar ideas were advanced at the conference about diakonia being an integral dimension of God’s mission and about the Triune God as the source of power that empowers the participants in that mission, while due recognition was also given to the biblical revelation of this theological insight.²⁵ Captured meaningfully in the following brief extract, for instance, it was proclaimed:

The God of the Bible seeks and effects change in concrete situations of life, especially of those who are denied the same. Therefore, diakonia as an action in God’s love must strive to transform people, systems and cultures.²⁶

Noticeably, however, this biblical theological foundation also led the participants of the conference in Colombo to go further and reinvigorate insight from liberation theology about God’s preferential option for the poor and the oppressed. By staying close to biblical revelation, they declared that it is from “the biblical witness” that one can learn about God’s omnipresence “in the struggles of those unjustly pushed to the margins of society” (e.g. Ex. 3:7-8); and, in the same vein, about Jesus’ own deliberate move to defy the powers of the day and constantly locate himself “among the marginalized of his time” (e.g. Lk. 4; Lk. 11:37-54; Mk. 10:45).²⁷ This revelation not only identifies the margins as “the privileged spaces for God’s compassion and justice and of God’s presence in vulnerability and resistance”,²⁸ at the same time, it also identifies the margins as the privileged spaces of the Triune God’s empowerment. Whereby, marginalised people in their own right receive God’s power to resist injustice and oppression “through their struggles for life, justice, dignity and rights for themselves and for all”,²⁹ as is captured in the following concrete insight from the Colombo conference:

For example, people with disabilities are promoting the values of sensitivity and partnership; the Afro-descendent communities, the Dalits and other discriminated communities are calling churches and communities to resist and

²² See Stephanie Dietrich et al., eds., *The Diaconal Church* (Oxford: Regnum, 2019); Ham, “Empowering Diakonia,” pp. 37-42; Knoetze, “*Diakonia Trinitaris Dei*,” pp. 158-160; LWF, *Diakonia in Context*, pp. 26-31; Nordstokke, “Empowerment,” p. 193.

²³ Ham, “Colombo,” p. 386.

²⁴ The influential role that the ideas from this conference have played in the ongoing ecumenical conversation on diakonia is reflected in several documents and publications. See e.g. Ham “Empowering Diakonia,” pp. 144-183; Kjell Nordstokke, “Ecumenical Diakonia: Responding to the Signs of the Times,” *The Ecumenical Review* 66(3) (2014), pp. 269-273; *Resource Book*, World Council of Churches 10th Assembly (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), pp. 103-111.

²⁵ See Ham, “Colombo,” pp. 384-386, pp. 389-390.

²⁶ Ham, “Colombo,” p. 389.

²⁷ Ham, “Colombo,” p. 387.

²⁸ Ham, “Colombo,” p. 387.

²⁹ Ham, “Colombo,” p. 387.

overcome cultures and practices that discriminate and dehumanize millions of people; the indigenous peoples are advocating for the value of the interconnectedness of life, even as their own lives and lands are threatened; young people in disadvantaged situations are resisting policies that deprive them of opportunities for education and employment; and vulnerable migrant workers, through their struggles for human rights, dignity and justice, are challenging political systems that deny them basic human rights in the name of national interests. There are many such expressions in every part of the world, in the global South as well as the global North.³⁰

Through its assertive reimagination of diakonia from the vantage point of the marginalised,³¹ the Colombo conference has thus given decisive direction to a new global commitment to transformative diakonia within the broad ecumenical movement. It has, in a new reaffirming way, brought to this commitment the indisputable biblical and theological insight regarding the indispensable place of the marginalised of this world as agents of God's transformative mission, agents without whom the nature and extent of that transformative mission can never be sufficiently grasped.³² The following words from the Colombo reflection confirm this insight: "Diakonia of the marginalized, then, is crucial for [the] church's engagement in realizing God's *oikoumene*, the alternative vision of the world."³³

The Ongoing Task of Empowering Diakonia for Transformation

It is justifiably claimed today that the ecumenical conversation on diakonia has reached a stage in its historic evolution that can be described as the "transformative period" steered by what can be called the "transformative model" of diakonia.³⁴ Viewed from this vantage point, the discussion in this article has offered a perspective that clearly supports this claim. More pertinently, it has shown how a new theological affirmation of diakonia's transformative power stands at the centre of the "transformative model", expressing a new theological assertiveness that diakonia can and should have the power and purpose to be transformative.

To conclude, however, this article wants to acknowledge an important emphasis in the literature on the need for diakonia's ongoing empowerment for transformation. Diakonia's transformative power, it is postulated, cannot be taken for granted. Much of what is offered in the name of "diakonia" remains stuck in a "charity model"³⁵ and, as a result, while diakonia has the power to transform, it also remains in need of being empowered to become transformative.³⁶

³⁰ Ham, "Colombo," pp. 387-388.

³¹ Ham, "Colombo," p. 384; see also Nordstokke, "Ecumenical Diakonia," pp. 269-270.

³² Ham, "Colombo," pp. 387-388; see also Nordstokke, "Ecumenical Diakonia," p. 270; WCC, *Ecumenical Diakonia* (Bossey: WCC Executive Committee, 2017), pp. 33-39.

³³ Ham, "Colombo," p. 388.

³⁴ See in particular Carlos Ham's identification of three historical periods of ecumenical concern with diakonia and the related models with which those periods can be associated: the charity period/model (1930s to 1970s); the reciprocity period/model (1980s); the transformative period/model (1990s until the present). Ham "Empowering Diakonia", pp. 44-183; see also Carlo E. Ham, "Empowering Diakonia: A Perspective from the World Council of Churches," in *Diakonia as Christian Social Practice*, pp. 107-120.

³⁵ Such a critical perspective is noticeably asserted today by participants from the Global South in the diaconal conversation. See e.g. the several contributions in "'Diaconia Takes the Pulpit to the Market.' Mutual Empowerment: Advocacy, Charity, Spirituality," Documentation of the International Symposium on Diaconic Work, Bielefeld-Bethel (Germany), 12 May 2017, eds. Regine Buschmann, Martin Büscher and Angelika Veddelar; also Nadine Bowers Du Toit, "Poverty and Inequality in South Africa: What's Compassion Got to Do With It?," in *Considering Compassion: Global Ethics, Human Dignity, and the Compassion*, eds. Frits de Lange and L. Juliana Claasens (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick, 2018), pp. 129-143; Ham, "Colombo," p. 389.

³⁶ See Ham "Empowering Diakonia", pp. 10-12; "Empowering Diakonia: A Perspective," pp. 111-120; Isabel A. Phiri and Kim Dongsung, "Called to be a Diaconal Community through a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace," *The Ecumenical Review* 66(3) (2014), pp. 255-264.

This article therefore recognises the call recently made from the centre of the ecumenical conversation that all actors of diaconia should join in a “Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace”³⁷ as very fitting. Significantly, this is a call that – in line with the perspective developed in this article – emphasises “that this pilgrimage does not seek to place human initiative at the centre”, but instead “grounds the pilgrimage of justice and peace in ‘God’s own mission for the world and the example of Jesus’.”³⁸ As such, it can be understood as a call that does not exclude human effort and enterprise in the task of empowerment but, at the same time, finds its deepest meaning and purpose in what can only be obtained through God’s ongoing empowerment: a spirituality that is sensitive to people who suffer and is therefore ready to mobilise for solidarity and bold action.³⁹

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³⁷ See e.g. Phiri and Dongsung, “Called to be a Diaconal Community,” pp. 252-264; Nordstokke, “Ecumenical Diakonia,” pp. 272-273.

³⁸ Phiri and Dongsung, “Called to be a Diaconal Community,” 259.

³⁹ The Lutheran World Federation has fittingly termed this spirituality a “diaconal spirituality”. See LWF, *Diakonia in Context*, pp. 37-38.

9. THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF DIACONIA – AN EIGHT-HEADED HYDRA

Cornelia Coenen-Marx¹

In Germany today, we hear a lot of talk about the “new normality”. In the middle of the coronavirus crisis, such a phrase aims to show that our established ways of life are not coming back. Some see this change as an opportunity: perhaps it will be possible to drive digitalisation forward or to fully appreciate the relevance of the medical professions. And perhaps we will even manage to learn from the pandemic how to handle the climate crisis and that political action is possible. Others are less optimistic and fear that this crisis will only reveal and heighten the growing inequalities, intergenerational conflicts and struggles to obtain care.

However, there is a sense that awareness is rising, that people are understanding that the pandemic is only another, particularly abrupt, tipping point in a series of major crises that condition one another. Only recently, the ecological crisis – coming to a head in the acceleration of climate change, increasing conflicts about raw materials and a rapid decline in biodiversity – has brought young people worldwide into the streets with Fridays for Future. But yet, there is so much talk about economic recovery programmes and sovereign bonds using the model of the financial crisis of 2008, whose consequences have not yet been overcome. Above all, in southern Europe the sovereign debt crisis showed what it means when states are unable to act and societies are taken hostage by the financial markets; the high death rates through Covid-19 in Italy and Spain are telling evidence of extensive cuts to their health systems.

Finally, problems of globalisation came to the fore right at the start of the current crisis, when demand for medicines and masks produced in East Asia led to considerable supply shortages worldwide. Soon, the employment crisis illustrated a threat to health. In the organisations and companies with precarious employment – abattoirs, parcel distribution centres, but also in the accommodation of seasonal workers – the number of persons infected was particularly high. This also applies to hostels for refugees, almost forgotten and invisible to the general public. In view of the first debates around the consequences of the pandemic, many now remember what is called the refugee crisis of 2015, which had the potential of splitting the population – not least for fear of further “social cutbacks” in the aging societies of Europe, which are struggling to shore up their national welfare systems. Yet the wars, the environmental and economic disasters from which people flee are themselves partially caused by worldwide conflicts for food, water and energy. It is an eight-headed hydra – every attempt to solve one problem in the usual way seems to lead to contradictions and tensions. We need to find new ways forward, a radically new reality.

Could we have prepared for this? Could we have known what was coming? Undoubtedly. Both the problems in the Middle Eastern countries and other source countries for refugees and the threat of a looming pandemic had been known for years. The same applies to the global economy, the unemployment crisis and the concerns about extreme climate change. It has long been clear that the above-mentioned crisis phenomena were intersections in a great transformational process comparable to the transformation towards industrialisation in the 19th century. Such facts did not however, make it possible to describe the challenges for politicians and civil society in such a way to facilitate change. In 2009, the EKD issued a statement entitled “Like a High Wall, Cracked and Bulging”;² the crisis on the financial markets was interpreted in the spirit of

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² Wie ein Riss in einer hohen Mauer, Wort des Rates der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland zur globalen Finanzmarkt- und Wirtschaftskrise, EKD-Texte 100 (2., um den Anhang erweiterte Auflage), 2009, available at: https://www.ekd.de/ekdtext_100.htm.

Isaiah's call to repentance. But for those who are "too big to fail", it is hard to let go of the old life. Hence those who experience and suffer injustice at their hands have little hope. This undermines both the credibility of democracy and also of the church.

For all of these reasons, our current multi-layered crisis raises questions for faith and the church. In 1928, in his sermon "Serve the Time", Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: "If we but understand the deep, pure form of these times and how to represent them in the way we conduct our own lives, then we will encounter God's holy presence in the midst of our own time."³ Two years later, when National Socialism was leaving a deeper imprint on society in Germany, he was visiting the United States. He was urged to remain there, in exile like many others. He decided to return to Germany and get completely involved in the problems of his time. In his eyes, and as Johann Wichern, the 19th century theologian and philanthropist, writes "You have to see the depth of reality with the clear eyes of faith in order to be able to shape it with the saving arms of love."

Signs of the Times

What do we discern afresh in these days of crisis – and what had become clear beforehand? "As long as Germans have to go to the food bank, there is no room there for refugees" was the message in 2018 in the German city of Essen. The organisers of the Essen food bank had decided to temporarily exclude refugees so that German pensioners, unemployment benefit recipients and deprived families could receive food supplies. The argument flared up all over Germany: there is not only a crack between top and bottom but also between inside and outside – a facet of which is magnified at the food banks. These "poor kitchens" have a tradition. When the great transformations of the 19th century overwhelmed families and parishes, diaconal associations took the initiative and founded soup kitchens, kindergartens, care homes, and houses of refuge. It took until the end of the century for social security systems to be created at the national level. People who saw their life falling to pieces through accident, illness, unemployment, were to be able to rely on mutuality and community support. Yet, it was not just a matter of money – it was about the feeling of belonging even when depending on assistance. This basic feeling lacking today. The food banks are the soup kitchens of today. But more is needed. In Spain an "unconditional basic income" is being tested. Perhaps, in the foreseeable future, Germany too will need to detach the social insurance systems from a direct connection to earnings.

In the coronavirus crisis, there was constant reference to the heroes and heroines of daily life – to nurses, sales personnel, and cleaners who "kept everyday life going". After the first few weeks, when people clapped on their balconies everywhere in Europe, it was clear: these heroines – they are mostly women – are "system-relevant" but generally poorly paid, when paid at all. When schools and daycare centres closed, women coped with home schooling on top of working from their home office for weeks, or did without paid work altogether. Moreover, even before the crisis, 1.5 million people were cared for by relatives – for an average of nine years with reduced employment and a growing risk of poverty, often with support from an ambulatory care service, where the poorest paid staff work as carers. Eastern European domestic help seems to be the answer when the relatives live too far away. There are an estimated 300 000 to 600 000 such workers at present. Many people only became aware of this fact when the borders with Eastern Europe closed at the start of the pandemic. Where the welfare state policies fail, care work will be privatised again and performed by the family. The commission for the Seventh Family Report of the German Federal Government pointed out that a care deficit will threaten the absolute priority of economic thinking.

We need networks against loneliness – caring communities with families, neighbours, service-providers, and cooperation between staff and volunteers. After all, according to a representative survey, twenty-five percent of Germans are already engaged in neighbourly assistance with shopping, handyman services and

³ Isabel Best (ed), *The Collected Sermons of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012).

child care. In the pandemic, this turned into a series of organised networks, with younger people doing errands for the elderly. Mutual support improves the quality of life for all concerned.

With the motto “out-speculated”, over 10 000 people demonstrated in Munich, Frankfurt and Berlin, in 2019, in a protest against the “crazy” housing situation, specifically long queues to view apartments, exorbitant rents and a trend away from permanent tenancy. The need for protest was clear. Students are camping in the universities. Pensioners can no longer afford their flat when their partner has to go into a home or passes away. About 37 000 homeless people live in Berlin alone, almost a quarter of them have children. At the same time, luxury apartments are standing empty because they are used as investments and objects of speculation. It is no accident that, of all companies, the real estate group Deutsche Wohnen moved up into the German share index (Dax) taking the place of Lufthansa was downgraded, in June 2020. But the rooms in which we live are more than an investment. Here too it is a matter of feeling that we belong; as citizens, we are part of urban society. The less private living space and the less property we have, the more we need public spaces in the city, freely accessible river banks, open churches and benches on the market square.

Where We Become Important

The struggles of our times are care struggles, marking the end of the neoliberal hopes. They concern access to food, housing, care and mobility. Home is a central concern – the town in which I can say “we”. Shrinking regions show how home is eroding: young people move to the prosperous regions, with the older ones remaining behind, frequently as home-owners unable to sell their properties. Families and neighbours change too, however, because people move in from elsewhere – from the country to the towns, from the towns to the plusher outlying suburbs, as job-seekers, migrants or refugees. With growing diversity comes uncertainty, a growing feeling of being a stranger in one’s own city. Families with small children, also elderly or people with disabilities and illnesses – whose share in the total population is growing – come under particular pressure when coping with daily life if they cannot fall back on the automatic assistance of relatives.

To organise cohesion, it is not enough to install a platform – be it digital or analogue. If we want to reach those who do not normally assert their rights, intermediary organisations are necessary: schools, churches, welfare organisations, political parties. Precisely such organisations have been in retreat in the last few years – from district administrations to church parishes. It is not enough to have rights – citizens need information and people who listen to and encourage them. How can we succeed in creating good places – or more exactly: the conditions and empowerment for a good life at the local level? Welcome projects for families or refugees, elderly-friendly and dementia-friendly towns, inclusion districts for people with disability – they all rely on an interweaving of different types of assistance. The social seedbed that characterises itself through individual assistance, proximity, voluntary work and versatility, needs supplementing through demand-led, high quality and organised systems of assistance. It will be crucial to understand this both in terms of their own dignity and logic. The promotion of “caring communities” in neighbourhoods and church parishes must be embedded in communal care structures.

Church in Transformation

Experiences from the refugee crisis can open our eyes to this. The voluntary commitment to assist refugees was a key factor in coping with the most urgent requirements. According to an Allensbach poll on civic engagement in assisting refugees of April 2017, 40 percent of volunteers work in groups that have formed exclusively for this purpose – without a legal form, less hierarchical and with a high degree of different ways of participation. 23 percent got involved of their own volition and outside all institutions. Young people between 20 and 30 years old were the dominant age group – and they organised themselves not least via the new media. In order to perpetuate the successes, however, these initiatives needed an institutional framework.

In many places, such a structure was established and the church has thereby visibly returned to its public mandate. Volunteers offering the refugees accommodation, clothing, language courses and accompaniment in their daily life were able to rely on church structures and premises.

This reminds me of the early establishment of diaconal ministries in the 19th century when committed citizens looked after those who were falling by the wayside during the Industrial Revolution – migrants and patients without nursing care, overstretched families or unemployed youth. Over time, in the eyes of many, the welfare associations transitioned into “state” social services and, more recently, they have become market-driven. Dedicated volunteers are particularly welcome when the public coffers are empty. At the same time, however, the commitment of volunteers is a seismograph of societal changes. The demographic change became clear to many when, during the coronavirus crisis, the volunteers at the food banks or neighbourhood assistance stayed away – many of them were over 65. These older people, from the angle of health policy perceived as the main “risk group”, constituted the bulk of the volunteers. Even before programmes and structures are developed, they roll up their sleeves and get down to work wherever needed.

This reflects experiences in the 19th century diaconia, when Johann Hinrich Wichern highlighted the diaconal role of all – by analogy with the priesthood of all baptised. This idea has since sustained youth associations, the ecumenical movement, and adult education. But Christians have also contributed and carried their own ideas into the church in the peace movement, the environmental movement, in movement for women’s liberation or to establish hospices. The “official” church needs people who are close to societal upheavals and to personal hardship, and who recognise the signs of the times.

However, unlike in the 19th century, those involved in the church and diaconia are far from all being church members nowadays. How much responsibility may they assume in church bodies and structures? What about those who are not baptised because their parents were not members? Would church membership on a trial basis be conceivable? Whether the dialogue with activists and seekers succeeds and what role is played not only by vocational and skills-related training but also religious education will become essential questions for the future of the church. Pastors, deacons, congregational educators and youth workers increasingly see themselves in the role of coaches, trainers and moderators of change processes. Here, all concerned benefit from the cooperation between parishes, diaconal ministries, adult education, youth work and schools. Instead of separate functions a network mindset is called for.

Our society, strongly characterised by the wish for autonomy and self-optimisation, needs a counterweight to the commodification of the social and health system – the readiness to mutually support and take responsibility for ourselves, for others, for social development and for creation as a whole. We need open eyes to discern the signs of the times, and find words of comfort. A counterweight would include feeding the hungry, offering a home to refugees, visiting the sick, not forgetting the prisoners and placing children in the centre. This action often starts on a small scale with works of compassion. The history of the church provides hope for our times as it shows how small gestures can resonate and change society. Diaconia has a transformational power.

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10. VULNERABILITY AND THE QUEST FOR HEALING AMONG MIGRANTS IN CAPE TOWN: THEOLOGICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

Henrietta Nyamnjoh and Andrea Bieler¹

This essay offers a reflection on vulnerability and healing built on the experiences of African migrants in South Africa. We approach this topic as an interdisciplinary conversation with intertwining theological and anthropological research and which raises the voices of our interlocutors. We seek to sketch out a *grounded* theology and anthropology as an attempt to realise the creative potential of a bottom-up approach, opposed only to top-down approaches.

As Andrea Bieler has stated elsewhere, pursuing this bottom-up approach requires inviting those “rendered invisible to articulate how the multifaceted phenomena that emerge from within the precariousness of life, play-out on the experiential level.”²

Since experiences of vulnerability, as well as the search for healing, can be expressed in religious, physical, psychological or systemic ways, a multifaceted understanding is needed also in the context of Diaconic Studies.

We proceed in this paper with three steps: firstly, by sketching out a concept of vulnerability and healing that is able to address various layers and seeks to overcome paternalistic and colonial patterns of “helping the vulnerable”. Such patterns are still deeply engrained in Diaconic practices worldwide and henceforth require deeper theological reflection. Secondly, we elaborate a case study that offers deeper insight into situational vulnerability and the quest for healing. Importantly, migrants in Cape Town have come to see vulnerability as something embedded into their lifeworld. The difference is seen in both the way they factor vulnerability into their everyday lives to mitigate harder times or the conviction and faculty to carry on and work towards changing the situation or indeed, how to adapt to it. Finally, we will offer some conclusions for the field of Diaconic Studies.

Vulnerability and Healing

Regarding the field of Diaconic Studies, we suggest reflecting on the following dimensions of vulnerability: a) a critique of a solely negative and deficit-oriented understanding of vulnerability; b) the distinction between fundamental and situational vulnerability; c) an analysis of the ambiguities as well as the potentials that vulnerabilities hold. All three dimensions are also reflected in Christian theology.

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² Andrea Bieler, “Enhancing Vulnerable Life: Phenomenological and Practical Theological Explorations,” in Heike Springhart and Günther Thomas (eds), *Exploring Vulnerability* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), pp.71-82: 72.

Vulnerability as a force of transformation

Vulnerability draws its meaning from its Latin roots *vulnus*, which means wound. The term thus infers a susceptibility to physical, emotional or social injury. In this vein, being vulnerable reflects the capacity of being wounded and evokes psychosomatic experiences of pain, frailty or weakness and, in social terms, the loss of autonomy and agency and a sense of powerlessness. However, by focusing on such a solely deficit-oriented understanding, we will miss the life-giving and creative dimensions of vulnerability as well as the ambiguities. Vulnerability is also associated with the ability to love and to give oneself to another as well as with acts of empathy and solidarity. A more complex approach is needed, one able to embrace the spectrum of experiences of radiant exposures that unfold in human life.

There are a variety of biblical resources that inspire a more complex understanding of vulnerability. For instance, the apostle Paul reflects on human vulnerability by offering the image of treasure in clay jars (2 Cor. 4:7). The treasure is depicted as the divine power at work in those who are afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down. These are the circumstances in which divine glory becomes most powerful as a source of persistence.³ It is evident to Paul that we are creatures of the earth, created from dust, animated through divine breath. Paul proclaims that it is in the midst of human vulnerability that God's glory will be made manifest; this divine power transforms human experiences. God's glory, his radiant splendour, is present in those who are considered weak.

In the second letter to the congregation in Corinth, he interprets his own illness and his experiences of persecution in Christological terms. His own suffering is intimately, even bodily interwoven, with the passion of Jesus: "We are ... always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies." (2 Cor. 4:7-10)

In Diaconic practice, we might think of those whom we assist as being wrapped up in divine glory. In experiences of enduring oppression as well as in illness or even in dying, this divine radiance (glory) can be discovered as a powerful force.

This gravitas towards a transformed understanding of vulnerability is also expressed in the incarnation: the word made flesh: in the birth, in the life, the death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. All of these aspects hint at His radical fall into human vulnerability in all its beauty and its risk. Being born as the son of Mary under precarious circumstances, Jesus immediately becomes the son of refugees who have to flee political persecution under King Herod. Later on, the gospels portray Jesus as an exorcist and healer who is in intense contact with those who are exposed to physical and psychic illness, or to social exclusion or political oppression. In the New Testament, healing stories give witness to the transformational healing powers that emerge during the encounters with Jesus. In his crucifixion, Jesus is subjected to humiliation, torture, and a violent death. Stories that portray the encounter with the resurrected one carry the wounds of trauma. These stigmata are transformed simultaneously into signs of hope and resistance over against the death machine that the Roman Empire represented.

This brief sketch demonstrates how deeply engrained the topic of vulnerability as a force of transformation is in the Christian imagination of how God operates in the world through Jesus Christ. These traces can inform a theology within Diaconic Studies that seeks to move beyond paternalistic patterns of "assisting the vulnerable" towards a more dynamic and multifaceted understanding.

Fundamental and situational vulnerability

We propose to differentiate between fundamental and situational vulnerability. Reflecting on this distinction is pivotal for Diaconic Studies.

³ See also Kristine A. Culp, *Vulnerability and Glory. A Theological Account*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), pp. 13-17.

Fundamental vulnerability encompasses phenomena that all human beings share regardless of their life circumstances. Every person experiences vulnerability as dependence at the beginning of life, during childhood, illness, when we fall in love, and in many cases during the process of aging and then dying. As human beings we are all potentially susceptible to physical, social or emotional injury. We are thrown into the world in the act of birth; from the very first moment our lives depend on others. We all live at times in asymmetrical relationships of caregiving. Fundamental vulnerability is expressed in this radical interdependence in which we live our lives; it encompasses an openness to the world that implies the potential to affect others and to be affected. This fundamental openness is univocal; it cannot be avoided. It hints at the fact that our corporeal being in the world is characterised by a porosity that is constantly stimulated by the engagement with the natural environment and by human relationships. This porosity has a somatic, a psychological, and a social dimension.

Fundamental vulnerability relates to the *pathos*-dimension of life, thus to events and emotions that befall, overwhelm or hit us; to things we cannot control and that we have not chosen. It is in those pathos-experiences that religious questions arise. Taking this dimension of fundamental vulnerability into account in Diaconic Studies, we do not depict human beings as robust agents who should strive for perfect control of their lives. We rather respond to the precariousness of life and seek to attend to the aspects we cannot control.

The second dimension pertains to the materialisation of situated vulnerability. Here, particular issues come to the fore that are only shared by certain individuals or groups in particular moments in time, and under defined circumstances. Attending to matters of situated vulnerability means to take the political conditions and the cultural and religious practices into account that *make* individuals and groups vulnerable. Situated and fundamental vulnerability are intertwined in the lived experience; for analytical purposes, however, it makes sense to distinguish between them.

With regard to situated vulnerability, two dimensions should be constantly analysed in Diaconic Studies:

1. the extent to which the access to basic goods is insured, to enable human flourishing. These basic goods relate to access to health care, education, food, housing, and a fairly ecologically safe living environment that is not life-diminishing or life-threatening. If these are not insured, the root causes need to be identified in order to avoid patterns of benevolent assistance that do not address problems in fundamental ways.
2. The second dimension of situated vulnerability refers to the grammar and practice of political, cultural and religious discourse that is often structured in binary terms (e.g., we and they, healthy and sick, black and white, citizens and foreigners). These binaries hold the potential to unleash discourses of normalisation or marginalisation from which the vulnerable subject emerges; for instance, *the* refugee or *the* disabled person. These binary patterns support structures of racism, xenophobia, economic exploitation and sexism which are deeply engrained in the social fabric of many societies.

Theologically speaking, we are also vulnerable creatures in a fundamental as well as a situated sense. Each and every one of us is gifted by the creator with a fundamental vulnerability that radiates through human lives and exposes human bodies and souls to a myriad of biological and social influences. It is unavoidable even if religions themselves come up with mythologies that celebrate the non-vulnerable.

Our vulnerable creatureliness is fundamentally steeped in an openness to the world that implies the potential of affecting others and being affected. This potential can be expressed in acts of love and surrender to another or to a community that makes us feel fully alive and that creates deep connections. However, a loving attentiveness towards others is always a risky endeavour, since it is embedded in an openness and a permeability that exposes us to the unknown touch, and to the attitude and actions of others. We are vulnerable creatures who live in a constant process of becoming and are thus directed towards future possibilities. Our vulnerabilities are thus in constant flux as well and are not static.

This insight opposes a strict binary perception of the world in which we would distinguish between the vulnerable and invulnerable.

Distinguishing between fundamental and situational vulnerability is helpful for diaconic practices that strive towards individual healing and social inclusion. Activities and programs that foster self-determination and freedom are thus always to be understood in relational terms. The apostle Paul uses the image of the body of Christ to represent this interdependence: within this body, we are all interconnected; if one member suffers, the entire body of the community is affected (1 Cor. 12:26). It is in this network of mutual reliance that assistance and care-giving needs to be conceptualised. Nowadays, we obviously need to expand our understanding of interdependent communities by moving beyond those who are Christians and to attend to those whose Christian lives are tempestuous. This makes it pivotal to understand how migrants make sense of and navigate these forms of vulnerabilities.

A Case Study from Cape Town (South Africa)

“The day God arrested me and revealed Himself to me”: Leaving the world to become a follower of God

Being an African migrant, especially in the context of South Africa where one has to constantly navigate the threshold of physical and structural marginalisation, xenophobia and ‘otherness’, engenders multifaceted vulnerability – fundamental and situated. Nevertheless, the positive lessons they draw from these forms of vulnerability is of importance. By way of illustration, we draw on Ken’s⁴ story to show how vulnerabilities play out and how migrants can navigate them. We are particularly interested in the following two questions: What kind of assistance do people seek from the church and how does a community act as an agent of assistance?

Ken is in his early thirties and a carpenter by profession.

Back in Cameroon, I was introduced into rough life, encouraged by friends to pay for sex regularly. They introduce me into that evil life, all that terrible life of smoking cigarettes and weed. But in 2011, I gave my life to Christ and received baptism at Full Gospel church and began preaching the gospel to my family and friends, to their amazement. In 2012, I travelled to South Africa and for the first few months I was still God-fearing. Then all of a sudden, a different spirit got hold of me again in South Africa, the spirit of backsliding attacked me, I fell into backsliding. I started clubbing, drinking heavily. Going to clubs, about three times a week. All my earnings disappeared, not sure where it went. Go after woman, from one lady to another, do evil. Although, I still respected God and kept Sunday holy; went to church on Sundays, prepare the church before each service, clean church and do everything in order, but I knew I was still in sin, afflicted by backsliding spirit. But in February 2015, God used the sermon, about heaven and hell, of a visiting pastor to arrest me in church.⁵

For Ken, making sense of his alcoholic and womanising addiction as well as mismanagement of his meagre income to satisfy his alcoholic habits is to turn to the church where he believes he will get spiritual healing from God. Inasmuch as he recognises his vulnerability, meaning-making processes with regard to vulnerability are situated in the perception of the intertwining of the affective lived body experience and the symbolic sense-making process. The recognition in his own account that he is unable to help himself and that he depends on a higher supreme authority to heal him of his infirmities, shows his efforts to make sense of his experiences by acknowledging his compositeness of being and interdependence.⁶ Importantly, Ken is full

⁴ “Ken” is a pseudonym. The interview with Ken was conducted by Henrietta Nyamnjoh on 31/07/2016.

⁵ Interview 31/07/2016.

⁶ Henrietta Nyamnjoh, “Globalized Healing and Evangelism: The Quest for Health and Healing among Cameroonian Migrants in Cape Town (South Africa),” in Andrea Bieler, Isolde Karl, HyeRan Kim-Cragg, and Ilona Nord (eds), *Religion and Migration: Negotiating Hospitality, Agency and Vulnerability* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt

of self-pity and shame because he is shunned by family and friends and has accrued debts and was given temporary accommodation at the church because no one is willing to lend him money to kickstart his business. He says:

When I was in the world, most of my ethnic brothers and sisters had considered me as an irredeemable case. Was I happy with myself and situation? No! I keep trying to free myself from alcohol, womanising attitude, but I was not strong enough. I was very weak in front of alcohol. It is not as if I did not know that what I was doing was bad, I was just unable to help myself until the day that God arrested me.⁷

Seeking healing was less because of his inability to stand for himself than a way of withdrawing from the “gaze of others or from the judgment of externalized and internalized voices”⁸ and to work towards redemption. His state of vulnerability, as such, draws our attention to the multidimensional interconnectedness of human life in its individual, social and religious complexities and ambiguity. Although Ken wanted to show them that “God can still turn someone’s life around,”⁹ changing his life was a way of him seeking to extricate himself from “known unknowns”. He was consciously threatened by the fact that he could be stabbed to death by gangsters, contract sexually transmissible diseases,¹⁰ or be run over by a car in one of his drunken states. It is important to note that Ken is not shy from embracing his vulnerability, and perhaps his openness towards God to seek spiritual healing because he believes it will heal him from the physical and psychological trauma from which he suffers. This follows his conviction that the fear of God and knowing God will instil in him the power of obedience to overcome his addiction. Paraphrasing Romans 12:1, he notes, “we should give ourselves to God like a living sacrifice, that we should be pure in and out, that we should keep ourselves holy.”¹¹ Consequently, Ken perceives the fear of God to be very powerful and a *sine qua non* to spiritual healing that safeguards him from the dos and don’ts of the commandments.

Spiritual healing for most migrants will automatically extend to their physical and psychology healing.¹² The offering of one’s body to God as Patout Burns avows calls on Christians to use their body as a sacrifice by being directed towards God. The body is “reformed by an unchanging disposition of submission to God, and pleases God by sharing the divine beauty.”¹³

The community in this case acts as a moral compass for Ken’s actions. By refusing to lend him money or providing him with accommodation was less out of hatred than as an impulse for him to clean up his act – to show signs of refraining from his addiction before he could be given help, which he was eventually given in the form of start-up capital.

Because Ken has constantly sought healing from the church and relapsed after a few months, he has named his drinking and womanising habits as ‘the demon’ in him, which is also part of acknowledging that his sins

(2019), pp. 183-201. See also Francis Nyamnjoh, “Incompleteness: Frontier Africa and the Currency of Conviviality”. *Journal of Asian and African Studies* (2015), pp. 1–18.

⁷ Interview 31/07/2016.

⁸ Bieler, *Enhancing Vulnerable Life*, p. 72.

⁹ Among his community, he is a living testimony of God’s miracle on a person’s life.

¹⁰ He already has a child out of wedlock.

¹¹ Interview 31/07/2016.

¹² Henrietta Nyamnjoh, “‘Speak to me Lord’: Seeking God’s intervention in times of duress among Cameroonian migrants in Cape Town,” in Afe Adogame, Raimundo Barreto, and Wanderley P. da Rosa (eds), *Migration and Public Discourse in World Christianity* (Augsburg: Fortress Publishers/Editora Unida, 2019), pp. 151-176.

¹³ J. Patout Burns Jr., *Romans: Interpreted by Early Christian Commentators*. (Grand Rapids, Michiga/Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Erdman’s Publishing Company, 2012), p. 291.

separate him from God.¹⁴ Offering himself to God is a first step towards healing. Categorising his addiction as a demon fits the Pentecostal narrative that evil and demonic forces can control one's actions, hence the solution is ultimately, a spiritual one.

Ken notes,

Although I knew that what I was doing was wrong, it was not easy for me to come out. I asked God to forgive me and take me out from this thing. Then, above all, the next day after the Sunday service, I went down on my knees at my business place; (because in my village, when a mother wants to beat a child for doing something wrong, she will give you a small piece of stick to clean your tongue as an act of confession that you will never repeat that crime). Recalling that act while at work I went down on my knees and I said God, please, I was doing A, B, C... Please, I will never do these things again; help me. Then I clean my tongue with a stick, I clean it, I say God, please, as I clean my tongue, these are all my evil deeds that I am removing. Then I threw the stick. That very moment, it's as if a new spirit entered into me. I regained the fear of God, I started doing the work of God, tried to be perfect, although Satan was still trying to gain hold of me. It was then that I became saved, up to now, that I can testify.¹⁵

Recognising his vulnerability and giving it a name is a step for Ken to confront it. Consequently, he sees his vulnerability as a springboard to strive towards getting closer to God in order to attain a better life. He notes that "God allowed me to go through it so that I can seek him more, and by the time He is done with me I will be a new person. It is also for me to be a living testimony to bring others to Christ."¹⁶ The act of using a piece of stick to clean his tongue, while it symbolises the bringing together of tradition¹⁷ and Christianity, it is also a significant confession and a pact that Ken has entered with God to turn away from sin.

Ken's acknowledgement and atonement of his sins echoes Springhart's insights: "Sin as the fundamental brokenness of humanity is part of the ontological vulnerability, as it is the unavoidable human condition. Therefore, if sin becomes real in deeds of guilt, we may connect it with situated vulnerability."¹⁸

From a Western Diaconic Studies perspective, Ken's healing might be considered to be an incomplete healing. Ken however, prioritises his spiritual healing over the rest because attaining spiritual healing will lead to the attainment of psycho-social and physical healing. Focusing more on the spiritual does not negate or undermine the other forms of healing, but according to Ken, spiritual healing supersedes and governs all other healing as he cites in this bible verse, "seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you." (Mt. 6:33) The offer of accommodation within the church provided a social service that would not have been possible with NGOs. Having one-on-one sessions with the pastor is often very helpful. It offers time for the pastor to counsel and pray with the person as in Ken's case. He met with the pastor every fourth night to go through his activities and evaluate how much of his addiction he had overcome. Such continuous working sessions were instrumental to rehabilitating Ken and a service he would not have enjoyed had he been referred to another institution, such as an NGO, for counselling. It also highlights the paramount position of spiritual healing that acts as a filter to resolve psycho-social and physical healing. Significantly, it was aimed at helping Ken get closer to God and work and offer himself towards his spiritual healing. Living inside the church meant he has to refrain from alcohol and womanising to spend more time in God's presence.

It is also important to underscore the fact that, contrary to Diaconic practice that privileges the model of psycho-social and physical assistance that are offered to the vulnerable, the case within most Pentecostal

¹⁴ Paul Tillich, *Systematische Theologie, Vol. 2*. (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 1987), p. 52, cited in Heike Springhart, "Exploring Life's Vulnerability: Vulnerability in Vitality," in Heike Springhart and Günther Thomas (eds), *Exploring Vulnerability* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), pp. 13-33: 29.

¹⁵ Interview 31/07/2016.

¹⁶ Interview 31/07/2016.

¹⁷ This is a traditional act of confession often used within families to signify a complete recant of one's bad habits.

¹⁸ Springhart, "Exploring Life's Vulnerability," p. 25.

churches in South Africa deviates from these norms. A lack of financial resources amongst the vulnerable calls for the churches, like Ken's, to use resources available to them at no cost – e.g. by providing accommodation. This is similar to the assistance offered to African migrants by “Every Nation Church” where the church building was used to accommodate migrants fleeing from xenophobic attacks. Christians raised money and food parcels for the new tenants. But they equally requested assistance from ‘The Gift of the Givers’ (a humanitarian NGO), to assist in trauma counselling and healthcare services, and the Scalabrini Centre to help those who have lost their documentation, all of which were out of the purview of the church. Where these churches may recognise the need for other forms of assistance to complete the healing process, it often lies out of their competence, hence the need to link up with NGOs which could provide such services irrespective of denomination.

Consequently, he credits his final healing as “being arrested by God”¹⁹ or his “Damascus moment”;²⁰ and thinks he has been greatly enriched and enhanced by the experience.²¹ Alluding to his healing as an arrest or his “Road to Damascus” (Acts 9:3) are significant as he likens his transformation to that of Paul.²² Similarly, embracing his vulnerability acknowledges his endurance and a journey towards healing like the apostle Paul's acceptance of the sufficiency of God's grace over his life (2 Cor. 12:9). Although Ken's vulnerability may have been hinged on self-pity and what he has been accused of by the community, which pains him, he has drawn a lot of positive lessons from it that have shaped his life and those of others around him. Hence, his healing could only come in the form of ‘arrest’ because he failed to discipline himself.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have sought to extrapolate from the experiences of Ken to show how migrants navigate and negotiate forms of fundamental and situated vulnerability, and conversely have sought to attain healing from these forms of vulnerabilities. For most migrants, the church becomes the first port of call for help because spiritual healing governs physical, psychological and social forms of healing. Striving for healing gives them the opportunity to dedicate themselves to God as ‘living sacrifices’. The solution often follows a Pentecostal narrative that foregrounds addiction in a parochial way of evil (devilish), hence often requiring a one-dimensional approach to healing, namely spiritual. While other approaches are sought, they are not of immediate concern until much later.

Most Pentecostal Churches attend to various forms of vulnerability by privileging spiritual healing in the described way. It will be a challenge for Diaconic Studies in the future to attend to such patterns of meaning-making, and to reflect on the practical consequences for both individuals who are seeking help, as well for mainline churches in South Africa.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Bieler, Andrea. “Enhancing Vulnerable Life: Phenomenological and Practical Theological Explorations,” in *Exploring Vulnerability*. Heike Springhart and Günther Thomas. Eds. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017. pp. 71-82.

Bieler, Andrea. *Verletzliches Leben. Horizonte einer Theologie der Seelsorge*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2017.

¹⁹ Interview 31/07/2016.

²⁰ Interview 31/07/2016.

²¹ Springhart, “Exploring Life's Vulnerability,” pp. 19-23.

²² Today Ken is a devout Christian who regularly goes out to preach the gospel.

- Lartey, Emmanuel Y. ““Of Formulae, Fear, and Faith: Current Issues of Concern for Pastoral Care in Africa,”” *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology* 10, no.1&2 (2001), pp. 5-15.
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- Stoltzfus, Michael J. & Rebecca Green, “Spirituality, Chronic Illness, and Healing: Unique Challenges and Opportunities,” in *Chronic Illness, Spirituality, and Healing: Diverse Disciplinary, Religious, and Cultural Perspectives* Michael Stoltzfus and Rebecca Green, Eds. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp. 15-45.
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11. DIACONIA AND THE CHURCH – TOWARDS A DIACONAL ECCLESIOLOGY – REFLECTIONS FROM ORTHODOX AND PROTESTANT PERSPECTIVES

Stephanie Dietrich¹ and Evangelos Thiani²

Introduction

From the very beginning, being a part of the Christian Church and being a follower of Jesus Christ meant one was employed in serving each other, serving the community and serving the world. Caring for each other's wellbeing, including protecting each other in times of prosecution and providing food and shelter for the other when in need, has always been a part of Christian identity and the identity of the church. The diaconal identity and life of the Church contributed to its growth in the Early Church and has been a part of its being ever since.

In this chapter, we want to provide an outline of the biblical and historical basis for our understanding of the Church as intrinsically diaconal in its nature. This chapter is written jointly by an Orthodox and a Lutheran theologian. Within the Lutheran tradition, the term *diaconia* is broadly used to describe the Church's social action. The Orthodox Church has not necessarily used the term *diaconia* when explaining the social services that the church offers its society and the disadvantaged. The term used in the East with more popularity has rather been philanthropy, denoting what God did for humanity through the incarnation.³ Nevertheless, due to the growing ecumenical understanding of the term, the Orthodox Church has taken a step further and discusses the same appreciating a joint definition, and also the need to use *diaconia* as a stronger terminology for the missional social services offered by the church.⁴

Although we might use different theological expressions and terminologies, we are convinced that the call to the Christian Church, whatever tradition one belongs to, is a joint call to faith in action, which we can and should describe together. It, therefore, contains only a few separated paragraphs on the specific Lutheran and Orthodox emphasis within theology. The rest of this chapter is a joint venture, based on our understanding that *diaconia* as service to the world is our common God-given mission to serve humankind and creation in accordance with God's will and our being a part of God's mission.

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³ Miltiadis Vantsos and Marina Kiroudi, "An Orthodox View of Philanthropy and Church Diaconia," *Christian Bioethics* 13 (2007): pp. 251-268; Demetrios J. Constantelos, "Origins of Christian Orthodox diakonia: Christian Orthodox philanthropy in church history," paper presented at the *Conference on the Social Witness and Service of Orthodox Churches* (The Lay Academy in the New Valamo Monastery, Finland: April 30 to May 5, 2004): p. 1.

⁴ With this understanding, Lina Molokotos-Liederman, defines *diaconia* as the "Christian social service, namely a compassionate and solidarity-based service founded on Christian values (God's love) in the form of charity and philanthropy towards those in need," -Lina Molokotos-Liederman, *Orthodox Diaconia Worldwide: An Initial Assessment* (IOCC, May 2009), p. 3. In this definition, philanthropy, which is the common Orthodox term for Christian social service, is expressed as a single part of the many components of *diaconia*, proving *diaconia* is a stronger term than the common Orthodox term of philanthropy.

The Biblical Foundation of a Diaconal Ecclesiology

Old Testament

Although biblical scholars not always have emphasised the role of the Old Testament (OT) as decisive for the development of a diaconal theology for today,⁵ we want to underline that the Old Testament, together with the New Testament, founds the non-negotiable basis for our emphasis on the Church as diaconal.

The OT is decisive for today's understanding of God's creation and the care for creation as a part of the Church's diaconal mission. As the OT scholar Crüsemann⁶ underlined, the OT emphasis on law, especially the social law, protecting the poor and marginalised and safeguarding everybody's right to basic livelihood, forms the basis for a Christian engagement both directly to the vulnerable and in the wider political space, advocating for people in need and against injustice. The Church, as the people of God, sees itself in continuation of the people of Israel whom God led out of captivity and into freedom. Biblical theology based on the Old Testament is crucial for understanding the responsibility God's people have for their societies and the world. Faith in God is always connected to responsibility here and now. The basis for this understanding is clearly laid in the OT Diaconal theology, which time and again draws on the OT "Exodus motif", inspiring God's people to fight against oppression and injustice in their different societies and contexts. The prophets in the OT bluntly accused their leaders and governments, exercised advocacy and claimed justice. "Prophecy as described in the Bible used the possibilities and cultural traditions of that time to describe the justice of God who favours the excluded and oppressed, and to condemn violations against God's justice."⁷ Jesus understood himself to be in the same prophetic tradition, frequently referring to the OT prophets as predecessors for his own mission and service. In the same way, churches and Christian organisations today see their engagement for justice as a part of their diaconal mission.

New Testament

Diaconia was a significant part of what the New Testament Church entailed, in that it was closely connected with the life in and outside the church. The New Testament understanding of *diaconia* and what the church is, revolves around unity with Christ, the philanthropic love of God and the other, the expected serving of the other emulating the servanthood of Christ, and the actions that go hand-in-hand with faith. In his outline on "Concepts of the Church in the New Testament", Ådna refers to the narrative traditions in the New Testament rooted in diaconal practice: Jesus as example, the life of the early community in Jerusalem and Paul's collection for the church in Jerusalem.⁸ Thus, elaborating on diaconal ecclesiology primarily takes its starting point in the NT narratives on Jesus' life and the life of the Early Church as model, not in the semantic use of the "*diak*-words" found in the NT.⁹

Jesus proclaimed his mission in a visit he made to the synagogue, referring to Isaiah 61, "...to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the

⁵ Cf. G.Uhlhorn (1882): *Die Christliche Liebestätigkeit*, p. 43. "The world before Christ is a world without love." (own translation).

⁶ Frank Crüsemann, "Das Alte Testament als Grundlage der Diakonie", in: Gerhard K. Schäfer & Theodor Strom (eds), *Diakonie- biblische Grundlagen und Orientierungen. Ein Arbeitsbuch*. 3.ed. (Heidelberg: Veröffentlichungen des Diakoniewissenschaftlichen Instituts und der Universität Heidelberg, 1998); Bd.2, pp. 67-93.

⁷ LWF, *Prophetic diaconia: "For the healing of the world"*, Lutheran World Federation: Report from Johannesburg, South Africa (2002), p. 14.

⁸ Jostein Ådna, "Concepts of the Church in the New Testament", in: Stephanie Dietrich, Knud Jørgensen, Kari Karsrud Korslien and Kjell Nordstokke (eds), *The Diaconal Church* (Oxford: Regnum Publishing House, 2019), pp. 55-64.

⁹ Stephanie Dietrich, "'Mercy and Truth are met Together; Righteousness and Peace Have Kissed each other' (Psalm 85:10): Biblical and Systematic Theological Perspectives on Diaconia as Advocacy and Fight for Justice", in: Stephanie Dietrich, Knud Jørgensen, Kari Karsrud Korslien and Kjell Nordstokke (eds), *Diaconia as Christian Social Practice: An Introduction* (Oxford: Regnum Publishing House, 2014) pp. 28-45.

blind, to set the oppressed free...” (Luke 4;18-19). In his ministry, Jesus held together proclamation, worship and *diaconia*. Christ identified himself as a servant (*diakonos*), who came to serve, not to be served (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:42-45; Luke 22:25-27), and emphasised the washing of His Apostles feet, as an act of servanthood, which he commanded them to do to others (Mark 9:35; John 13:14-15). Jesus and his followers subsequently made evident that holistic ministry – taking care of the whole human being – is an unnegotiable part of Christianity, and thus the Church’s being and doing. Jesus’ call to follow him always implied both faith and deeds.

Diaconia belonged to the identity of the community of Christians in the Early Church, that is the first congregations, to take care of each other. Acts 2 witnesses extensive sharing and communitarian life. The have sharing their resources with the have-nots was to a level that “they sold their properties and possession to give anyone who had need” (Acts 2:45). It was the task of the Apostles to share whatever was donated equitably to the needy, to an extent that there were no more needy persons among them (Acts 4:32-35). At the same time, Acts tells us about upcoming rivalries and inequalities, which the first Christian communities had to address. Acts 6 reports about tensions between the Hellenistic and the Jewish groups of Christians regarding the “daily diaconia”. Mrad comments on this passage:

The animosity of the nations to one another and the egocentricity of humans do not allow a common participation in table fellowship. Taking the “oppressive Jerusalem” as an example and literary mediation, Luke invites the true disciples to make their exodus from oppressive human authority, exclusiveness, rejection and animosity toward the Word of God that took flesh in His “suffering servant”.¹⁰

After the request from the Apostles in the Jerusalem council, to remember the poor (Gal. 2:10), Paul organised a collection among the gentiles for the poor in Jerusalem and was positively received by both the rich and the poor churches (Acts 11:19-29; 2 Cor. 9:6-15). This form of “international diaconia” was thus an inherent part of the Church’s life from the beginning. Even though the establishment of ministerial structures and ordained ministries was not concluded by the time the biblical canon was decided on, the establishment of a diaconal ministry, often mentioned as the “right hand” of the bishop in administering and distributing material resources, a “go-between-ministry” between the church and the society, has historical evidence.¹¹

The Church’s Diaconal Identity throughout History

What the church is perceived to be is always contextual, depending on who, where and when the definition is given. The theology of what the church is, historically is always evolving, changing, continuously in the making, considering that the Holy Spirit continues revealing the essence of what this divine and human institution called the church is.¹² This aspect of the church being divine and human at the same time, makes it dynamic rather than static, and thus its understanding continuously changes.¹³ The twentieth century has

¹⁰ Nicolas Abou Mrad, “Diaconal Perspectives between the Book of Acts and the Orthodox Liturgy”, in: Stephanie Dietrich, Knud Jørgensen, Kari Karsrud Korslien and Kjell Nordstokke (eds.): *The Diaconal Church* (Oxford: Regnum Publishing House, 2019) pp. 65-82.

¹¹ Maria Munkholt Christensen, “Historical Perspectives on Diaconal Ecclesiology”, in: Stephanie Dietrich, Knud Jørgensen, Kari Karsrud Korslien and Kjell Nordstokke (eds), *The Diaconal Church*, Oxford: Regnum Publishing House, 2019) pp. 41-54.

¹² Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical & Global Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002).

¹³ Cyril Hovorun, *Meta-Ecclesiology: Chronicles on Church Awareness* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

been labelled the century of ecclesiology due to the many definitions of what the church is; diaconal ecclesiology is one of such emphasised ecclesiologies.¹⁴

Early church

The early church believed in philanthropic *diaconia* as an inherent responsibility and an irreplaceable part of the life of the church, as a command directed and expected by God, and later as a responsibility of the church as given by the state. Taking care of the needy in the early church was also a salvific event, part of what living a Christian life entailed, an essential part of the requirement of living and being church, and furthermore, an event and opportunity of caring and serving Christ as he did for all humanity through the incarnation.

Within the first century, the Christians mainly kept their *diaconia* initiatives to themselves, an attitude that changes dramatically in the second century. The Christian compassion seen in the deeds of individual Christians and church units included giving aid to families, burying the dead after the plagues, caring for the sick and the poor, offering food and housing to travellers, the aged, orphans, widows, and the homeless among others. The church took the hearts of many, especially by aiding society in the most devastating of times including during the plagues,¹⁵ wars,¹⁶ fires and earthquakes¹⁷ among other crises, natural disasters, and tragedies.¹⁸ Such social care in addition to the liturgical services and prayers¹⁹ offered during such times emphasised that these calamities were not a reaction of an angry God to society, but rather a broken world in revolt against a merciful, philanthropic, and loving God, whose love was shown in many ways including the *diaconia* of his church.²⁰

Saint Basil and Saint Benedict, influencers of monasticism in the East and West respectively, taught and practised *diaconia* as part of the asceticism of the monastics.²¹ In the 4th century, Saint Basil initiated an anti-poverty program in his newly formed city, the Basilead,²² a “city of mercy” outside the gates of the city of Caesarea, where he surrounded his monastery with homes for the aged, lepers’ hospitals, orphanages, homes for the poor, travellers and immigrants, small industrial trade workshops, among other social and institutional housing.²³ By their inclusion of *diaconia* in their daily operations, the monastic movement for both East and West further stressed the importance and understanding of the church in relation to *diaconia*.

¹⁴ Hovorun, *Meta-Ecclesiology* (2015), pp. 23-26; pp. 95-124.

¹⁵ Dionysios of Alexandria, “Easter Letter to the Brethren in Alexandria,” quoted in *Eusebius Ecclesiastical History* 7.22 in Charles Lett Feltoe, *St Dionysius of Alexandria Letters and Treatises* (London/ New York: SPCK/The Macmillan Company, 1918), p. 66, soft copy at <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/36539/36539-h/36539-h.htm> [accessed on 15th March 2020].

¹⁶ Timothy S. Miller and John Nesbitt (eds), *Peace and War in Byzantium: Essays in Honor of George T. Dennis, S.J.* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1995).

¹⁷ Eva Catafygiotu Topping, “On Earthquakes and Fires: Romanos’ Encomium to Justinian.” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 71(1) (1978), pp. 22-35.

¹⁸ Yaron Ayalon, *Natural Disasters in the Ottoman Empire: Plague, Famine, and other Misfortunes* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

¹⁹ Pauline Allen, “Stage-Managing Crisis: Bishops’ Liturgical Responses to Crisis (4th-6th centuries)” in David C Sim and Pauline Allen (eds), *Ancient Jewish and Christian Texts as Crisis Management Literature: Thematic Studies from the Centre for Early Christian Studies* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), pp. 159-172.

²⁰ Kari Latvus, *Diaconia as care for the Poor? Critical Perspectives on the Development of the Caritative Diaconia* (Kuopio: Kirkon tutkimuskeskuksen verkkojulkaisu / Church Research Center Online Publication 53, 2017).

²¹ Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism* (2003), pp. 34-41, pp. 11-131; John Chryssavgis, *In the Heart of the Desert: The Spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, rev. ed.* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Inc., 2008).

²² Vantsos and Kiroudi, *An Orthodox View of Philanthropy and Church Diaconia* (2007), p. 260. See also: <https://stbasils.com/mission-ministries/basilead/>.

²³ Philip Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Susan Holman, *The Hungry Are Dying: Beggars and Bishops in Roman Cappadocia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Timothy Patitsas, “St. Basil Philanthropic Program and Modern Micro-lending Strategies for Economic Self-Actualization,” in Susan R.

Funds meant for *diaconia* were collected from the congregation during the Eucharistic assemblies or during the fasting seasons.²⁴ Originally these offerings were dropped at the *skeuophylakion* (vestry and sacramental preparatory room), for distribution after the Eucharistic service, showing the undivided understanding of *diaconia* and the Eucharist in the East, and its image of the Kingdom of God.²⁵ The collections were mainly performed by the deacons and deaconesses, but also by the hierarchs and priests.²⁶ This giving for *diaconia* was highly connected with several spiritual benefits and the redemption of the giver, and was expected of every Christian.²⁷ Saint Basil questions the delay of giving with some in the church by asking, “What keeps you from giving now? ... The hungry are dying before your face. The naked are stiff with cold. The men in debt are held by the throat. And you, you put off your alms, till another day?”²⁸ In return, almsgiving in the early church gave out several spiritual things to the philanthropist, including God’s favour, entrance to the Kingdom of God, forgiveness of post-baptismal sin, theological benefits and justification of richness, whereas it gave the receiver material benefit while showing them the caring-God through the work of the church.²⁹ Gregory Nazianzus says on the subject, “We should fix in our minds the thought that the salvation of our bodies and souls depends on this: that we should love and show humanity to these (the suffering poor).”³⁰ Such episcopal statements only emphasise the early church understanding of the church and Christianity, besides their mission and responsibility.

The early church hierarchs further related the action of giving for *diaconia* with Christ – the head of the church, who was sacramentally one with the poor and needy.³¹ Saint Gregory of Nyssa explaining this, notes that the poor and those suffering “have taken upon them the person of our Saviour. For He, the compassionate, has lent them His own person [...] the poor are the treasures of the good things that we look for; keepers of the gates of the kingdom, opening them to the merciful and shutting them on the harsh and uncharitable.”³² Saint John Chrysostom further emphasising how *diaconia* is meant to serve the body of Christ, namely the poor and the suffering humans, not just donating for the wellbeing of church building, asks, “Do you really wish to pay homage to Christ’s body? Then do not neglect him when he is naked [...] don't neglect your brother in his distress while you decorate his house. Your brother is more truly his (God’s) temple than any church building.”³³

Holman (ed), *Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society* (Grand Rapids, MI/ Brookline, MA: Baker Academic & Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2008), pp. 267-286; William Ramsay, *The Church in the Roman Empire Before A.D. 170*.

²⁴ Dragica Tadic-Papanikolaou, “Orthodox Contributions for the Understanding and Practice of Diaconia (The ‘Liturgy after the Liturgy’),” Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Thomas FitGerald, Cyril Hovorun, Aikaterini Pekridou, Nikolaos Asproulis, Guy Liagre and Dietrich Werner (eds), *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism: Resources for Theological Education* (Volos/Oxford: Volos Academy Publications/ Regnum Books International, 2013), pp. 687-694.

²⁵ Cf. Metropolitan John of Pergamon, “The Eucharist and the Kingdom of God (Part 1, 2 & 3)” *Sourozh* 58, 59, 60 (1995), pp. 1-12, 22-56, 32-46.

²⁶ Roman Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving in Early Christianity*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplementary Series 77 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press/ JSOT Press, 1993), p. 60-134.

²⁷ Constantelos, *Origins of Christian Orthodox diaconia* (2004), p. 14.

²⁸ Basil, *Homilia in Illud: Destruam Horrea Mea*. English trans., *Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers*, vol.3 (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1959), p. 331 quoted in Emmanuel Clapsis, *The Image of Christ in the Poor* (IOCC, 2005), p. 2.

²⁹ Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving in Early Christianity* (1993), pp. 9-24.

³⁰ Gregory Nazianzus, *De Pauperum Amore*, English trans., M.F. Toal, *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers*, vol.4 (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1963), p. 56 quoted in Clapsis, *The Image of Christ in the Poor* (2005), p. 1.

³¹ Aideen M. Hartney, *John Chrysostom and the Transformation of the City* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd, 2004); St Basil the Great, *On Social Justice*, trans., C. Paul Schroeder (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2009).

³² Gregory of Nyssa, *Love for the Poor*; Walter Shewring, *Rich and Poor in Christian Tradition* (London, 1948), p. 65 quoted in Clapsis, *The Image of Christ in the Poor* (2005), p. 3.

³³ John Chrysostom, *On Matthew: Homily 50:4* quoted in Clapsis, *The Image of Christ in the Poor* (2005), p. 4.

The above elucidates the understanding of diaconia as an intrinsic component of what the church is, what it does, and the ecumenicity of the same is clear even in the first centuries of the church. In addition, it is most likely that this diaconal experience and acceptance in society made the Greco-Roman state embrace the church as their official social services entity, with limited rejection from the society and non-Christians.³⁴ The empire in return funded the church's social and philanthropic initiatives,³⁵ and exempted churches and monasteries from taxation due to their non-discriminatory diaconia initiatives to society.³⁶ According to Stark, this active and compassion-filled diaconia gave Christianity a major boost in society as well as inspiring numerous conversions and the growth of Christianity both then and in later centuries.³⁷

Reformation era

The Reformation story is certainly not as significant for the self-description of the churches in the East, belonging to the Orthodox tradition; it is predominantly the story of the Western churches. Nevertheless, the Reformation era has shaped and inflected the development of global Christianity in a decisive way, and its understanding is thus foundational for understanding the later church history, including mission history and *diaconia* history. Diaconal ecclesiology, within the protestant tradition, responds to fundamental positions of Reformation theology, like the hermeneutical principles of *sola fide*, *solus Christus*, *sola gratia* and *sola scriptura*, committing itself to clarifying the faith-base of diaconal action and at the same time to the principle of *ecclesia semper reformanda*, asking how the church should live according to God's call in its life and work in today's world.

Looking into the Reformation era from a diaconal angle, one might say that its main objective was to bring the (western) church, as it was perceived by the Reformation fathers and mothers, back to what the Church was intended to be from the beginning, according to their reading of the Bible and the Church fathers. The Reformers' accusation of the misbehaviours and failures of their churches and the late-medieval corruption of the church thus comprised a prophetic voice against injustice and power abuse, when the church, in alliance with the worldly powers, forced poor people to give money as indulgences in their hope for eternal life. This incorporated a fundamental failure and abuse of the church leadership towards its members. What later on in church history is characterised as the protestant emphasis on the "priesthood of all believers", is distinctive for this emphasis on the whole people of God as participating in God's mission and service towards each other. This becomes decisive for the understanding of the Church as diaconal in the following centuries.

The Reformation era also brought a fundamental change regarding the relation between state and church.³⁸ When it comes to service to the poor and marginalised, reformers like Martin Luther emphasised that the Church should be responsible together with the government and the legal authorities, simultaneously avoiding any attempt to mix the hope for eternal salvation through good deeds and indulgences with the care for humankind, *diaconia*. The reformers underlined that humankind's good deeds are a part of their Christian

³⁴ Charles Matson Odahl, "Constantine the Great and Christian Imperial Theocracy," *Connections: European Studies Annual Review*, 3 (2007), pp. 89-113; Francis Opoku, "Constantine and Christianity: The Formation of Church/State Relations in the Roman Empire", *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies*, 5.1 (2015), pp. 17-34.

³⁵ John T Chirban (ed.), *Holistic healing in Byzantium* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2010); Timothy S. Miller, *The Birth of the Hospital in the Byzantine Empire* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1997); _____ *The Orphans of Byzantium: Child Welfare in the Christian Empire* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003).

³⁶ Demetrios J. Constantinos, *Byzantine Philanthropy and Social Welfare* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1968); _____, *Poverty, Society, Philanthropy in the Late Medieval Greek World* (New York: Aristides D Caratzas Publication, 1992); Vantsos and Kiroudi, *An Orthodox View of Philanthropy and Church Diaconia* (2007), pp. 261-262.

³⁷ Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1997).

³⁸ Cf. Hammann, G. *Die Geschichte der christlichen Diakonie: Praktizierte Nächstenliebe von der Antike bis zur Reformationszeit*. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003).

faith for the sake of one's neighbour, not for God's sake. In this way, the Protestant Reformation in the West paved the way for an understanding of the Church's responsibility in society together with secular actors, for the sake of humankind, because it is according to God's will that the Church serves humanity. The establishment of the "common chest" in many areas of Europe, where donations were shared with those in need, according to worldly rules and regulations, also helps us visualise how the Reformers sought methods to serve the people in need, instead of subsidising the corrupt power systems of their time.³⁹

Thus, the Reformers' "whistleblowing" against the late medieval church practices was also a prophetic act against power abuse and the oppression of the poor and marginalised of that time, and thus an act of the diaconal church. When it comes to diaconal ministry, many of the reformers had ideas regarding establishing formal diaconal orders within the ministerial structures of their churches, a three-fold or five-fold ministry, but the ideas were largely not set into action.⁴⁰

The diaconal revival in the 19th century

In the 19th century, the German concept of "Diakonie" developed, emphasising *diaconia* as acts of humble, caritative work, based on a specific understanding of the Early Church. In the first place, the diaconal movement took place by establishing fellowships of deaconesses and deacons who were trained as nurses, teachers, social workers and educators. This inner mission movement promoted a form of Christianity where Christians engaged in institutions, primarily within nursing and education. Numerous institutions were founded all over Europe, partly in cooperation with the official churches, partly as entrepreneurial endeavours of faithful lay men and women apart from the Church. The diaconal revival following Johann Hinrich Wichern's speech of the need for Inner Mission in 1848 at the Synod in Wittenberg combined mission and *diaconia*, and emphasised the corporate responsibility of the church and every Christian to exercise "saving love" (German: *rettende Liebe*): "As Christ in his totality reveals himself in God Word, he proclaims himself in God's deeds, and the highest, purest and most Church-like deed is the saving of love."⁴¹

Similar institutions were established all over Germany and across Europe, and later expanded to other continents. In Wichern's vision of the church, deacons would play a core role in times of growing social needs, and this would also lead to a renewal of the church caring for the poor and needy. The diaconal revival built on pietist spirituality, emphasising the individual's conversion and discipleship, and was as such a strong lay movement within, parallel to, and sometimes in opposition to, the institutionalised churches. Nordstokke describes this relation between the diaconal revival and the churches: "Wichern's ideas were not given the attention that he had hoped, and his proposals regarding a church-based *diaconia* were not realised. Instead, the Inner Mission remained an interdependent undercurrent in the life of the church."⁴²

Both the understanding of *diaconia* as primarily "humble service", based on a narrow reading of the NT presumably confirming this understanding, and the departmentalisation of institutional and congregational *diaconia* have been thematised within the discourse on *diaconia* during the last 20 years. The diaconal revival of the 19th century became decisive in lifting up *diaconia* as a Christian responsibility, leading towards institutionalised, professional *diaconia*, while *diaconia* as a mark of the church, an essential element of the

³⁹ Szyuka, P. "The Common Chest – An Inspiration for the 21st Century? Approaching Luther's Attitude Toward the Economy". *Diaconia*, 7(2) (2016), p. 197.

⁴⁰ Cf. Munkholt, op.cit., p. 48.

⁴¹ Own translation. Johann Hinrich Wichern (1848): "Erklärung und Rede auf dem Wittenberger Kirchentag", in: Wolfgang Maaser and Gerhard K.-Schäfer (eds), *Geschichte der Diakonie in Quellen. Vom Anfang des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zur Gegenwart*. (Neukirchen: Neukirchner Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 2016), pp. 114-123.

⁴² Kjell Nordstokke, "The Study of Diaconia as an Academic Discipline", in: Stephanie Dietrich, Knud Jørgensen, Kari Karsrud Korslien and Kjell Nordstokke (eds), *Diaconia as Christian Social Practice: An Introduction*; (Oxford: Regnum Publishing House, 2014), p. 50.

Church's life and identity, and congregational *diaconia* were set on the agenda again in the 20th century, within the movement discerning the need for ecumenical *diaconia*.

Ecumenical diaconia

From its inception, the ecumenical movement has always had *diaconia*; the Christian witness through service, at its core and mission.⁴³ This can be seen from the early 1900s, when church-based organisations united to do diaconial work even before the formation of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1945. It was throughout and after the WWII reconstruction of Europe during the 1940s-1950s that the WCC emphasised the following points:

1. that *diaconia* was a permanent obligation of the church and the WCC;
2. that *diaconia* is a spiritual and not just a material-based charity; and
3. that inter-church *diaconia* is more useful than single denominational initiatives.⁴⁴ In this spirit, the WCC 5th General Assembly in Nairobi in 1975 made a historic declaration on *diaconia* by noting that “the church’s ministry of sharing, healing and reconciliation is of the very nature of the church.”⁴⁵ Several meetings after this helped drive this even further.

The 1986 conference on *Diaconia 2000: Called to be Neighbors* held in Larnaca, Cyprus, was instrumental in fulfilling these aspects of *diaconia* among the WCC member churches and inter-church aid.⁴⁶ This global consultation highlighted that *diaconia* is not a North-South activity, but a global Christian servant-based action to handle existing global challenges and poverty, which happens in “various levels— emergency, prevention, rehabilitation, development and change”, and that through cooperation when realising *diaconia* the unity of churches can be achieved through ecumenical solidarity.⁴⁷ In 2012, the WCC convened a meeting in Colombo, Sri Lanka, and stated that the churches, in order to continue the mission of God, have to look at the contemporary problems of the world, engage in more people-based rather than resource-based *diaconia*, and seek to understand *diaconia* from the Global South perspectives so as to bring out their language and contextual issues.⁴⁸

This ecumenical journey saw the instigation of the *ecumenical diaconia* document, which was highly emphasised at the WCC 10th assembly in Busan South Korea in 2013 among other ecumenical forums, underlining the churches’ need to seek for a joint diaconal language,⁴⁹ and that “*diaconia* is an integral dimension of the nature and mission of the church.”⁵⁰ This linking of what the church is and what it does, is a fundamental theological breakthrough that the ecumenical movement presented to many churches.

Ecumenical *diaconia* reminds the world that, as the church shares the eucharistic table with its faithful with no boundaries of colour, race, status, age, or even nationality, it is also called to share the altar outside

⁴³ Richard D.N. Dickinson, “Diaconia in the Ecumenical Movement” in John Briggs, Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Georges Tssetsis, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, volume 3 1968-2000* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2004), p. 403-431.

⁴⁴ Teresa Joan White, “Diakonia” in Nicholas Lossky, José Míguez Bonino, John Pobee, Tom F. Stransky, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Pauline Webb (eds), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, 2nd ed. (Geneva; WCC Publications, 2002), p. 305-310.

⁴⁵ White, *Diaconia* (2002), p. 307.

⁴⁶ Claudius Cecon and Kristian Paludan, *My Neighbour- Myself: Visions of Diaconia* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1988); Klaus Poser (ed), *Diaconia 2000: Called To Be Neighbours: Official Report WCC World Consultation, Larnaca 1986* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1987).

⁴⁷ White, *Diaconia* (2002), p. 308.

⁴⁸ WCC, *Theological Perspectives on Diaconia in 21st Century* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: WCC 2-6 June 2012), <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/unity-mission-evangelism-and-spirituality/just-and-inclusive-communities/theological-perspectives-on-diaconia-in-21st-century> accessed on 15th March 2020.

⁴⁹ WCC Executive Committee, *Ecumenical Diaconia*, Doc No.17 App (Bossey: WCC publications, 2017), p. 7.

⁵⁰ WCC Executive Committee, *Ecumenical Diaconia* (2017), p. 8.

the temple with the “sisters and brothers of Christ” within or far off, as it witness and evangelises in its mission. It is in such diaconal and missional aspects, based on the *liturgy after the Liturgy*, that the Christian traditions are fully able to work and theologise with each other with no conflicts, yet they are not in full communion liturgically. Thus, diaconia is central in reminding the divided church of the work needed to bring the body of Christ together, like the prayer of Jesus “that all maybe one” like the Holy Trinity (John 17:20-26).⁵¹

An Orthodox Approach to Diaconal Ecclesiology

Church ecclesiology has changed over the years. Nevertheless, amidst the many existing definitions of what the church is across the centuries, there has not been “an exact and exhaustive definition, which expresses the essence of the church in itself.”⁵² The neo-patristic synthesis in the Orthodox Church has especially taken interest in ecclesiology.⁵³ Such Eastern ecclesiologies have been based on the basic doctrines of Christianity as formulated within the patristic period, and a number of communion, administrative (primacy/synodality/royal and ministerial priesthood) and ecumenical related ecclesiologies.⁵⁴ These ecclesiologies were highlighted with the understanding expressed by George Florovsky, that

It is impossible to start with a formal definition of the Church. For, strictly speaking, there is none, which could claim any doctrinal authority. None can be found in the Fathers. No definition has been given by the Ecumenical Councils. In the doctrinal summaries, drafted on various occasions in the Eastern Orthodox Church in the seventeenth century and taken often (but wrongly) for the “symbolic books”, again no definition of the Church was given, except a reference to the relevant clause of the Creed, followed by some comments. This lack of formal definitions does not mean, however, a confusion of ideas or any obscurity of view. The Fathers did not care so much for the *doctrine* of the Church precisely because the glorious *reality* of the Church was open to their spiritual vision. One does not define what is self-evident.⁵⁵

The Orthodox Church has not necessarily used the term *diaconia* when explaining the social services the church offers society and its disadvantaged, rather the popular term in the East has been philanthropy,

⁵¹ Thomas FitzGerald, “Unity and Prayer,” in Thomas F. Best and Dagmar Heller (eds), *So We Believe, So we Pray: Towards Koinonia in Worship* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1995), pp. 47-54; Bria, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy*, pp. 36-43, pp. 55-64.

⁵² Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima, “Orthodox Reflections on the Nature and Purpose of the Church” in Tim Grass, Jenny Rolph, Paul Rolph and Ioan Sauca, *Building Bridges: Between the Orthodox and Evangelical Traditions* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012), pp. 131-148.

⁵³ Heikki Huttunen, “Perspectives on the church’s diaconal mission in society,” in *From Oulu to Järvenpää: The Finnish Lutheran-Orthodox Theological Discussions from 2001 to 2012* (Helsinki: National Council, 2014), pp. 50-56.

⁵⁴ Hovorun, *Meta-Ecclesiology: Chronicles on Church Awareness* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); John Zizoulas, *Eucharist Bishop Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop during the First Three Centuries*, trans., Elizabeth Theokritoff (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2001); Nicholas Afanasiev, *The Church of the Holy Spirit*, trans., Vitaly Permiakov (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007); Philip Kariatlis, *Church as Communion: The Gift and Goal of Koinonia* (Adelaide/Sydney: ATF/St Andrew’s Orthodox Press, 2011); Roger Haight, “Twentieth-Century Ecclesiology: Orthodox and Pentecostal Ecclesiologies and BEM,” in *Christian Community in History*, vol.2; *Comparative Ecclesiology* (New York: Continuum, 2004), pp. 430-453; Stylianos Harkianakis, *The Infallibility of the Church in Orthodox Theology*, trans., Philip Kariatlis (Adelaide/Sydney: ATF/St Andrew’s Orthodox Press, 2008).

⁵⁵ George Florovsky, *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View: Volume One in the Collected Works of Georges Florovsky* (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing Company, 1972), p. 57.

denoting what God did for humanity through the incarnation.⁵⁶ However, due to the growing ecumenical understanding of the term, approaches, and theology, the Orthodox Church has taken a step further and tried to discuss the same, appreciating the need for a joint definition but also the need to use a stronger terminology for the missional social services offered by the church. With this understanding, Molokotos-Liederman, defines *diaconia* as the “Christian social service, namely a compassionate and solidarity based service founded on Christian values (God’s love) in the form of charity and philanthropy towards those in need.”⁵⁷ In this definition, philanthropy, which is the common Orthodox term for Christian social service, is expressed as a single part of the many components of *diaconia*, proving *diaconia* is a stronger term than the common Orthodox term of philanthropy.

In addition to the ecumenical gatherings, several inter-Orthodox gatherings have also been held to discuss *diaconia* from an Orthodox perspective.⁵⁸ From these gatherings, the Orthodox have explicitly confessed the connection of the being and nature of the church with *diaconia*.

Christian *diaconia* is rooted in the Gospel teaching according to which the love of God and the neighbour are a direct consequence of faith. The diaconal mission of the Church and the duty of each of its members to serve are intimately bound up with the very notion of the Church and stem from the example of the sacrifice of our Lord Himself, our High Priest, who, in accordance with the Father’s will “did not come to be served but to serve and to give up his life as a ransom for many” (Mt. 20:28).⁵⁹

The sacrificial love of God for His creation, for the Orthodox Church, is extended to missional contexts through aiding others through *diaconia* and is not only about following in Christ’s footsteps but is also a duty for all Orthodox Christians and by extension the church universal. Neither the church nor its followers can therefore consider themselves Christian if they do not participate in *diaconia*. For the Orthodox therefore, *diaconia* is a part of what the church is and what the church does, thus there cannot be the church without *diaconia*.

The Orthodox Church is a highly liturgical church, where *leitourgia* yokes the entire church into one. *Leitourgia*, a term from two Greek words *leitōs* – public, and *ergon* – work, originally meant public common work of the people for the benefit of the community.⁶⁰ When Christianity took over this term, it mainly meant public worship, and especially the Eucharist; considered the public prayer per excellence.⁶¹ “The Eucharist is the climax of the Church’s life, the event in which the people of God are celebrating the incarnation, the death

⁵⁶ Miltiadis Vantsos and Marina Kiroudi, “An Orthodox View of Philanthropy and Church Diaconia,” *Christian Bioethics* 13 (2007), pp. 251-268; cf. Constantelos, *Origins of Christian Orthodox diaconia*, 1.

⁵⁷ Lina Molokotos-Liederman, “Orthodox Diaconia Worldwide: An Initial Assessment” (IOCC, May 2009), p. 3.

⁵⁸ (i) The first inter-Orthodox on *diaconia* from an Orthodox perspective held in Valamo Monastery in Finland in the early 1970s (ii) The pre-assembly meetings held in Bucharest in 1974 and in Etchmiadzin in Armenia in 1975, giving the Orthodox a chance to review matters *diaconia* before the WCC General Assembly in Nairobi in 1975 (iii) the Oriental and Eastern Orthodox conference held at the Orthodox Academy of Crete in Chania Greece in 1978 to discuss the Orthodox approach to macro and micro *diaconia*, and (iv) the 2004 conference convened by the World Council of Churches (WCC), International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) and Orthodox Church of Finland Filantropia which saw the Eastern Orthodox converge at Valamo Monastery in Finland to discuss the Eastern Orthodox *diaconia* and social service understanding cf. Ecumenical Patriarchate Permanent Delegation to the World Council of Churches, “An Orthodox Approach to Diaconia”, *Consultation on ‘Church and Service’ at the Orthodox Academy in Chania, Crete, from November 20 to 25, 1978*: <https://www.ecupatria.org/articles/an-orthodox-approach-to-diaconia/> accessed on 27th November 2019 (hereafter EPPD-WCC, *An Orthodox Approach to Diaconia*); Molokotos-Liederman, *Orthodox Diaconia Worldwide* (2009).

⁵⁹ EPPD-WCC, *An Orthodox Approach to Diaconia*.

⁶⁰ Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones, and Roderick McKenzie (eds), *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed., with revised supplement (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 1036-1037.

⁶¹ Tadic-Papanikolaou, ‘Orthodox Contributions for the Understanding and Practice of Diaconia’ (2013), p. 687.

and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, sharing His glorified body and blood, tasting the Kingdom to come.”⁶² This highly emphasised worship does not end within the church building, but rather continues outside the church buildings through *diaconia*. Justin the Martyr and Clapsis emphasise that you cannot disconnect the word, the eucharistic meal, collecting funds for *diaconia* from doing *diaconia*, for such shows the unity and communion of the Christians with God and each other.⁶³

For the Orthodox Church, living a righteous life includes *diaconia*, and is connected with the last judgement (Mt. 25:31-46). This is shown by two aspects of Orthodox worship and iconography. In the Orthodox liturgy, there is a litany call asking God “for a Christian end to our life, peaceful, without shame and suffering, and for a good defence before the awesome judgment seat of Christ.” Thus, as the Orthodox Christians exit the church, they are faced by the icon of the second coming of Christ on top of the western wall exit door or the narthex.⁶⁴ This is to remind them that if they really want to succeed at the last judgement as their litany prayer, they must continue with the *liturgy after the Liturgy*.

The church in the Eucharist prays for the suffering and the needy in society, calling the church to service and action towards the same issues they pray for, an action exhibiting the inseparable connection of *Orthodoxia* (right belief) and *Orthopraxia* (right action). Thus Orthodox *diaconia* is intrinsically connected to not just worship but also the mission of the church.⁶⁵ What the Orthodox has come to call *the liturgy after the Liturgy*, a term borrowed from the mid-1970s ecumenical discussions, is “the constant tradition in which worship and Liturgy are an essential factor of proclaiming and confessing Christ,”⁶⁶ showing that the Eucharistic communion; inside the church building, is inherently connected with the mission of the church outside the church building as it seeks to fulfil the mission of God in the world.⁶⁷ According to the concept of the *liturgy after the Liturgy*, the worship of the church is in two parts, “First the people gather for worship, to hear the word of God and to eat the bread of life (cf. Luke 4:16); then, at the end of the liturgy, they are sent out (cf. Mt. 28:19f.). Here, the worshipping community becomes an evangelising community. Receiving the eucharistic ‘bread for pilgrims’, food for missionaries, the faithful become actors of mission.”⁶⁸ In remembering the sacrificial offering of Christ for the salvation of the world (John 3:16), as expressed in memory in the liturgy, the church as the bride of Christ is also called to practically offer itself to the world by witnessing

“Beyond the boundaries of the eucharistic assembly to serve the community at large. The eucharistic liturgy is not an escape into an inner realm of prayer, a pious turning away from social realities; rather, it calls and sends the faithful to celebrate ‘the sacrament of the brother’ outside the temple in the public marketplace, where the cries of the poor and marginalized are heard.”⁶⁹

The *Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today’s World*⁷⁰ document of the Holy and Great Council of the Eastern Orthodox Church held in Crete, Greece in 2016, defines *diaconia* as, “the witness of love through

⁶² Ion Bria, “The liturgy after the Liturgy,” in Ion Bria, *Martyria / Mission: The Witness of the Orthodox Churches Today* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1980), pp. 66-71: 67.

⁶³ Clapsis, *The Image of Christ in the Poor* (2005), p. 3; Justin Martyr, *First Apology* p. 67; Tadic-Papanikolaou, ‘Orthodox Contributions for the Understanding and Practice of Diaconia’ (2013), p. 691.

⁶⁴ Constantine Cavarnos, *Guide to Byzantine Iconography*, vol.1, 2nd ed. (Belmont, MA: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 2010), pp. 96-107.

⁶⁵ Bria, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy*, pp. 83-88.

⁶⁶ Ion Bria, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996), p vii.

⁶⁷ Bria, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy*, p. 19.

⁶⁸ Bria, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy*, p. 24.

⁶⁹ Bria, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy*, p. 20.

⁷⁰ <https://www.holycouncil.org/-/mission-orthodox-church-todays-world> accessed on 13th December 2019.

service” and insists that helping the needy is part of the “salvific mission” of the Orthodox Church in the world, which is an expression of the Orthodox “faith and the service to the Lord.” Every local Orthodox Church is therefore mandated to fulfil this *Missio Dei* through their *Missio Ecclesia* as realised in their *leiturgia*, *diaconia*, and *martyria*. The Great Council, insisting that Christians are co-workers with Christ (1 Cor. 3:9), expressed the undivided connection of *diaconia* and the church in the witnessing of the resurrected Christ in activities done within or outside the boundaries of the church.

The Orthodox Church is today not seen as being very active in philanthropic and diaconal work in most areas, while it is exceedingly active in some areas.⁷¹ Most Orthodox churches raise diaconal resources for their own people when suffering and share with some outside their jurisdiction.⁷² Diaconal activities in the Orthodox Church are at present left to the individual local churches, dioceses, established diaconal institutions, parishes and individuals.⁷³ These diaconal institutions are predominantly a church department or under the mission department dealing with relief, and are not organised or enabled to do diaconal work professionally to help bring about a greater impact.⁷⁴ Deacons and deaconesses in this church are today seen as “liturgical decorations in services conducted by bishops”, instead of social ministers who could help develop Orthodox *diaconia*.⁷⁵

Nevertheless, the African Orthodox Church is strongly involved in *diaconia*. The activities of African Orthodox dioceses include handling poverty and caring for the poor, building health and educational facilities, caring for widows, orphans and the aged, feeding children in their school contexts, farming, building bridges in villages, drilling wells for water, and initiating microfinance projects to name but a few projects.⁷⁶ All these diaconic theology and practices within the Eastern tradition broadly show that Orthodox ecclesiology is highly connected and cannot be removed from their practice and understanding of *diaconia* and mission.

A Lutheran Approach to Diaconal Ecclesiology

Lutheran churches emphasise that *diaconia* belongs to the Church’s being and identity. *Diaconia* is unfolded in every Christian’s life, as a call to serve God, one’s fellow human beings and as stewards of God’s creation. *Diaconia* intrinsically belongs to the life of Christian congregations and communities and implies service to local communities and wider societies. In many countries, diaconal institutions, such as hospitals, schools, orphanages etc. are established and are a part of the Lutheran Church’s diaconal presence in different contexts. In some countries, these diaconal institutions partake in public health- and welfare-services. Finally, international diaconal organisations, offering emergency services and development aid, are a part of Lutheran ecumenical *diaconia*, and thus inseparable from the Church in its essence.

Within Lutheran theology, one emphasises that human salvation and justification before God, *coram Deo*, relies solely on Christ, and not on human deeds and achievements. At the same time, the Lutheran confessions emphasise that good deeds belong to all Christian life, as a part of the Christian’s sanctification and of all Christian life towards humanity, *coram hominibus*. Hence, *diaconia* is an intrinsic part of the Church’s and every congregation’s life, based on God’s call to be Church *in* the world, not apart from the world, and to live this call in the different contexts where the Church exists. Lutheran theology strongly emphasises that

⁷¹ Constantelos, *Origins of Christian Orthodox Diaconia* (2014), pp. 22-28.

⁷² Molokotos-Liederman, *Orthodox Diaconia Worldwide* (2009), p. 4.

⁷³ IOCC in the USA, Filantropia in Finland, and Apostoliki Diaconia in Greece are among the over 51 Orthodox affiliated diaconal institutions worldwide as surveyed by IOCC in 2008 cf. Molokotos-Liederman, *Orthodox Diaconia Worldwide* (2009), pp. 5-7.

⁷⁴ Molokotos-Liederman, *Orthodox Diaconia Worldwide* (2009), pp. 3,7-8.

⁷⁵ Huttunen, *Perspectives on the church’s diaconal mission in society* (2014), p. 52; John Chryssavgis, *Remembering and Reclaiming Diakonia: The Diaconate Yesterday and Today* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2009).

⁷⁶ Orthodox Archdiocese of Kenya, *Year Book and Review* (Nairobi: African Orthodox Church of Kenya, 2002-2018).

Christians are not only Christians within the Church's worship and faith, or "God's realm", but they are called to live as responsible citizens in their respective societies, the so-called "worldly realm". Good deeds, service to the world, *diaconia*, are, according to Lutheran theology, not only a practice within the Christian community, but, based on creation theology, belonging to the world. Christians are appealed to serve with all people of good will for the sake of humanity, not for the sake of salvation. Lutheran theology also emphasises that *diaconia* never should be an instrument of conversion but has its own value and contributes to the witness about the good news in Christ through transformation, reconciliation and empowerment.⁷⁷

The Lutheran World Federation emphasises *diaconia* as an intrinsic part of Lutheran ecclesiology and belonging to God's mission, the *missio Dei*: "LWF member churches are called to take part in God's mission, which includes proclaiming Christ's Gospel, serving the vulnerable (*diaconia*), and advocating for them."⁷⁸ *Diaconia* starts with knowledge of the context, the mapping of needs and assets, and a profound conviction that serving the poor and marginalised and serving God are inseparable. In order to serve in the world through *diaconia*, churches need to seek knowledge not only within theology, but in many different theoretical and practical fields, also from empirical studies, as an interdisciplinary endeavour. Diaconal theory and diaconal action mutually rely on each other, and the goal of diaconal sciences is to improve diaconal practice.

Lutheran theologians like Jürgen Moltmann, emphasise the holistic mission of the church: any separation between mission and *diaconia* would contradict the unity that is expressed in the mission of Jesus, which implies walking as he did, embracing the poor and the sick, and bringing them healing, salvation, hope and a future. According to Moltmann, *diaconia* is a calling to follow Jesus by taking up the cross (Mk. 8:35) and suffer in solidarity with those who are in need, in the "horizon of the inbreaking reign of God". Moltmann strongly advocates the "becoming diaconal of the congregation as well as the becoming congregational of *diaconia*", to support the Church's holistic ministry in all its ways of living and acting.⁷⁹ Some of the biggest Lutheran churches in the world, like the Evangelical Mekane Yesu Church in Ethiopia, have focused on the need to define the mission of the Church as holistic ministry, where proclamation and service are interconnected and inseparable. This became an important reminder for all Lutheran churches, avoiding departmentalisation and a disconnection of the Church's service in for example development departments from the regular Church life in congregations.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have tried to outline the joint basis for our understanding of the Church as diaconal. The biblical witness and the tradition of the Church make clear that *diaconia* always has been, and should be, an intrinsic element of the Church's life in all its different contexts. It belongs to the identity of the Christian church, and it has the potential to unite churches in joint action, notwithstanding doctrinal differences. Furthermore, while we have appreciated the richness of each tradition in their diaconic ecclesiological expressions and practices, we have also seen spaces that can be improved by embracing each other's tradition more from an ecumenical perspective.

As a Lutheran theologian, the Orthodox approach to diaconal ecclesiology inspires me to see an even closer relation between worship and *diaconia*. The Orthodox understanding of *diaconia* as the "liturgy after the liturgy" are important for a Protestant tradition, which sometimes struggles with upholding a specific "churchy" identity of *diaconia*, when diaconal activities primarily belong to diaconal institutions. Orthodox Church history, upholding the relevance of the Early Church testimonies, also shows how *diaconia* was an

⁷⁷ Cf. LWF (2009), *Diaconia in Context*. <https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/DMD-Diaconia-EN-low.pdf> [last accessed 4/6/2020]

⁷⁸ <https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/capacity-diaconia>.

⁷⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, *Diakonie im Horizont des Reiches Gottes* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984), p. 36.

intrinsic and un-negotiable aspect of early Church life. Finally, the Orthodox liturgy, with its emphasis on the beauty of God mirrored in the Church's icons and the divine liturgy, also becomes an important reminder about humankind's need to hold focus on what is good and precious, amidst all pain and despair, as comfort, empowerment and strengthening of people's resilience. As a Romanian Orthodox friend told me, in a very poor and remote area of the Transylvanian mountains: The people are suffering so much – they need the beauty of our churches to be empowered to live their lives and not fall into despair.

The Orthodox tradition, which highly prides itself with being ancient and rich in theology in connection with the early church, can also modestly learn much from the Lutheran Federation and theology, a tradition that comes from the Western Reformation. Such lessons from my perspective will include, not just doing diaconia but more so doing it strategically and in a more locally and globally coordinated manner; the highly spelt out and growing Lutheran theological science and practice of diaconia and its interdisciplinary efforts are a place the Orthodox must pause to not only contemplate but also learn from, as they map out their needs and assets. Moreover, the past and present Lutheran professional and active use of deacons and deaconesses in diaconia could help the Orthodox see the need to not only return the original social responsibility of this office, but more so review, perfect and expand it to serve using all available men and women who are ready to be involved in the holistic mission of the church.

As a Lutheran and an Orthodox theologian, we agree that *diaconia* is not just something the churches do, but it is based on the centre of our Christian faith, faith in the triune God. God, who is perfect *community* in Godself, continuously calls the Church to strive for perfect community, also on earth. God's hospitality towards humankind implies a call to God's Church to practice the same *hospitality* in the world. This points towards an ecclesiology where *diaconia* is an intrinsic and unnegotiable part of the Church's identity. *Diaconia* belongs to the mandate given by the triune God to the church as an integral part of its mission.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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12. INTERPRETATION, INSPIRATION, AND INTERRUPTION: THE ROLE OF THEOLOGIES IN DIACONIA

Sturla J. Stålsett¹

Introduction

What is, or what could be, the role of theology in *diakonia*, broadly understood as (Christian)² faith-based social practice?³ In their variety, theologies may at best serve as a guiding light to such work. More specifically, theologies, as conceptualisations of social reality and human existence as seen from Christian faith in God, may interpret, inspire, and interrupt diaconal practice. In turn, diaconal practice may and should inform and renew theological views and discourses, thus always relating them to the present cultural and political context in new ways.

The interrelationship between practice and theory is multidimensional, dynamic, and mutual. It is not possible, nor fruitful, to point to a definite starting point of this hermeneutical spiral between the two poles. We should not understand the possibly guiding light of theologies as a wholly external or independent source of authoritative knowledge by which we could judge the validity or fruitfulness of the practice. Such light, emerging in and through social work of many kinds and contexts, may nonetheless serve practice in multiple ways: it may provide lenses through which one's own or others' actions may make sense, in individual or collective acts of interpretation. I will argue that it is primarily these acts of *interpretation*, seeing a particular social service in light of Christian faith experiences and sources, that constitute such action as 'diaconal.' Theologies of various sorts may ignite such action, providing it with *inspiration* and motivation through stories, appeals, and values. It may also *interrupt* these practices by criticising and correcting them and providing a new direction.

In an ecumenical approach, differing confessional belongings with their corresponding theological models and metaphors represent a fruitful and complementary tension for *diakonia*. Many ways of seeing correspond to the plurality of sources of Christian faith, as well as to the various contexts of diaconal endeavours. The task of coming to terms with the conflict of interpretation is as perennial as the work for realising mercy and justice in a conflicted world itself.

A Hermeneutical Approach to Diaconia: The Primacy of Interpretation

Even if theory and practice always are mutually interdependent, there is good reason to start in and from the standpoint of practice.⁴ Life is embodied. Reality is concrete, although its concreteness is always already,

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² The parenthesis is meant to signal the possibility of speaking of 'diaconia' also inter-religiously.

³ See Diaconia. Journal for the Study of Christian Social Practice, and, e.g., Stephanie Dietrich, *Diakonia as Christian Social Practice: An Introduction*, Regnum Studies in Mission (Oxford: Regnum, 2014); Kjell Nordstokke, *Liberating Diakonia* (Trondheim: Tapir akademisk forl., 2011); Trygve Wyller, *Heterotopic Citizen: New Research on Religious Work for the Disadvantaged*, vol. vol. 4, Research in Contemporary Religion (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009); Johannes Eurich and Ingolf Hübner, *Diakonia against Poverty and Exclusion in Europe: Challenges – Contexts – Perspectives*, vol. Bd. 48, Veröffentlichungen Des Diakoniewissenschaftlichen Instituts an Der Universität Heidelberg (Evang. Verl.-Anst., 2013); Herbert Haslinger, *Diakonie. Grundlagen Für Die Soziale Arbeit Der Kirche* (Paderborn: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, 2009).

⁴ See Sturla J. Stålsett, Arnhild Taksdal, and Per Kristian Hilden, "Research as Diaconia: Commitment, Practice and Participation," *Diakonia. Journal for the Study of Christian Social Practice* 2, no. 9 (2018).

provisionally, interpreted. Interpretation is thus necessarily *re*-interpretation. Yet it relates to something or someone beyond the mere act of grasping, someone whom we need to understand. Diaconia is such a relation to another or other human beings.⁵ It arises in and through a call – the call of another living person. In particular, it is a mutual and practical relation to humans as well as to other living organisms in a *conflictual* reality, a reality in which goodness cannot be taken for granted. Suffering, oppression, marginalisation, denigration, harassment, destruction, or death: diaconia emerges as a response to life, particularly as life is threatened by death-dealing forces and realities.

Hearing or heeding this call demands (re-)interpretation.⁶ The concrete embodied presence of the suffering comes first. Responding to this call, as a second albeit seldom clearly separated step, will have many forms, according to the need and the context. It is not the concrete expression of this response that makes it diaconal. What makes it diaconal, is an interpretation of this call as in some deep, and yet hidden sense, God's call.

Thus, while profoundly practical in its initiation, elaboration, and aims, diaconia is constituted hermeneutically. Its identity and uniqueness do not depend on the faith nor piety of the actors involved, whether that of the persons calling, or that of those responding to the call. The fundamental theological role in diaconia is thus, I argue, to detect and make explicit the incarnational and soteriological core of the call of the suffering other to which diaconal action is a response. In and through service, solidarity and acts of liberation from pain and oppression, diaconia serves God.

Diaconal action is realised by individuals or groups, congregations, organisations, and institutions. Even governmental bodies may be seen as responding to the divine call that constitutes diaconal action. In this regard, I find it fruitful to distinguish between implicit and explicit diaconal work.⁷ The difference between these two is the relation between the social act and the act of interpretation.

In explicitly diaconal work, interpretation in light of Christian faith in God takes place in some direct relation to the endeavour. It is also done by those who are engaged in the practice. Again, this does not necessarily mean that the diaconal service is undertaken in a special or distinct way. Diaconia, as e.g., health service, is carried out according to best practices and standards of the corresponding medical discipline. If it is social work, it seeks to live up to contemporary quality expectations and recent innovations in its respective field. Legal advice to refugees must adhere to and challenge prevailing juridical rules and regulations, etc. Yet, in diaconia, this professionally disciplined commitment to solving particular life challenges is interpreted as acts that are, in unique and multifaceted ways, in tune with values that emerge from Christian faith in God.

Such interpretation may be theoretical and practical. It may be the community, organisation, or the diaconal protagonist themselves who makes this interpretation. Or it may representatively be undertaken by particularly designated persons, such as theologians, deacons, pastors, or the leaders of the institution, congregation, or organisation. Although the time and form of the interpretation may vary, explicit diaconia means there is some degree of collective awareness among the participants of the diaconal character of the work being carried out.

By contrast, in implicit diaconia, the act and the interpretation are not directly linked in time or space. It is social, medical, or pedagogical work, which, likewise, is interpreted as being in line with core tenets of

⁵ For the root meanings and semantic field of *diakonew* and *diakonia*, see e.g. J. P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2 vols. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), p. 460, entry 35.19. Cf. also discussions in Kari Latvus, "The Paradigm Challenged; a New Analysis of the Origin of *Diakonia*," *Studia theologica* 62 (2008). Interestingly, in one passage Emmanuel Lévinas, *Humanisme De L'autre Homme* (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1972), describes the relation to the Other as *diakonia*.

⁶ See e.g. Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action. Essays in Hermeneutics*, vol. II (Evanston (IL): Northwestern university Press, 1991); Werner Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics. Development and Significance* (New York: Crossroad, 1992); Clodovis Boff, *Teología De Lo Político. Sus Mediaciones*, trans. Alfonso Ortiz, Verdad E Imagen (Salamanca: Ediciones Sígueme, 1980).

⁷ See also Sturla J. Stålsett, "Precious and Precarious Life: Exploring Diaconal Economics," *Diaconia* 10, no. 1 (2019).

Christian faith in God, but where this interpretation is *not* undertaken as the practice is carried out. Nor is it necessarily interpreted by the ones performing it. Thus, different kinds of solidarity groups, voluntary organisations, or even governmental bodies may be seen as acting “diaconally”, albeit in an implicit manner.

One may criticise such a concept of an implicit diaconia on various terms. Some would see it in some analogous sense with Karl Rahner’s much-disputed idea of ‘anonymous Christians,’ as dis-respecting the own intention of the actors involved.⁸ It may also be seen as dissolving the precise boundaries of diaconia, that in the end, may serve to undermine its distinct identity and *raison-d’etre*. Still, what might be the advantages of referring to such practices as (implicitly) diaconal? Besides this being an apparent correspondence with the non-intentional act and non-Jewish identity being a significant point in one of the most central founding diaconal texts, the parable of the Good Samaritan, I see several gains of the designation ‘implicit diaconia.’ Firstly, it avoids making the diaconal dependent upon the religious intention or conviction of the actors involved. Theologically, this preserves both the exclusivity, sovereignty, and the all-pervasiveness of divine presence and action according to Christian faith. The identity of diaconal work is ultimately hidden in God’s call and act.

Secondly, it avoids the pitfall of making explicit diaconal work ‘better’ by the very virtue of being religiously motivated or interpreted. The goodness of the good Samaritan, or the justice of the ‘just ones’ in the scene of the last judgment in Matthew 25, is not dependent on faith. Similarly, we can and should assess the quality of diaconal work according to the same standards as other medical, social, pedagogical, or legal services. Diaconal actors cannot escape general and commonly accepted quality demands by hiding behind some pious façade.

Finally, this also makes clear that the community of Christian faith can and should look for inspiration, correction, and completion from outside its ranks and history, too. Being the God of the whole universe, the God of Christian faith may surprise and challenge the community of believers from unexpected angles.

The Diaconal Identity of the Church City Mission in Norway

To serve as an example of the interrelationship of diaconal practice and theological interpretation, as well as the distinction between explicitly and implicitly diaconal endeavours, I turn to the Church City Mission in Norway.⁹ Initially inspired by pietistic awakenings in Christiania (the old name for Oslo) in 1855, it is now one of the significant voluntary organisations providing social welfare in Norway, with 1800 employees and more than 4500 volunteers across 40 towns and cities throughout the country.¹⁰ The work of the Church City Mission is comprehensive in scope. It spans from treatment and rehabilitation from drug dependency; 24 hours’ SOS helpline service; homes and institutions assisting irregular migrants, people with mental health issues, victims to human trafficking or involved in the sex trade, elderly persons, children and youth at risk; to religious services such as pastoral counselling, communal sharing and liturgical celebration of various kinds.

In these manifold professional practices, this diaconal organisation has to live up to general standards and demands of the different fields of knowledge involved: somatic and psychological health care, treatment of substance abuse and dependency, geriatrics, migration, social economy, community development, etc. Among its employees, volunteers, and contributors, many are Agnostics, Muslims, Humanists, as well as more or less confessing Christians from various denominations. Still, the Church City Mission is an explicitly diaconal organisation. In its founding documents, its self-presentations, its use of symbols, as well as through

⁸ See Gavin D. Costa, “Karl Rahner’s Anonymous Christian – a Reappraisal” *Modern Theology* 1, no. 2 (1985).

⁹ The author served as the General Secretary of this organisation from 2006 to 2014.

¹⁰ <https://kirkensbymisjon.no/about-us/>. For an academic analysis of its first 125 years, see Knut Lundby, *Mellom Vekkelse Og Velferd: Bymisjon I Opp- Og Nedgangstider* (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1980).

practices such as liturgies, vigils, prayers, and pastoral care, the inspiration, and guidance of Christian faith is made explicit. It is confessed not only as a historical legacy but also as a contemporary commitment. Until recently, the General Secretary also had to be an ordained minister of the Church of Norway. The degree to which this explicit Christian framing of the work is present and visible in the different activities and departments varies quite substantially, however. In some places, the primary purpose of the operation may be presented as decisively 'religious.' The Church City Mission has, for decades, represented and enacted spiritual practices as well as a theological orientation that has challenged other Christian communities within and beyond the Church of Norway. Its early inclusive and committed stance on the equal dignity of LGBTQ+ people proved decisive in its ability to meet the needs of people affected by HIV, for instance. In other work, e.g., of professionalised treatment of drug abuse or psychiatric disease, the religious framing is much more discrete, if at all noticeable. In some instances and contexts, explicit expressions of religiosity are avoided. According to a hermeneutical approach to diaconal work, with the distinction between explicit and implicit diaconia, the degree of this unification or separation of the (diaconal) act and its (theological) interpretation says nothing of the diaconal quality of the work, as such. On the contrary, in some cases, less (explicit) religiosity may be the sign of adequate diaconal practice.

Furthermore, for the point of view of diaconal leadership, this also makes it clear why and how persons who do not necessarily share the Christian faith may be a fully integrated and skilled diaconal co-worker. Like the Samaritan, the diaconal character and quality of their work depends on the degree to which it is capable of responding to the demand at hand.

What is, then, the role of theology in the work of the Church City Mission in Oslo? In its by-laws, the main purpose of this organisation is expressed in the following words:

The Foundation Church City Mission of Oslo (formerly Oslo Inner Mission) has as its main purpose – in collaboration with the formal bodies of the Church of Norway and in coherence with its confession – to promote activities that contribute to realising the mission of the church.¹¹

The social activity is defined as being part of 'the mission of the church.' This purpose points directly at the role of theologies in the varied professional work of this organisation. To see itself as contributing to the realisation of the mission of the church, it must make up its own mind on what this mission is. It must also deliberate upon and prioritise what part of that mission the organisation sees itself as particularly called and equipped to carry out. The hermeneutical practice of interpreting social reality in light of the Christian sources, as well as approaching and drawing from the Christian sources from the standpoint of its particular everyday practice, thus becomes key to this diaconal organisation's identity. Theology may serve to reveal the diaconal core and character of its practice, and thereby orient the direction and possible forms of this work.¹² Now, more concretely, what theological resources, traditions or modes may shed light on this orientation?

The Relevance of Contextual and Liberation Theologies to Diaconal Praxis

Theology today is necessarily named in the plural. The concept of the one, definitive and authoritative *teologia perennis* is no longer tenable – if it ever was. Theology, as a human practice of interpretation,

¹¹ My translation. Norwegian original: «Stiftelsen Kirkens Bymisjon Oslo (tidligere Oslo Indremisjon) har til formål – i samarbeid med Den norske kirkes organer og i overensstemmelse med dens bekjennelse – å fremme tiltak som bidrar til å virkeliggjøre kirkens oppdrag», retrieved from:

http://www.innsamlingskontrollen.no/media/organization/bylaws/090717-Vedtekter-sendt-styret-9--mai-05_611479.pdf

¹² On the role of religion as providing resources for orientation, as well as for transformation and legitimization, see Jan-Olav Henriksen, "Everyday Religion as Orientation and Transformation: A Challenge to Theology" *Nordic Journal of Society and Religion* 29, no. 1 (2016).

formulation, and explication of the contents of Christian faith in God, depends on, arises in, and speaks to diverse biographical, cultural, and political contexts.¹³ The confessional heritage of a given community, congregation, or person informs and directs their understanding in ways both visible and invisible to the theological subjects. This inevitable plurality of theological resources and perspectives is a source of creativity as well as a critical challenge for diaconal practice. As its sphere of action cannot be confined to only one confession or context, diaconia is necessarily ecumenical in its scope. It can draw from a variety of theological schools and traditions.

However, programmatically contextual and praxis-oriented theologies, such as liberation, feminist, indigenous, and ecological theologies, are arguably particularly valuable to inspire and orient – serve as guiding light for – diaconal practice. As one inspirational source of this family of theological approaches, Latin American liberation theology draws forth some qualities and emphases that prove particularly useful in the social work that we call diaconal.¹⁴

Firstly, liberation theology emerges in situations of conflict and struggle. Therefore, it will resist any speculative escapism from the everyday suffering of humans as well as other living creatures and the environment. It addresses injustice and seeks, therefore, to be critical and practical before it is explicative. Programmatically siding with the poor and oppressed – of many different origins and with many faces – it will dismiss any simplistic claim to objectivity or neutrality. Theologising comes after action, conceptually, although not always nor necessarily chronologically. It is the “second act.”¹⁵

The emphasis on praxis as the starting point means that this theological current does not necessarily privilege a particularly religious nor Christian kind of experience or sphere of life. Instead, it addresses the whole of human experience, in particular as this experience represents negativity, darkness, or lack. Correctly, to my mind, in the 1980s, Swedish theologian Per Frostin applied Edwards Schillebeeckx’s concept of “contrast experience” in his interpretation of the driving concern in the then-emerging black theology of liberation from South Africa. Tragically, as it is, such contrast experiences are still shared throughout the human community, and beyond.¹⁶ Hence, a liberation theology approach may serve diaconia as an interdisciplinary, practical, and relational field of action and study that is faced with and takes charge of human experience in its contextual variety, not as distinctly religious or ‘spiritual.’

Thirdly, liberation theologies are relational and dynamic, always open and subject to change. The profound inspiration of the pedagogy of Paulo Freire shaped Latin American theology – at least in its intention, though not always lived out consequently – as a “deutero-learning”, a “learning to learn” illustrates this dynamism and openness.¹⁷ The Christological emphasis of the following of Jesus and Christian life and community as

¹³ See, e.g. Stephen B. Bevans, *Essays in Contextual Theology*, vol. Vol. 12, *Theology and Mission in World Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2018); *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll (NY): Orbis Books, 1992); Sigurd Bergmann, *God in Context. A Survey of Contextual Theology* (Abingdon: Ashgate, 2003).

¹⁴ See, e.g. Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino, eds., *Mysterium Liberationis. Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993); Christopher Rowland, *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, 2nd ed., *Cambridge Companions to Religion* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Jon Sobrino, “La Teología Y El ‘Principio Liberación’” *Revista Latinoamericana de Teología* XII, no. 35 (1995).

¹⁵ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Teología De La Liberación. Perspectivas* (Lima: CEP, 1971), pp. 27-34. English translation: *A Theology of Liberation. History, Politics, and Salvation*, Revised Edition with a New Introduction. Transl. and edited by Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson. Fourth printing ed. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991).

¹⁶ Per Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa*, Doctoral thesis ed. (Lund: Lund University Press, 1988).

¹⁷ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (London: Harmondsworth, 1972); Juan Luis Segundo, *Liberation of Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1976); see also Sturla J. Stålsett, “Learning to Learn Slowly. Vocation, Transformation, and Theological Education in the Context of Globalisation”, *Ministerial Formation*, no. 94, July (2001).

belonging to ‘the way’ found in works of liberation theologians such as Jon Sobrino also underscores this processual character, so relevant to diaconal practices in various parts of the world today.

In other words, the concrete and conflictual contextuality of these liberation theologies may serve diaconal practice well, and in many ways. Other theological schools and traditions, such as, i.e., dialectical theologies, mysticism, and negative theology, evangelical or process theologies, may also contribute constructively to the self-critical orientation of diaconal practices. But in what ways and for what purposes may this theological reflection take place?

In addition to the central and constitutive theological role of interpretation already spelled out so far, there are at least two other vital functions these theologies may have in the development of diaconal work, namely, inspiration and interruption.

Theology as a Source of Inspiration in Diaconia

Diaconal work aims at relief: it seeks to reduce pain, alleviate poverty, liberate from slavery and domination, and prevent or repair damage and loss. It confronts negative reality with actions of resistance and healing. Such work does not come automatically nor easily. It needs to be set in motion; it needs motivation. It is not sufficient to *know* what is demanded from us, i.e., what it means, theoretically or conceptually, to do good or install justice. We also need the desire to actually *do* so, to engage, to struggle, to work, to serve:¹⁸ “Go and do likewise!” (Luke 10:37).

Theology may provide diaconal practice with resources for inspiration. These may be Biblical stories and narratives, like – famously – the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) or Jesus’ conversation with and healing of Bartimaeus, the blind beggar (Mark 10:46-52). They may be commandments, proverbs, or poems. They may be symbols and rituals. The role, for instance, of reading the Bible or of liturgical celebrations in relation to diaconal work, are cases in point. A closer look at the latter, liturgies and religious services, may deepen our understanding of the inspirational function of theologies in diaconia. It may also serve to develop further the distinction introduced above between explicit and implicit diaconal practice.

In the daily work of the Church City Mission, religious services are held in different contexts and occasions. There is the regular weekly “Everyday Mass” each Wednesday in the Community Church of Tøyen, a socially and culturally mixed neighbourhood in inner Oslo. The congregation is not confined to those living in the neighbourhood, however. It consists of people seeking this particular church and the City Mission for a variety of reasons. Before the service, soup is served for all in the congregation hall. The service always starts with candle lighting and free prayers, commonly raising communal, social, political as well as personal concerns. Then follows a contextually adapted and ecumenically inspired liturgy according to the *ordo* of the universal church.

At Møtstedet, the City Mission café for people spending most of their time outdoors in the streets due to poverty, homelessness, or substance abuse, weekly service is celebrated too, on Thursdays. In the evening, after most guests have enjoyed a cheap but delicious and nutritious dinner, the café is made into a sacred space. There is candle lighting, hymn singing, and prayers, expressed in (often quite broken) Norwegian, English, Romanian, Romanese, or Spanish. The brief liturgy is led by an ordained minister, and concludes with the sharing of the Holy Communion, offered at the café tables.

Sometimes, though less frequently, the same room is open at midnight, welcoming foreign women involved in street prostitution in the area, in particular. It was the expressed wish of the participating women themselves to have such a space for religious service amid the nightly context of the sex trade. These services would be ecumenical in shape and even take on certain trans-religious features, with a strong emphasis on the dignifying role of blessings in hardships and struggle.

¹⁸ See Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London: Verso, 2007).

A different case in point is the yearly service in remembrance of those who have died from drug abuse. The service is held in collaboration with the Oslo Cathedral of the Church of Norway and other denominations. Other (explicitly and implicitly) diaconal organisations or institutions, who are working with people victim to drug addiction, participate, too.

These examples serve to show a variety of ways in which liturgy informs and inspires the diaconal work of the Church City Mission. The Bible is read in community, words held to be sacred are meditated on and preached, sacraments are shared, and blessings are bestowed. Explicitly and distinctively faith-oriented and faith-based tools and working methods are applied. They bring into the concrete context and everyday life of the diaconal activity a different language and distinct bodily practices that may, at best, make space for the experience of renewal, strength, and hope in the face of danger, despair, and death. They may speak directly to the human condition of finitude, and provide recognition and comfort, even when the positive results of the efforts themselves seem to be lacking or far away. Thus, in and through such liturgical celebrations, the explicit, theologically oriented faith dimension of diaconal work gives it a distinct character and quality.

However, the history of religious abuse of social services for missional purposes, trading help for conversion, as it were, clearly shows that the introduction of such direct and explicit faith practices in diaconal work is not necessarily unproblematic, nor always helpful. The power asymmetry in any work of assistance or solidarity should always be taken into account. The dignity and freedom of the other person must be respected, in particular when the other needs support. In many cases, in fact, *not* speaking about faith or God may be theologically warranted for the practice to be a qualitatively sound diaconal practice.¹⁹

Theology as a Source of Interruption in Diaconia

Every practice needs to be questioned: Is this right? Is this the way? In particular, practices with good intentions need critical interrogation and scrutiny, since the good purpose in itself may invite complacency and unfounded self-assurance. Harm has been caused while insisting on the best of intentions. Self-interest and abuse of power have often used charity and benevolence as their convenient disguise. The history of diaconia is, sadly, no exception to this rule. Hence, all diaconal work needs to be disturbed, problematised, and shaken. It needs interruption.²⁰

Diaconia must take power seriously. Oppression and injustice are usually the direct results of the abuse of power. Critique of powerful persons, bodies, and structures is thus key to the liberating and healing efforts of explicit and implicit diaconal actors. Where may the resources for such a critique be found?

Critical theories of many disciplines and origins are useful to bring the reality and workings of power relations into public awareness, and thus prepare the ground for redistributing and restoring processes of empowerment. Such critical theories must also be used to investigate diaconal practice itself. It is a central function of diaconal studies today to continually and critically review past and present diaconal methods in order to question, correct, and propose improvements to them.

Theology has often had the role of legitimising and explaining the existing practices of religious communities, including their works of charity, healing, or societal transformation. Self-confirming righteousness is a temptation for any theology. Like any field of knowledge, theology, too, is guided and shaped by interests of which it is itself not always fully aware, nor willing to face.

¹⁹ See e.g. Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Silence: A Christian History* (London: Penguin books, 2013); Sturla J. Stålsett, "Å tie rett om Gud. Taushet som teologisk kompetanse i pastoral og diakonal praksis" – Refleksjoner Etter 22. Juli 2011, *Teologisk Tidsskrift* 2 (2013).

²⁰ See, in the context of public theology, Kjetil Fretheim, *Interruption and Imagination: Public Theology in Times of Crisis* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2016).

Nonetheless, theology may provide diaconal practice with vital critical resources. Again, different schools of theology may offer different emphases and perspectives that may be particularly useful in this regard. Dialectical theologies are particularly wary of what they see as a deep-seated human propensity to manipulate the sphere of the sacred to cover up selfish interests, failure, and lust for admiration and dominance. This theological approach insists that the all-pervasiveness of sin, perishability and human hubris can only be overcome by gracious divine self-revelation and salvific invitation. The emphasis on the absolute sovereignty of God sheds critical light on all human endeavours, at the same time as it may liberate a space in which the quest for absolute purity and human (self-)mastery is overcome by a more pragmatic, realistic and sober search for workable solutions within the limits of life as broken and blurred.²¹

Mystical theologies, with their apophatic and kataphatic approaches, take this human experience of closure and darkness to imply even the inability to name the divine properly.²² Process theological approaches may open up a critical re-evaluation of a widely held presupposition of human superiority vis-à-vis nature and the cosmos.²³

Feminist theologies critically bring to the fore the manifold ways in which God-talk and religious practices, including those presented as diaconal, are caught up in patriarchal structures that minimise the worth and dignity of women and hence corrupt human relations and life as gendered.²⁴ The awareness of the intersectionality of oppressive structures, i.e. the manifold ways in which discrimination based on race, sexuality, class, ethnicity, etc. mutually reinforce one another, invites a fruitful combination of critical insights from a variety of liberationist and contextual theologies.

Furthermore, liberation theologies show how human sinfulness reaches beyond the individual sphere, coming to concrete political expression through economic structures and systems of public governance.²⁵

Together, these theologies provide critical resources for diaconia to become what has often been named “prophetic diaconia”.²⁶ To be truly prophetic, however, i.e., in line with the practices of such biblical figures as Amos, Isaiah, or Jeremiah, or with the prophetic acts of Jesus of Nazareth, diaconia must direct its critical theological resources against itself first. The prophets of the Bible are particularly critical of power exercised with religious justification. Jesus confronts and resists the alliance of colonial imperial rule and militant religious orthodoxy to the point of being crushed under its brutal dominance in the event of the crucifixion.²⁷

Diaconia’s participation in and co-responsibility for life-negating and discriminatory practices, even in the name of Christian faith-based love, proves the usefulness of the theological concept of sin. The awareness of

²¹ In different ways, such emphases are found in both Barthian and Lutheran approaches to contemporary theology. See e.g. Eberhard Jüngel, *Theological Essays II*, J. B. Webster (ed) (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995); Inge Lønning, “Gott. Neuzeit / Sytematisch-Theologisch”, in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, Horst Robert Balz, et al. (ed.) (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1984).

²² See, i.a., Mark A. McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integration of Theology and Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

²³ See, e.g. Catherine Keller, *The Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London: Routledge, 2003).

²⁴ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992); Ivone Gebara, *Out of the Depths: Women’s Experience of Evil and Salvation*, trans. Patrick Ware (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), *et passim*.

²⁵ Cf., e.g., Elsa Tamez, *The Amnesty of Grace: Justification by Faith from a Latin American Perspective*, trans. Sharon H. Ringe (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993); Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994).

²⁶ Kjell Nordstokke (ed), and The Lutheran World Federation, *Diakonia in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment: An LWF Contribution to the Understanding and Practice of Diakonia* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2009), p.81-83.

²⁷ Jon Sobrino, *Jesucristo Liberador. Lectura Histórica-Teológica De Jesús De Nazaret* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1991); *La Fe En Jesucristo. Ensayo Desde Las Víctimas* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1999). English translation: *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth* (Maryknoll (NY): Orbis Books, 1993); *Christ the Liberator: A View from the Victims* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001).

not unambiguously representing justice and goodness is crucial for the credibility of any struggle for goodness and justice for others, and for each other. Since admitting one's shortcomings and errors does not come easy, and neither should be seen as a merely individualistic, cognitive, or purposeful matter, the liturgical practice of confessing sins in the community becomes an essential tool through which theologies may serve diaconal practice. It becomes one of the ways in which a healthy interruption of the diaconal undertaking is created, so that it may be better tuned to hear the call of the suffering other, through which Christian faith expects to perceive God's voice and loving presence.

Finally, such interruption is, however, not only critique and correction. It may as well, and equally important, preserve the space for surprise. Nothing is just what it seems to be. Personal experience, our lived reality, is endlessly enigmatic. To 'respect' someone or something means, etymologically, to 'see anew,' i.e., to hold back one's first judgment, to permit the other to appear in her or his otherness. Respect, in this sense, is indeed important in any activity designed at assisting the other through healing, rehabilitation, or liberation. At this point then, theologies may serve diaconal practice by suggesting to see and safeguard this otherness of the other person as resting in the otherness of God. The biblical motive formulated in Genesis 1:27 that considers the human to be created in the 'image of God' is one instance of securing this God-given and thus dignified otherness of the other.

Another fundamental theological tenet in this regard is holding Jesus to be represented in the neighbour, in particular, in the vulnerable human person whose life is dependent on ours in a myriad of ways, seen and unseen (cf. Mt. 25:31-46, *et passim*). Jewish-Christian faith is seeing the otherness of the other as resting in the otherness of God. Crucially, at the same time, the Christian church holds God in Christ to reveal Godself as saving love, historicised and embodied in the testimony of Jesus of Nazareth. Thus, the inherent ambiguity of this enigmatic otherness of God and the other human being is overcome. In itself, otherness may be as threatening as it may be benevolent. Surprise may be a shock that causes fear, rather than joy.

Permitting its practice to be interrupted by the surprisingly good news of Christian faith in God as love overcoming the forces of sin, destruction, and death, may thus serve to renew and rekindle diaconia. The interruption provided by theological interpretation of diaconal practice may serve as inspiration – and promise.

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13. DIACONIA AS PUBLIC THEOLOGY WITHIN A SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

Nadine Bowers Du Toit¹

Introduction

The notion of *diaconia* has been limited in some circles to that of compassionate service or framed as “acts of charity and benevolence that have been conferred upon the less fortunate or needy in one’s community”.² In recent years, however, while it has been affirmed as a biblical notion which “articulates the mandate of service and love of neighbour”, it has also been emphasised as being inclusive of socio-economic justice and requiring engagement with the public sphere. Indeed “diakonia, which belongs to the essence of Christ, shapes and characterises the life of the church in a publicly responsible manner”.³ This has long been recognised within the context of diaconal action in South Africa. South African scholar of diaconia, Karel August makes the important point that the “pre-eminent activity of the church is in the public arena, not in the sanctuary” – sent into the public arena with the ethical imperative of Jesus to proclaim the Kingdom of God.⁴ Indeed, August argues that “in entering the public arena, the church stays true to the good news to the poor [...] to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free” (Lk. 4:18-19).⁵ The latter highlights the need to explore the field of *diaconia* with reference to the public voice of the church and this has long been the manner in which the South African church has understood diaconia as public. This contribution firstly explores what is meant by Public Theology and then proceeds to explore the ways in which diaconia as a field relates to that of public theology within the South African context. This contribution concludes with a reflection on diaconia as public-prophetic, which may be identified as the most prominent discourse within South African diaconal praxis.

What Is Meant by Public Theology?

The notion of Public Theology itself is a fairly recent and complex one and a variety of possible explanations makes it challenging to clearly differentiate Public Theology from other similar fields such as Political Theology, Social Ethics and Civil Religion. The term ‘public’ itself is complex. Smit states that in recent practice, ‘public’ can be used in various contexts, with various meanings. However, in its most common sense, this ‘public’ refers to ‘common interest’ or ‘common good’, that is, it refers to almost everybody or to the majority of people with regard to specific aspects of their lives which are not private but shared with others.⁶ Smit best defines the ‘public’ in ‘public theology’, to mean “a specific sphere of human life together distinct from politics, the economy and civil life, namely the deliberate formation of public opinion which has the common good at heart and promotes human dignity and justice”.⁷ While distinct, Public Theology indeed

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² Isabel Phiri and Kim Dongsung, “Called to be a Diaconical Community through a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace,” *The Ecumenical Review* (2014), 66(3), p. 253.

³ Paul Chung, “Diaconia and economic justice,” *The Ecumenical Review* (2014), 66(3), p. 302.

⁴ Karel August, *Equipping the Saints: God’s measure for development* (Bellville: Printman, 2014), p. 101.

⁵ August, *Equipping the Saints*, p. 102.

⁶ Dirk Smit, “Christian in Public: aims, methodologies and issues in public theology”, in Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology Series. Ed Len Hansen (Sun Media: Stellenbosch, 2007), p. 29.

⁷ Smit, “Christian in public”, p. 39.

takes place within these spheres or sectors of society (social, political, economic) and Koopman,⁸ furthermore, notes that Gustafson outlines four varieties of moral discourse “that suggest four ways in which theology can engage with these spheres: prophetic discourse, narrative discourse, ethical or technical discourse and policy discourse”.⁹ These discourses are largely utilised below to discuss Diaconia as Public Theology within a South African context.

Diaconia as Public Theology in South Africa

Firstly, it is important to note that diaconal work is ‘public’ in the most basic sense, in that it works for the ‘common good’ of society in largely addressing the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalised in society. More often than not, in a South African context much of this work is done by Faith Based Organisations and local churches, who as non-profit entities operate in the realm of civil society, but are driven by a Kingdom imperative which is rooted in a call for human dignity and justice.¹⁰ This work has a long history in South Africa, beginning with the colonial missionaries and, while the latter is not uncontested, it is important to note that during Apartheid, it was largely Christian diaconal organisations and churches that addressed the poverty of the black populace, due to the state’s racial marginalisation of the time.¹¹ In a post-Apartheid context, public diaconal organisations remain the ‘harbingers of hope’ – acting within contexts of deep marginalisation with high rates of poverty and racial inequality. Diaconal organisations, therefore, seek to work together with individuals and communities in re-imagining what a Kingdom vision of community looks like in a context where almost half of the poor have no wage income and still live under deplorable conditions excluded from opportunities and resources required for economic and social mobility.¹² Myers notes that “there is also a need to help the community and us to recognize the activity of God in the story of the community...our theology tells us that God has been doing redemptive and creative work in the life of the community, if only we look for it”.¹³

⁸ Nico Koopman, “Public Theology in (South) Africa: A Trinitarian approach”, *International Journal of Public Theology*, 2007, 1(2), p. 200.

⁹ Prophetic discourse points to the roots of injustice and calls us towards a hopeful vision, motivating us towards the realisation of a more just and “ideal state of affairs”, while narrative discourse invites stories and parables of moral heroes and community events that “sustain the common memory” and shape “the conscience and moral identities and characters of the members of the community”. Ethical or technical discourse on the other hand “uses philosophical and rigorous modes of moral argumentation, employing logic and precise definitions” and “clear definitions of justice and rights”. Policy discourse, of course, refers to the “discourse of the policy and decision makers in society, dealing with questions about what is desirable within the constraints of what is possible” and “whether we have the power to effect change”. These moral discourses highlight the ‘tasks’ of the church in the public domain(s), so to speak, which include: prophetic speaking with regards to issues of poverty, marginalisation and injustice; the telling of stories of hope and activation of prophetic imagination in order to imagine a better future; the need for the “hard work of interdisciplinary and intersectoral analysis and deliberation that can lead to jointly reached preliminary solutions” and the need to engage as a catalyst for advocacy and social change in engaging political, social and economic role players and institutions regarding policies that “impact the most vulnerable in society”. Cf. Koopman, “Public Theology in (South) Africa”, pp. 200-202.

¹⁰ Nadine Bowers Du Toit, “Does faith matter? Exploring the emerging value and tensions ascribed to faith identity in South African faith-based organizations”, *HTS Teologiese Studies / HTS Theological Studies*, 2019, 75(4).

¹¹ Nadine Bowers Du Toit, “Rise up and walk”: tracing the trajectory of the Carnegie discourse and plotting a way forward”, *NGTT*, 2014, 55, pp. 206-208.

¹² Tiaan Meiring, Catherine Kannemeyer & Elanri Potgieter, *The gap between rich and poor: South African society’s biggest divide depends on where you think you fit in.* (SALDRU: Working Paper Series Number 220, 2018), p. 5, cf. Koopman, “Public Theology in (South) Africa”, p. 200.

¹³ Bryant Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2011), p. 207.

Diaconia is also public in that it is not confined to those of the Christian religion alone, the work of diaconia is to work with all those who require assistance, empowerment and advocacy irrespective of their beliefs.¹⁴ While the majority of South Africans confess to be Christian, we also have a plurality of faiths within our context (Islam, African Traditional Religion, Hinduism etc.). A recent study appears to indicate that it is precisely because their motivation and identity as diaconal actors is rooted in the call within the biblical texts to care and seek justice for the poor, marginalised and oppressed, that South African FBO's believe it is their calling to serve all neighbours.¹⁵ It is interesting to note, however, that this study also revealed that precisely because many FBO's identities are so deeply rooted in their faith, that it is often integrated into their programmes in such a way that it borders on proselytization.¹⁶ These recent findings indicate a shift from the more faith "neutral" practices identified by Swart during the early post-Apartheid years.¹⁷

In working within the public or civil domain, diaconia that seeks legitimacy should and must engage in the "hard work of interdisciplinary and intersectoral analysis and deliberation".¹⁸ In South Africa, the field is locally termed "Theology and Development" and draws from a range of discourse including both intra (meaning theological) and inter-disciplinary fields such as: Biblical Studies, Missiology, Ethics, Systematic Theology and Ecclesiology, Development Studies, Economics, Political Science, Sociology and Anthropology – to name but a few.¹⁹ Training in this field within SA has been undertaken for over 20 years at institutions such as the University of Stellenbosch and University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, and more recently it has been established in other universities around the country in order to equip clergy and other faith workers for working in this field.²⁰

The most obvious way in which diaconia is public within the SA context is perhaps with regard to its prophetic and advocacy role – the "need to engage as a catalyst for advocacy and social change in engaging political, social and economic role players and institutions regarding policies that impact the most vulnerable in society".²¹ This is discussed separately in the following section.

¹⁴ This is echoed by Smith who notes that Public Theology can be described as our shared socio-economic-political life, or rather, an account of "how to live in common with neighbors who don't believe what we believe, don't love what we love, don't hope for what we await". James Smith, *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology*, 2017 (Baker Publishing: Grand Rapids), p. 11.

¹⁵ Bowers Du Toit, "Does faith matter?", p. 3.

¹⁶ Bowers Du Toit, "Does faith matter?", p. 3.

¹⁷ Ignatius Swart, "Networks and partnerships for social justice? The pragmatic turn in the religious social development debate in South Africa", in *Religion and Social Development in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Perspectives for Critical Engagement*, Ignatius Swart, Hermann Rocher, Sulina Green & Johannes Erasmus (eds) (Stellenbosch: SUN Press, 2010), p. 86.

¹⁸ Stephanie Dietrich, "Mercy and Truth Are Met Together; Righteousness and Peace Have Kissed Each Other" (Psalm 85:10): Biblical and Systematic Theological Perspectives on Diaconia as Advocacy and Fight for Justice", in *Diaconia as Social Practice: an introduction*, Stephanie Dietrich, Knud Jorgensen, Kari Korslien, Kjell Nordstokke (eds) (Oxford: Regnum, 2015), p. 45: "This multidisciplinary identity of diaconia, and thus ability to relate theory and practice, makes the concept extraordinarily useful in the encounter between church and world. Because the science of diaconia includes both a profound analysis of the context, theoretical multidisciplinary reflections and competencies on professional practice, it is notably useful when dealing with the church's responsibilities in and towards the world".

¹⁹ August, *Equipping the Saints*, p. 93; Cf. Steve De Gruchy, "Theological education and social development: Politics, preferences and praxis in curriculum design", *Missionalia*, 2003, 31(3), pp. 451-466.

²⁰ August, *Equipping the Saints*, p. 88.

²¹ Koopman, "Public Theology in South Africa", p. 202.

Prophetic Diaconia as Core Task of Public Diaconia in South Africa

In addressing issues of poverty and marginalisation, it is important to remember that “we are not primarily dealing with the conditions of scarcity, but rather with fundamental questions of power, control and distribution [...] Thus, certain relationships in society – those to do with ownership and power, whether social, racial, economic, cultural or political – are responsible for perpetuating poverty”.²² In recent years, there has been a distinct global shift to recognise this within ecumenical diaconia and, therefore, an emphasis on advocacy for justice and peace and a shift away from a narrow understanding of diaconia as mere charitable work. While traditional relief and welfare work are legitimate and well-meaning in many contexts, there remains a need to address the roots of poverty and marginalisation.²³ This prophetic diaconia calls us into solidarity with the vulnerable, oppressed and marginalised and emphasises the need for diaconia to engage the political and economic powers prophetically and speak truth to power.²⁴

This includes advocacy, mobilisation and policy work on national, regional and global levels.²⁵ In South Africa, for example during the Apartheid era, churches combined their daily relief and welfare work with the poor with prophetic critique of an unjust state, through mass mobilisation and protest.²⁶ While some sectors of the church lent tacit support to the Apartheid regime, others were vocal in their public witness during this period. At the dawn of democracy in 1994, Social Development conferences were held by church-related bodies, which called on the new democratic state to centre the importance of a people-centred and participatory development paradigm.²⁷ In a post-Apartheid era, however, several diaconia scholars have argued that the church lost its prophetic voice for some years in its move from a “theology of resistance” (Liberation Theology) to a “theology of assistance” – which favoured a pragmatic rather than prophetic stance towards the state.²⁸ This move meant that churches more openly sought support and co-operation from the

²² Chevannes Jeune, “Justice, Freedom and Social Transformation, in *The Church in Response to Human Need Samuel*, Vinay Samuel & Chris Sugden (eds) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 219.

²³ Kjell Nordstokke, “Ecumenical Diakonia”, *The Ecumenical Review*, 2014, 66(3), pp. 265-273; Cf. Phiri & Dongseung, “Called to be a diaconal community”, pp. 255-256.

²⁴ Chung makes a clear call for diaconia to address the notion of empire and call for global economic justice against the forces of neo-liberal globalisation which seeks the systemic destruction of already marginalised groups, cultural diversity and the earth. He notes that: “The church’s responsibility for economic justice characterizes diaconia as an essential element of the church’s life – grounded in Christ’s way to incarnation and reconciliation. It upholds the church’s engagement with public and global issues, which are imbued with the signs of the times on behalf of God’s shalom, justice, and the integrity of life. The God who forgives is the One who demands justice. Economic justice is an indispensable part of the church’s responsibility and prophetic diaconia for society”. Chung, “Diaconia and economic justice”, p. 307.

²⁵ Today, organisations, such as Diaconia Sweden, sees themselves as political actors in their own right in working for change in areas such as Fairtrade, freedom of speech, peace and conflict work, Sexual and Reproductive Rights etc. largely through policy work and advocacy (<https://www.diakonia.se/en/How-we-work/Advocacy-and-policy/>). Advocacy issues on a global level addressed by the World Council of Churches include care for creation and climate change, advocacy for stateless people, children, human rights, HIV/AIDS, peace and conflict work, solidarity with churches in the Middle East and Palestine/Israel issue etc. (<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/public-witness>). While in the Global South, bodies such as the All Africa Conference of Churches include issues as such as Human Trafficking and advocacy for economic justice and therefore “engage in multi-stakeholder dialogue on national debts, international aid, access to markets (economic partnership agreement)”. <http://www.aacc-ceta.org/en/programmes/peace-diakonia-and-development>.

²⁶ Bowers Du Toit, “Rise up and walk”.

²⁷ Swart, “Networks and partnerships for social justice”, p. 17.

²⁸ De Gruchy, “Theological education and social development”, p. 452; Cf. Ignatius Swart, “Meeting the Challenge of Poverty and Exclusion: The emerging field of Development Research in South African Practical Theology”, *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 2008, 12, pp. 104-149. Cf. Nadine Bowers Du Toit, “The elephant in the room: The need to re-discover the intersection between poverty, powerlessness and power in ‘Theology and Development’ discourse”, *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 2016, 72(4) 10.4102/hts.v72i4.3459.

state in its diaconia work and appeared to lend tacit support to the state. In the wake of widespread government corruption and ongoing inequality and poverty, it appears however, that the church is once again finding its voice as a champion of the poor and marginalised in speaking truth to power at the national level, but also in working with government during, for example, the recent COVID-19 pandemic. It should be noted, that as South Africa is a development state and not a welfare state (as many European nations are) and it regards the religious sector as a key role-player in civil society. The state, therefore, continues to fund grassroots-based development FBO's (registered as NGO's) as they are often the most suitable delivery agents for the state in social welfare in certain sectors and geographical areas.

At the grassroots level, the work of diaconia includes that of advocacy, mobilisation of the marginalised, and policy work to engage the social, political or economic systems which result in poverty and marginalisation, which must also be addressed at the level of communities.²⁹ In addition, it is important to note that both diaconal organisations and congregational advocacy or even a combination of the two are the key change agents. In a congregational setting, it may take the form of "justice ministries" that seek justice for marginalised groups in their communities by engaging with local municipalities/government or other sectors of their local community for reforms (i.e. business, education). In a diaconal setting, an example of this (although not limited to only this) may be that those working with vulnerable and marginalised groups, whose dignity and rights are at times not recognised by the state (such as the disabled, migrants, the elderly, abused women and children), engage with the government with regard to exclusionary policies or practices or even advocate for a change in the law with regards to these groups.³⁰ While early South African scholars in the field of diaconia in SA have long noted the need for local congregations, in particular, to form such justice ministries at grassroots, it is evident that many remain in a charity or welfare mode and struggle to mobilise their congregations to address these matters. The reason for this is identified as the inability of clergy to identify poverty as not only an issue of charity, but as rooted in the biblical call for justice and the need to recognise power as a key hermeneutical category in a context where poverty, race and class remain aligned and where Gender Based Violence is at one of the highest rates in the world.³¹

Conclusion

Diaconia operates for the common good and is, thus, public in the most basic sense. In this contribution, however, it has been argued that diaconia as public theology is also prophetic, narrative discourse, ethical, technical and advocates for social change. Within the South African context, it is clear that diaconal work is indeed public, but that there remain challenges in the church appropriating its prophetic witness – particularly at grassroots levels.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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²⁹ Advocacy is more often than not defined as acting on behalf of those that have been marginalised so as to speak on behalf of the "voiceless"; however, foundational to advocacy and mobilisation within sound diaconal practice is that of recognising that diaconal work should be peoplecentred (i.e. recognise that the poor and marginalised have a voice) and should act from the starting point of the peoples' own needs and assets. <https://www.diakonia.se/en/How-we-work/Advocacy-and-policy/>.

³⁰ Myers, *Walking with the Poor*, p. 272.

³¹ August, *Equipping the Saints*, p. 108; Bowers Du Toit, "The Elephant in the room", p. 2.

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14. INTERDISCIPLINARY AND CONTEXTUALITY ANALYSIS IN DIACONIC STUDIES

Martin Büscher and Dennis Solon¹

Diaconia is, as is evangelism, part and parcel of Christian churches' identity and mandate. Dissimilarly to the spiritual concerns of the churches, diaconic concerns of charity, care and advocacy are much closely related to social contexts and to different competencies of how to exercise these concerns. Likewise, different professions, abilities and competencies join church organisations. It is expedient for social work, medical care and health services, social counselling and law, socio-economic and management facilities to fight hunger, poverty, violence, social injustice. All these have their own faces in different regions, nations, and cultures globally. Rationalities dispose of their own reference systems.

Interdisciplinarity and contextuality in diaconic services must be considered and be put at the centre of diaconic practice. Different rationalities tend also to have their own distinct reference systems.

In this article, we will look at some relevant disciplines for diaconic studies and we will differentiate between specific contexts for the need of diaconic engagement. We will focus on three disciplinary perspectives, i.e. the theological, the economic, and the related matters of social work, pedagogics or psychology. Given the manifold perspectives available, we will choose examples from contexts in different global settings (Philippines, South Africa, Germany) to indicate the relativity of access. Two passages from the Bible will serve as examples for relating empathy and good organisation: the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25–37) and the story about Moses and his father-in-Law, Jethro (Ex. 18).

Interdisciplinarity on Biblical Grounds: Unity of Faith and Organisation

Interdisciplinarity is an enriching and constructive characteristic of theological reflection. As a reflection of religious experiences, theology is not located in a social vacuum. Although human experiences may be construed as religious in the course of theological reflection, they do not solely reflect what is strictly religious. Therefore, it must take into consideration the fact that experiences and interpretations can benefit from the perspectives of other disciplines, such as economics, management, psychology and other related sciences. For these reasons, neglecting the contributions of other disciplines would be counterproductive to the task of theology. Theology, like these other disciplines develops knowledge from study and analysis; theology aims at knowledge of God and understanding of God's activities in the world. In this postmodern age, interdisciplinarity can help minimise the polarisation and adversarial relationship between theology and scientific disciplines, or at least to minimise scenarios of power plays where one seeks to dismiss or subsume the other into one's own domain.²

The parable of the Good Samaritan

The parable of the Good Samaritan is placed within the didactic section on discipleship and mission in Luke's Gospel (9:51–13:21). It juxtaposes a right perception of reality with right action. The story in 9:51–9:55

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² For a detailed discussion on the issue, see J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, *The Shaping of Rationality: Toward Interdisciplinarity in Theology and Science* (Grand Rapids Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), esp. pp. 17–21.

reveals an adverse scenario. The disciples, James and John, perceive correctly that Jesus is not welcome in a Samaritan village (9:51–52), but the words they say reflect their readiness to pursue destructive retaliation: “Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” Indeed, chapter 13, which encloses and corresponds with this section, invites the reader to a radical change of perceiving reality – especially in contexts of suffering and death – and undertaking action, as conveyed by an ethic of repentance (Gr. *metanoia*; cf. 13:1–5, 10–17). The Samaritans and Galileans have not suffered more than others due to the particular gravity of their sins, but the call for renewal and repentance is equally valid and relevant for all, including the pious Jews in Jerusalem.

In contrast to what has been presented in Luke 9:51–55, the parable in 10:25–37 presents a concrete example of right perception of reality, as well as right action. While on a teaching journey, a lawyer³ raises a question to test Jesus (*ekpeirazō*): “What must I do so that I may inherit eternal life?” The Greek word *ekpeirazō* (lit. to test; to tempt) betrays the purpose of his question, that is to check Jesus’ understanding of the Scripture. Jesus returns the lawyer’s question by asking him, “What is written in the Law (*nomos*)? How do you perceive (*anagignōskō*) it?” Here, Jesus examines the lawyer by asking how he interprets or perceives the Law, highlighting that his perception is based on the things that are happening around him. In the conversation, both Jesus and the lawyer agree on the ethical imperative of loving God as well as their neighbour (*plēsin*). What matters now is doing it: “Do this and you will live” (v. 28). At this point, the lawyer is caught off guard and, as he is no longer the one testing Jesus and wants to reclaim his initial position, he throws Jesus a further probing question: “And who is my neighbour?” This second question sets up Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan – we can call this character, the diaconic neighbour.

The *Good Samaritan* (vv. 31–35, NIV): Symbol of a Diaconic Manager

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came to where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

Afterwards Jesus asks the lawyer who among the three was a neighbour to the victim. And the latter is again correct in identifying the Samaritan as the neighbour, to which Jesus utters a striking rejoinder: “Go and do likewise!” From a perspective of diaconic management, the Samaritan can rightly be considered as the first diaconic manager in the teachings of Jesus. He perceives his situation correctly and does rightly: he is touched by the brokenness and suffering of the victim, he reacts and organises support. The Good Samaritan brings the injured man to the inn, he gives money to the innkeeper and indicates that he will come to see whether there is more need of his assistance. The Good Samaritan is even taking on the role of a financial controller.

The need for professional organisation can also be discovered in the story of the Old Testament, in Exodus 18, where Jethro is honoured by his people and given tasks of responsible judgement.

³ Gr. *nomikos*, lit. “an expert in the law”, or someone trained in legal matters. Cf. Frederick Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 675.

The story of Jethro, father-in-law of Moses

Exodus 18 is the concluding section of the account of the people's experience of the wilderness under the leadership of Moses (Ex. 15–18). Moses has so far led the people to victory, first against Pharaoh and his army (Ex. 15) and later against the Amalakites –because God was with them (cf. 15:1–18; 17:15). Added to this recollection is God's presence and provision of water and food throughout the people's journey in the wilderness (15:22–17:6).

The story in Exodus 18 occurs in three stages: first, Jethro hears of God's work of delivering the people through Moses and, along with Moses' wife Zipporah and her sons, comes to the wilderness to meet him (vv. 1–12). The second stage presents Moses busily taking care of the various needs of the people, mostly resolving interpersonal disputes and teaching them "God's rule and instructions" (vv. 13). This undertaking preoccupies him all day. The third stage presents an active character of Jethro (vv. 14–23), who in the second stage is presented as a perceptive observer of Moses' leadership activities. He discusses with Moses the basic processes of his leadership activities in service to God and to the people, asking him about *what* he is doing and about the reason *why* he is sitting alone "from morning until evening" as he responds to the people's issues. Moses explains that what he is doing is helping people to solve their problems (v. 16).⁴ His answer is implied in his statement that "people come to *me* to seek God" (v. 15, emphasis added). It appears that Moses understands himself as the person entrusted to resolve the people's disputes and that the task of making God's instructions known lies on his shoulders.

Jethro argues that this is not the case. Accordingly, what Moses is "doing is not good" (v. 17). His assessment is apparently not about the normative aspect of what he does – that is, helping people arrive at solutions to their problems – but in the manner of how he goes about it. His way of doing it, Jethro argues, will later wear him out, and then he will be little use to the people around him. Thus, resolving disputes is something he cannot do alone. He suggests to Moses a better process (vv. 19–23, NIV):

19 Now, listen to me. Let me give you some advice. And I pray God will be with you. You should continue listening to the problems of the people. And you should continue to speak to God about these things. 20 You should explain God's laws and teachings to the people. Warn them not to break the laws. Tell them the right way to live and what they should do. 21 But you should also choose some of the people to be judges and leaders.

"Choose good men you can trust—men who respect God. Choose men who will not change their decisions for money. Make these men rulers over the people. There should be rulers over 1000 people, 100 people, 50 people, and even over ten people. 22 Let these rulers judge the people. If there is a very important case, then they can come to you and let you decide what to do. But they can decide the other cases themselves. In this way these men will share your work with you, and it will be easier for you to lead the people. 23 If you do this as God directs you, then you will be able to do your job without tiring yourself out. And the people can still have all their problems solved before they return home."

Jethro's advice provides concrete steps to resolving the people's problems:

1. Moses continues to stand between God and the people (lit. being "for the people before God", v. 19), in the sense of being mediator or *diakonos* (cf. Acts 6);
2. A set of guidelines indicating the people's ethical duties and responsibilities to be formulated (v. 20);
3. Organise a leadership structure by identifying leaders (Heb. *sar*) for a small group of ten to a large group of a thousand (v. 21), who shall decide on minor cases (v. 22). Moses will then only have to deal with larger issues; this way his burden could be minimised.

⁴The Hebrew *shaphat*, lit. to judge, refers to Moses' role of making a decision to solve disputes. The somewhat loose use of the word here implies the sense of mediating to arrive at an acceptable solution to the issue at hand.

This process of resolving issues, especially in reference to the third element, approximates very much what we call nowadays the principle of subsidiarity, whether in management processes of institutions and companies or large social and political organisations like the European Union. The result of which, according to Jethro, would be an experience of peace (*shalom*) for the people (v. 23). The fourth and final stage (vv. 24–27) simply narrates the implementation of Jethro’s advice.

In both stories we encounter a religious tension. On the one hand, we observe empathy, faithfulness, existential religious grounding; on the other hand, we discover thoughtful organising. The Good Samaritan identifies an adequate avenue for his help, gives a good sum of money, offers a mandate and indicates that he will check the results later on. Jethro observes Moses in his dedication and wonders whether the workload put on Moses is human. In both cases, the relation of faith and good management are twins. They belong together. Looking at contemporary competencies related to theology or management we encounter quite often separate worlds. Not only are they not related as natural friends, they are even looked upon as adversaries and in contradiction with each other. The biblical stories tell a different lesson. They tell the story of unity between faith and organisation.

Cultural, Socio-Economic and Political Relativity of Understanding Diaconic Concerns

In theology, and particularly in biblical studies, context matters. Depending on emphasis, some scholars concentrate on a biblical author’s context, yet some on the present reader’s context. Contextual consideration holds true for diaconal theological reflection and praxis. Diaconia, or the act of service in general, takes place in various contexts not only in church and service institutions, but also in the context of the people who experience such kinds of service. Given this assumption, diaconia studies require consideration of contexts. By context, we mean the social, political and economic conditions in which diaconia is undertaken, including cultural contexts, e.g. religious life, values, and customs.

Contextuality sees itself within the realm of hermeneutics. In considering diaconal contexts, questions that are asked revolve around situations of need and helplessness, disenfranchisement, marginalisation, and oppression that people experience; the historical, social and cultural factors that have direct effects on these situations; the relevant changes that occur in the course of time; and the forms of diaconia that are (or envisioned to be) undertaken in such a given context.

Conceptual considerations

Semantically, context is that which comes with any given text. In biblical literary criticism, one can speak of an immediate context, context of an entire literary corpus, and context of the whole Bible.⁵ However, texts could also metaphorically refer to any object of study or reflection, such art, music, or (human) action.⁶ Following this premise, any event, phenomenon or experience is a text and its context comprises the elements, such as events, actions or conditions, which surround it. Stricklen summarises this line of understanding poignantly: “Whatever is lifted out of the flow of ordinary life for reflection, beckoning others to enter into its projected world of meaning, is a text.”⁷

An understanding of texts as actions and experiences is especially helpful for theological reflections in diaconia, since this discipline does not deal with static objects, rather with dynamic events in the lives of peoples or in the movements of the ecosystem. The contextuality of diaconia studies reflects conscientious

⁵ See, for example, William Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert L. Jr. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas, TX: Word Pub., 1993), pp. 162–171.

⁶ Cf. Teresa Lockhart Stricklen, “What is the Text We Exegete for Preaching? Or, Meaningful Exchange and the Realm of God,” *Encounter* 68 (2007), pp. 15–31, esp. pp. 16–18, there with some references to H. G. Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur.

⁷ Stricklen, “What is the Text We Exegete for Preaching?” p. 17.

attention to the surrounding circumstances of a diaconic activity or program. At the same time, it also invites contextualisation of gathered information in one's home context. This is what is usually included in the teaching program of the Institute for Diaconic Science and Diaconic Management, Protestant University Wuppertal/Bethel "International Master of Diaconic Management" (IMADM),⁸ wherein participants make contextual observations of diaconal institutions visited. Afterward, the participant retreats to undergo inward reflection on their own context in dialogue with what transpired during the said exposure visit.

Contextual considerations could also go beyond local situations, especially in studies in which participants from differing contextual backgrounds come together to grapple with contextual issues. In this case, one can speak of inter-contextuality, where participants share their differing contextual perceptions of observed realities and seek a sense of such realities together. Due to references to surrounding realities of human experiences, contextuality and intercontextuality are characteristic features of public theology, and the ultimate ground of the tension between the two is God's trans-contextuality.⁹ Intercontextuality plays a crucial role in discerning how contexts – past, present, or future – "interpenetrate each other".¹⁰ For this reason, attention to historical aspects as well as visions for the future play an important role in diaconia studies.

As such, diaconia as the practice of theology can be classified within the perspective of public theology.¹¹ However, crucial to this essay is diaconia's contextuality as an act rooted in a critical perception of concrete realities that affect those on the margins. Let us take as an example economic context in the study of diaconia. Here, we refer to experiences of students of the international Master of Arts in Diaconic Management (IMADM) degree program of the Institute of Diaconic Management (IDM) of the Protestant University Wuppertal/Bethel during the period 2018–2020. During each of the modular sections in Asia (Indonesia, Philippines), Africa (South Africa and Tanzania), and Europe (Germany) the students have the opportunity to visit various diaconal institutions in the region for about a week, noting their observations. They then use these notes when reflecting together and discussing them in line with their home contexts. During the usual daily reflections, the participants took the opportunity to reflect about diakonia in different contextual settings and to learn from inter-contextual dialogue about diakonia.

In the Asian sections, in Indonesia and the Philippines, poverty was especially visible, from lack of access to basic education and health care, to deficits in financial literacy. The Sion Foundation of the GKJ TU in Central Java has diaconal programs which look into these issues. For instance, it discovered the need to include women and enable them to participate in solving the problems of financial literacy in local households. As a result, a women's credit cooperative organised by local women in a village in Central Java becomes a living witness of female empowerment and improved financial management in local homes.

Exposure to socio-economic realities in other contexts also invites dialogue with one's present perceptions. This is a case with the students who, three months after their experience in East Java, found themselves in various places in Manila, Philippines. One of the striking experiences they gathered there was the visit to a slum area by the river banks in Tondo District, which is considered one of the country's poorest

⁸ Master of Arts Diaconic Management (IMADM), organised in collaboration with the United Evangelical Mission (UEM), Wuppertal/Bethel, Medan, Dar es Salaam since 2011 for African, South East Asian and European Students with leadership experience in their home churches.

⁹ Cf. Dirk J. Smit, "Does it Matter? On Whether there is Method in the Madness," in *A Companion to Public Theology* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2017), pp. 67–92, esp. pp. 86–87.

¹⁰ José Medina, *Speaking from Elsewhere: A New Contextualist Perspective on Meaning, Identity, and Discursive Agency*, Annotated edition. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006), p. xiii.

¹¹ Cf. Ulrich H. J. Körtner, *Diakonie und Öffentliche Theologie. Diakoniewissenschaftliche Studien* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), p. v "Wenn es zutrifft, dass Kirche wesentlich Diakonie ist, liegt es unmittelbar auf der Hand, dass diakonische Theologie als Öffentliche Theologie zu treiben ist. "

neighbourhoods.¹² The following excerpt from the song of Gary Granada entitled “*Bahay*” (house) captures to some extent the sad realities of the slums of Tondo:¹³

*Isang araw ako’y nadalaw sa bahay tambakan
Labinlimang mag-anak ang duo’y nagsiksikan
Nagtitiis sa munting barung-barong na sira-sira
Habang doon sa isang mansyon halos walang nakatira...
Isang bantog na senador ang unang nilapitan ko
At dalubhasang propesor ng malaking kolehiyo
Ang pinagpala sa mundo, ang dyaryo at ang pulpito
Lahat sila’y nagkasundo na ang tawag sa ganito ay bahay*

I happened to pass by a house in a dump site
Wherein 15 families in a cramped condition reside
Suffering under a badly dilapidated shanty
Whereas in a big house there hardly lives any...
I inquired first with a distinguished senator
Then at a big university with an expert professor
Also the world’s acclaimed – the gazette and the pulpit
To call such “a house” they have all agreed

Indeed, such an image reflects utter disenfranchisement and the resultant induced exposure to pollutive environments, and to some extent inability of government authorities to provide basic needs, such as decent shelter, alternative source of living, education and health care. It is an image of a broken humanity. One may even wonder whether things have indeed changed for the better. During a given evening reflection, a participant shared his observation that the slum area in Tondo presented him directly with a different perspective of poverty and humanity’s daily struggle to be human. Here, understanding poverty goes far beyond the question of basic income, but has to deal with questions of how people can have an income at all for subsistence living.

Diaconia in a European, resp. German context in an economically advanced industrial society becomes visible in a well-organised, often with a state-funded appearance. Poverty is a hidden problem, only publicly visible in rare cases. There are shelters, offices, meeting points for people affected, out of sight in the lives of those better off. People who are not employed, one parent families, people of chronic burn-out somehow invisibly get along or are professionally cared for. There are welfare regulations as well as corresponding rights for disadvantaged people. The social welfare system is a strong part of society and gives a guarantee for the minimum standards for a good life. Such basic financial guarantees, though, do not necessarily guarantee a life in human dignity at the same time. Refugees, can by law receive a certain minimum to survive, preventing hunger and alleviating sickness, but social integration, cultural empathy or respect for human dignity cannot be guaranteed by the social system alone. High professional standards and equipment in the areas of diaconic services for people with disabilities, homes for the elderly, youth work or at hospitals can be looked at as impressive by its high standards, but the religious, spiritual or ethical dimension often stays invisible for observers coming from a different international cultural background.

¹² Cf. Ian Morley, “Manila,” *Cities* 72 (2018), pp. 17–23.

¹³ Authors’ translation of select lines.

Summary: Integrating Diaconic Studies in Contexts and Disciplines

In biblico-theological reflections related to diaconic studies interdisciplinarity and contextuality therefore play a crucial, decisive role. As gleaned from the two biblical examples above, noble faith commitments and convictions are to be translated into responsible action. Perceptions of realities, including those that are external, are part and parcel of every faith journey. The expert in law who asks Jesus about inheriting eternal life and seeking the neighbour is confronted by a Samaritan character, an outsider and perhaps for him an unthinkable example for the practice of his faith. Moses is able to discover a new way of resolving organisational issues through another's perspective. The discipline of theology may, therefore, avoid coming into dialogue, collaboration or cooperation with other disciplines, but to do so is only to its own detriment. This especially holds true for the practice and study of diaconia in this fragmented world.

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15. CHRISTIAN SOCIAL SERVICE IN COUNTRIES WITH A PREDOMINANTLY CHRISTIAN TRADITION AND STATE CHURCH HISTORY

Ingolf Hübner¹

This article provides an overview of the development of Christian social services in Central Europe since the Reformation, using Germany as an example. The mainly Christian and—until 1918—state church tradition in Germany is characterised by the parity between the Catholic and Protestant churches. This developed into a system of cooperation between church and state, which continues today, even amid increasing secularisation.²

Historical Outline

Social engagement should be a fundamental dimension of every good parish and every Christian church. In the age of the Reformation, the churches emphasised social responsibility more than in previous centuries. Christian communities discovered that they constituted a social community as well as a religious community and with this came responsibility for one's neighbour. This took place in the 16th century in the context of a state church. The question as to who is responsible for what sort of social work has been answered differently among the different states. In Lutheranism, welfare became a task for the secular authorities and the community. In contrast, in the Reformed tradition, care for the poor has been seen as a genuinely ecclesiastical task. For this purpose, a deacon office was set up in the parish. Regardless of how a Christian social service was designed, there was new attention given to the social dimension of the Protestant Church. This increased attention to the social side of the gospel was not a specific feature of the Reformation. Due to the influence of the Counter-Reformation and humanism, providing welfare was also increasingly recognised in the Catholic State Church. The denominations of Western Christianity have subsequently contributed to the formation of different models of care and service.³

However, social benefits in the countries with state churches remained rudimentary and essentially charitable for a long time. In the 19th century, the Industrial Revolution in Europe impoverished the industrial proletariat, a phenomenon called pauperism.⁴ The state church had hardly any answer to this social question. Instead civil society initiatives—inspired by the revival movement—led to the establishment of diaconal institutions in various places. Johann Hinrich Wichern founded rescue houses based on the family principle. Theodor Fliedner and his wife Friederike Fliedner founded the first deaconess mother houses, which combined nursing, nursing training and a Christian community. Many other impressive Christian personalities, with their initiatives and foundations, increased the diaconal institutions from the 1830s onwards, which expanded to more fields of work. At the same time, new models of Christian life plans and job profiles emerged like deaconesses and deacons. What the various initiatives and foundations had in common was that they emerged from civil society and that their work was relatively independent from the state church.

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² See Honecker, Martin. *Evangelische Christenheit in Politik, Gesellschaft und Staat: Orientierungsversuche*. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998).

³ Reuter, Hans-Richard. "Der Protestantismus und die Anfänge der Sozialpolitik in Deutschland". In *Ambivalenzen der Nächstenliebe. Soziale Folgen der Reformation*, Johannes Eurich, Dieter Kaufmann, Urs Keller and Gerhard Wegner (Eds) (Leipzig: EVA Leipzig, 2018), pp. 79-94.

⁴ From lat.: pauper = poor, denotes mass poverty and the loss of landless rural people and factory workers.

In the 19th century, Wichern's initiative created a nationwide network of diaconal work. This association called the “Central Committee for the Interior Mission”, followed by the formation of regional associations, did not merely create a growing organisational framework for Christian social work. The “Central-Committee” also played an important role in developing collaboration with government agencies. The legal framework, which the emerging welfare state in Germany increasingly specified, developed in parallel with the expansion of the diaconal institutions. In addition to the two large associations of Christian social services—the Protestant Diakonie and the Catholic Caritas—other charities were founded. These associations of private individual charitable aid thus formed the free welfare service, which had a decisive influence on the development of the welfare state. In Germany, a corporate welfare state model emerged in which the Protestant Diakonie, like other welfare organisations, provides a significant part of the social services, while the state is essentially responsible for social security and finances large parts of this work.⁵ In the further development of the welfare state model in Germany, a system of social legal claims against the state was established. However, the state and local authority are encouraged not to provide social services themselves and, if possible, to provide them through other social service providers, including Christian social services. This principle of subsidiarity is rooted in the tradition of the Reformation and helps to strengthen grassroots movements, self-organisation, and community-based approaches. It places the individual and their dignity at the centre of social regulations and aims to distribute social responsibility among different actors. Individuals should be able to choose the correct sort of social service according to their need. Despite differences in ideology, the social services of different welfare associations are available to all those in need of help.

The development of the modern welfare states and the role that Christian social service have played in them has been quite different in the various state churches of Europe.⁶ The individual welfare states differ, among other ways, with regard to the scope of benefits, the eligibility requirements and the way in which social benefits are financed and provided. This means that there are different forms of organising and financing for Christian social services in different countries. In the social-democratic welfare state found in the Scandinavian countries, where the states and the church did not separate until the 21st century, there were and are few large organisations of Christian social work. The state or the local authorities mainly offer these services. However, this has changed over the past few decades through a number of foundations of diaconal institutions. The situation is different in countries with a liberal welfare state tradition, such as in Great Britain. With an emphasis on the free market, Christian social services there cannot rely fully on public support and must organise privately. They must seek financing through donations. Undergoing a complex transformation process after the end of the Cold War, the post-socialist welfare states in Eastern Europe combine various elements of the welfare state. In addition, there are various state church traditions of Catholic or Orthodox origin and thus a mix of denominational and organisationally different Christian social services have been formed.

Differentiation of Christian Social Services

Overall, these developments in Christian social services in countries with a state church tradition show that modern, diverse societies often result in a diversity of social services offered by the churches. The requirements regarding professional quality of social services, economic stability and legal protections demand specific legal and organisational entities be built and held accountable, in addition to the social services coming directly from the parish. Diaconal work in Germany has often been organised through civic

⁵ See Kaiser, Jochen-Christoph. *Sozialer Protestantismus im 20. Jahrhundert. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Inneren Mission 1914-1945*, R. Oldenburg Verlag, Munich 1989.

⁶ See Schubert, Klaus; Simon Hegelich, Ursula Bazant (Hgg.). *Europäische Wohlfahrtssysteme. Ein Handbuch*, Wiesbaden 2008.

associations since the 19th century. The organisation of social services requires high and professional quality, which can only be achieved through the interaction of different professions in an organisation. Hospitals, hospices, nursing homes, outpatient care services, day care centres all need processes and forms of organisation appropriate to their work. Private law corporations were, and are, primarily founded for this purpose, including associations, non-profit limited liability companies, civil law companies, cooperatives or foundations that are legal entities of Christian social services. These legal entities make it easier to delimit differently financed work areas and minimise the existing liability risk for the often voluntary board members and supervisory bodies. Diaconal institutions are subject to the requirements of commercial law. The assignment of civil society organisations and associations of the Diakonie to the church is done within the framework of canon law.

In addition to the legal organisational features, the Christian social services are characterised by the way in which they are refinanced and, consequently, by their position on the social market.

In Germany, Christian social services are mostly non-profit organisations and charitable status is recognised by tax law for organisations that are selflessly committed to the interests of the public and those in need of help. Non-profit entities with charitable status enjoy tax benefits: for example, they can issue donation receipts for a tax deduction of the donations. However, they are subject to restrictions when dealing with funds, such as a ban on distributing profits. In addition to individual donations, collections and donations from foundations, the work of Christian social services is financed by the reimbursement of the cost of services. In Germany, based on the tradition of the corporate welfare state model, these are funds from the social work of the local authorities or in other cases of social insurance funds—e.g. health or long-term care insurance— and are provided by institutions of the Diakonie. These reimbursements for social and health services cover a large part of the costs for benefits in kind and staff, and in some cases also investment costs unless they are financed by public grants.⁷ A relatively small proportion of diaconal work—especially counselling services, pastoral care and community (“Diakonie”)—is financed through church taxes or church collections.

Diaconal companies

Christian social services, which receive financial reimbursements for a substantial part of their services, use the term “diaconal enterprise” today. This designation makes it clear that these legal entities of Christian social services are on the health and social services market. The refinancing of Christian social services through partial or full funding commitments from the state—including the local authorities—enables them to offer a wide range of aid. Diaconal companies today operate in Germany in the sectors of health care, nursing, child and youth welfare, disability, and social assistance, as well as educational and vocational training for the labour market.

In many cases, significant diaconal companies with large workforces and significant total assets have emerged. These company sizes require professional management. The management of diaconal companies requires maintaining and communicating the values of the theological, economic, and professional perspectives. Diaconal management is the theologically conscious management, design, and organisation of social-economic services in the realm of the Protestant churches. Since diaconal companies are diverse organisations in which the Christian context of an individual action is often not immediately apparent, the specific task of diaconal management is to clarify the theological meaning of the concrete action and to make diaconal organisations transparent.

The formation of legal entities and the professionalisation of work are associated with a significant increase in the number of full-time employees in Christian social services. This ensures the possibility of expanding

⁷ For more information on the forms of financing diaconal work, see: <https://www.diakonie.de/so-finanziert-sich-diakonische-arbeit>.

diaconal work. However, it presents Christian social services with the challenge of mediating between the full-time and the volunteer worker. The organisations of Christian social services have a close relationship with parishes, especially when it comes to working with volunteers.

When designing the Christian profile of social action in Diakonie, many diaconal institutions use the concept of diaconal culture.⁸ This opens up a specific perspective on Christian social services in a society that, despite secularisation, is shaped by a Christian tradition and Christian values. By understanding Christian social action as a culture, Christian values such as mercy and justice are strengthened, and attitude is shaped by empathy. As a result, the Christian faith and the provision of social services remain connected. In increasingly secular and multi-religious societies, values and attitudes are what make Diakonie as part of the church visible and strong.

An understanding of Christian social services as a culture also introduces the idea not only of helping people in need, but also of influencing society and contemporary culture as a whole. Johann Hinrich Wichern took this view from the beginning of his organising Christian social services. They fall short when they only provide social services. Such a shortened perspective has sometimes caused Christian social services to be accused of being a loophole in a society that produces and excludes poverty. Diakonie as a social service of the Protestant churches sees itself pointedly as an advocate for the weak and therefore must publicly call out the causes of social hardship in politics and society. The Christian social services represent a connection between the individual-based help provided by the appropriate social services and the group-based political strategy of an advocate for the socially excluded. “Charities make a significant contribution to social justice in society. Their work consists of a wide range of practical social work as well as specific contributions to the social understanding of justice.”⁹ Long after the end of the state church, Christian social services in countries with a Christian tradition today face the job of interpreting the values of human dignity, freedom, sustainability and justice found in their Christian roots and to strengthen them in public social discourse.

At the European level, the various Christian organisations who offer social services and advocate for social justice have come together through the Eurodiaconia network. Together, they work for a socially just transformation of Europe.¹⁰

Christian social services as a prominent part of the church in society

Christian social services today face a number of challenges that are exacerbated by globalisation, liberalisation of the economy and demographic change. The changes in the economy have increased the risk of poverty for the socially disadvantaged in many countries with a Christian tradition. Christian social services have responded by setting up soup kitchens and free food expenses. A major demographic change is how many such countries have an aging population. Therefore, there is an increase in the number of people in need of care. This presents Christian social services with the task of training nurses and caregivers and ensuring that necessary caregiving services are financed. Christian social services face another challenge due to migration: the direct care of refugees, as well as advice and support for their integration. Recognising others’ suffering remains an important part of Christian engagement, as is offering aid with the assistance of well-organised social services.¹¹

⁸ See Hofmann, Beate (Hg.). *Merkmale diakonischer Unternehmenskultur in einer pluralen Gesellschaft* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2020).

⁹ Translation from Maaser, Wolfgang, *Diakonie um Spagat. Gemeinnützige Wohlfahrtspflege zwischen Solidarität und marktformigen Modernisierungsstrategien*, in: Eurich, Johannes, Heinz Schmidt (Hgg.), *Diakonik: Grundlagen – Konzeptionen – Diskurse*. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2016), pp. 163-187, 177.

¹⁰ Eurodiaconia, “The Role of Social Services in Fighting Inequalities in Europe,” Bruxelles, 2016, <https://www.eurodiaconia.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/The-Role-of-Social-Services.pdf>.

¹¹ An overview offers: Diakonik – At a Glance, https://www.diakonik.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Diakonie/PDFs/Ueber_Uns_PDF/2018-10_Diakonie_At-a-glance.pdf.

The work of Christian social services contributes significantly to the image of the churches in postmodern societies. Given the decline in church ties, Christian social engagement is becoming increasingly important for the visibility of the church. In this way, Christian social services, in their breadth and diversity, contribute both to social cohesion and to the preservation of the Christian roots of the modern welfare state.

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16. CHRISTIAN SOCIAL SERVICE IN MINORITY PROTESTANT CONTEXTS AND SECULAR STATES

Caterina Bain¹

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2 NIV)

The Latin American Context – An Overview

Latin America is a young, diverse, mostly urban region of significant contrasts. It is a place in which both the access to fundamental rights for human dignity and the model of development we aspire to achieve are in dispute. This is globally an important region due to its significant number of natural reserves and “open veins”, as the writer Eduardo Galeano said, in reference to the historical plundering of its natural resources by colonialism.

It is the most inequitable and violent continent and the most vulnerable to climate change. The levels of inequality and violence are appalling and they are rooted in an unjust political, economic and social system and in a culture that embraces privileges at the expense of the well-being of the majority. Compared to other regions, the continent presents an average Gini coefficient almost a third higher than that of Europe and Central Asia. Inequality is historical and structural. Even during periods of economic growth and prosperity, this inequality has remained the same and/or it has been reproduced.

Eradicating poverty and reducing multidimensional inequalities present some of the main challenges and critical nodes for progress towards sustainable development. High levels of inequality are a major barrier to ending poverty, developing capacity, expanding citizenship and democratic governance.² Gender inequality is evident in many ways, but the cruellest expression of violence against women is femicide. According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), twelve women die each day as a result of femicide. This equates to one woman being killed at least every two hours, turning it into the region with the most femicides worldwide. The region also has the highest rate of sexual violence towards women perpetrated by someone outside of their relationship and the second highest rate of violence committed by a spouse or partner.

In 2018, about 30.1% of the regional population lived below the poverty line, while the lowest 10.7% was below the extreme poverty line. This means that about 185 million people were living in poverty, 66 million of them in extreme poverty. The most vulnerable social groups are children, adolescents, women, indigenous peoples, Afrodescendants, and people living in rural areas.

Regarding religion, Latin America is primarily Christian, with a historical predominance of the Roman Catholic Church. The historic Protestant Churches are a significant minority. According to data collected by the Pew Research Center survey (2014), in the 1960s, at least 90% of the population was Catholic, a percentage that has since decreased to 69% of adults (almost 40% of Catholics worldwide), while 19% are Protestant and/or Evangelical and 8% say they have no religious affiliation. The general change in identity is towards Evangelical Churches that include various denominations and independent churches.³ The Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal churches are the ones who have grown the most and the Assemblies of God

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² Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Social Panorama of Latin America, 2019 (LC/PUB.2019/22-P/Rev.1), Santiago, 2019. (p.13-37).

³ Less than a quarter are historical Protestants.

are the ones who have the largest number of believers.⁴ The growth has been so significant that, in some countries such as Brazil and Colombia, they have become political interlocutors for governments, which generates concern for human rights organisations, faith-based organisations⁵ (FBOs) and churches recognised for their commitment to the defence of human rights. These churches define themselves as an alternative and prophetic voice, creating alliances with other actors and sectors such as universities, organisations and social movements to increase their capacity for advocacy and impact, and counter the fundamentalist positions that press for the inclusion of their moral agenda in public policies.

Latin American countries are a biodiversity “superpower” and are seriously threatened by climate change. South America alone has almost half of the world’s terrestrial biodiversity. The Amazon and the South American Gran Chaco are two areas of enormous wealth for humanity which must be protected by any means for their impact on the world’s climate, especially as they act as carbon sinks and for their biodiversity. Churches and FBOs have been raising awareness about threats to and advocating for the protection of these regions.

Amazonia, a lung of the planet, represents half of the tropical forests in the world. As Cardenal Barreto, Vice-president of the REPAM – Pan Amazonian Ecclesial Network⁶ – explains, it is “a territory devastated and threatened by the concessions of States to transnational corporations. The big extractive projects, monoculture plantations and climate change put their lands and natural environment at serious risk. They destroy their culture, the self-determination of peoples and above all they affect Christ incarnate in the people who live there (native peoples, riverine people, peasants, afro-descendants and urban populations).”

The South American Gran Chaco is the second most vulnerable forest ecosystem in South America connected with the Amazon. Four million people live there, including family farmers and indigenous peoples. It covers about one million square kilometres, distributed amongst Argentina (59% of the total area), Paraguay (23%), Bolivia (13%) and a small portion of Brazil (4%). It harbours diverse environments such as plains, mountains, rivers, dry and flooded savannas, marshes, swamps, palm groves, diversity of forests, etc. It is threatened by deforestation and degradation of its natural environments in favour of agricultural and forestry production, as well as real estate. In the last seven years, an average of 1,600 hectares of native forest has been lost per day.⁷ The problem of the Gran Chaco and the Guarani Aquifer⁸ was presented in the Amazon Synod held in Rome in 2019. The President of the Episcopal Commission for Aboriginal Ministry of the Argentinean Episcopal Conference maintained the need to “continue listening to what reality, what nature is telling us, above all the cry of the earth and the clamor of the poor”⁹ in line with *Laudato Si* (no.49).

The current model of development has an emphasis on mining energy production and agricultural production based on monocultures and indiscriminate use of natural resources. This model has serious consequences in terms of climate change and social conflicts. The economic-financial system deepens injustices and does not accept limits to the expansion and accumulation of wealth. Environmental deterioration and exclusion are serious problems addressed by diaconal actions that are articulated to design joint action strategies of greater spatial and temporal scope, and to expand their impact and advocacy capabilities. For instance, in addition to the REPAM referred to above, we can mention the “Churches and Mining Network” and the Chaco Argentina Agroforestry Network (REDAF, for its name in Spanish). This acts as an articulation space which brings together people and institutions – largely ecumenical – that work

⁴ In the Historically Catholic Region, Pew Research Center – November 13th, 2014 (p.6).

⁵ This term is widely used for organisations which base their mission and values on religious faith when assuming roles as social agents.

⁶ See: <https://redamazonica.org/>.

⁷ See: <https://incupo.org.ar/bosque-casa-de-los-pueblos-del-chaco/>.

⁸ Located beneath the surface of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay is the second largest known aquifer system in the world. It is said that this vast underground reservoir could supply fresh drinking water to the world for 200 years.

⁹ <https://redamazonica.org/2019/10/sinodo-amazonico-preocupacion-por-el-gran-chaco-y-el-acuifero-guarani/>.

in the Chaco region to contribute to the construction of a better quality of life for rural peasant and indigenous communities, in harmony with the natural resources of this territory.

The fact of being a middle-income region conditions international cooperation and international ecumenical cooperation, which are the ones who largely finance political advocacy and the promotion of human rights in Latin America. This factor implies a challenge for diaconal work in terms of developing new capacities and strategies for the sustainability of long-term actions.

Christian Social Service in Latin America

Diakonia as defined by the Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement is “the responsible service of the gospel by deeds and by words performed by Christians in response to the needs of people”.¹⁰ This wording indicates three components in the understanding of diakonia: it is action, or performing services, by using deeds and words; Christian faith motivates this action and views it as an expression of Christian discipleship; diaconal intervention reflects social reality and seeks in its performance to alleviate human suffering and promote justice, peace and human dignity.

Prophetic diakonia refers to the ability to point out sin, its causes and historical responsibility for a given situation, both structural and circumstantial. It seeks to build bridges to transform realities. The political, economic, social and environmental context, which is complex, uncertain, and full of tension and conflict – as previously described – challenges the ecumenical diakonia in its search for justice, healing and reconstruction of the entire creation.

In recent years, there has been a strengthening of political sectors and economic groups that promote conservatism, protectionist policies, intolerance against migrants and greater restrictions on the ability of organisations to carry out their mission. Religion and the Bible are increasingly present in the public-political sphere, with a growing influence of fundamentalist religious organisations and groups of different faiths who have been gaining power and visibility by mobilising and organising strategically to create resistance movements, to promote support, or raise awareness contrary to legislative advances and public policies of inclusion and expansion of rights (for example: equal marriage law, legalisation of abortion, comprehensive sex education in schools, etc.). This has led national,¹¹ regional¹² and international¹³ churches and FBOs to publicly declare themselves in favour of democracy and a state that ensures the security, protection and expansion of rights without discrimination.

Our profession of faith demands that we reject the structures and systems that perpetuate poverty and inequality, situations of injustice, abuse of rights and destruction of the environment; announcing and giving hope for positive changes in favour of people’s dignity. The prophetic voice is the capacity to act collectively;

¹⁰ Teresa Joan White, Art "Diakonia", in: *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, WCC Publications Geneva 2020, p. 305.

¹¹ For instance, the Argentinian Confederation of Evangelical Churches (FAIE for its name in Spanish) public statement on the Comprehensive Sex Education (CSE) Act <https://iglesiametodista.org.ar/descargas/2018/09/Declaracion-de-prensa-14-9-18.pdf>; the Communion of Reformed Churches in Argentina dated on September 17th, 2018 http://ierp.org.ar/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Declaraci%C3%B3n-CIR-por-ESI-final-setiembre-2018-1.pdf?fbclid=IwAR288X986GKbZGrKXOdiARIKVG3MmvX4VMNOt_HfUSNhAgDY7iDg5j42jYs.

¹² Statement of the Alliance of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches of Latin America on the institutional crisis in Bolivia. <https://aipral.net/justicia/comunidad/2019-bolivia-nos-preocupa-la-biblia-utilizada-como-arma>; Act Alliance public statement on LAC: <https://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/ACT-Alliance-public-statement-on-LAC-EN-1.pdf>.

¹³ See ACT Alliance public statements on Gender Justice in LAC <https://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/ACT-Alliance-public-statement-on-Gender-Justice-in-LAC-EN.pdf>; and https://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/English-version_-Statement-of-Commitments-LAC-Nairobi25-final.pdf.

it requires that we are independent from the centres of power; medium and long-term planning; concrete actions and proposals; new ways of doing things and closeness to those whose rights are violated.

In organisational terms, diakonia can take different forms depending on the context, the level of expertise of the service and the local legal regulations. Sometimes, it is part of the structure of the Church and/or Councils of Churches, while in other cases, it is done by independent legal entities – such as civil associations, foundations or federations – which are used as part of the strategies for institutional development and sustainability. This facilitates the mobilisation of resources, provides greater autonomy and/or flexibility to operate and allows for better adaptability to changing and competitive environments.

Among the main strategic lines of diaconal work in the region, we can mention: a) gender justice; b) economic justice; c) socio-environmental justice and adaptation to climate change; d) justice for migrants, displaced persons and refugees; e) democracy, peace, and justice; f) risk and disaster management. The priority populations served are: women, children and youth, indigenous people and Afro-descendants, migrants and the poor who are the most vulnerable people.

This diakonia seeks to build citizenship (including those who are discriminated against by the system and do not have the same opportunities to get out of poverty and achieve comprehensive development) and to ensure that the changes promoted can be appropriate and sustainable over time. Actions of social development, sensitisation and awareness raising of rights are fundamental to the empowerment of individuals, groups and communities so that they can be active subjects and protagonists of the transformation processes. This requires active listening, building relationships of trust and development of organisational capacities and alliances that promote change. The fight for rights is repeatedly played out in this arena; to enforce them, it is necessary to have empowered subjects, viable and sustainable proposals and sufficient strength to transform power relationships. As development actors, FBOs can contribute to building resilience, creating and strengthening democratic spaces for decision making and participation so that all voices can be taken into account in the processes of change.

The SDG Agenda 2030 as a Public Platform for Diaconal Engagement: Challenges for FBOs

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 25 September 2015, proposes a transformative and holistic approach to development that involves three dimensions of sustainability: economic, social and environmental. It is the result of a constructive process concerning governments, civil society, academia and international organisations. It consists of a Declaration, 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 associated targets – and together with the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction – serves as a platform for all actors committed to sustainable development. It is based on three central principles: respect for human dignity; sustainability; and an ethical commitment to “leave no one behind”. It is a very ambitious, indivisible, interconnected and inclusive agenda that calls for multi-stakeholder cooperation and the creation of partnerships for the mobilisation and sharing of resources. To achieve sustainable development, it is essential to be able to harmonise three basic elements: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection.

“The SDGs Agenda 2030 represents a new public platform for diaconal engagement. It challenges ecumenical diakonia to develop strategies for action, and of equipping local churches and other partners to assume an active role in relation to the SDG agenda”.¹⁴ It is a useful advocacy tool. As it is recognised as a human rights agenda, it is important that it is known locally. FBOs can contribute to territorial outreach and to urge governments to take action. Despite having a critical eye, many FBOs see the Agenda as an

¹⁴ World Council of Churches, Act Alliance and Lutheran World Federation “Llamados a la acción transformadora. Diaconía ecumenical” Versión revisada 17-04-2018 – Non Published (Geneva, Switzerland, 2018), pp. 11-12.

opportunity and an instrument for dialogue and cooperation. They appreciate its potential to build new alliances that expand collective capacities and joint mobilisation of resources.

The involvement and commitment of civil society – and particularly of FBOs – is critical, as they play a significant role in localising the SDGs, identifying who is being left behind, holding governments accountable to their commitments, delivering services, presenting innovative proposals, monitoring progress, and guaranteeing democratic processes. An important challenge for FBOs is to generate a space for strategic collaboration in the implementation of the SDGs, taking into account religious identity as a valuable factor that can provide innovative proposals. Humberto Shikiya affirmed that: “religious leadership has a key role in building peace where there is conflict or tension. It is also important that their voices continue to be raised and continue to influence the governments and the interested parts so they can keep the promises they made to attain sustainable development [...] what represents an added value is that their actions are a concrete answer coming from their beliefs, their faiths and spirituality, and their values; before they respond to the SDGs”.¹⁵

Civic Space, Transparency and Accountability: Challenges for Ecumenical Diakonia

Ecumenical diakonia in Latin America is developing in an environment of shrinking civic space for civil society organisations (CSOs). The enabling legal and fiscal frameworks are generally not conducive to the growth and institutional development of organisations, which affects medium- and long-term sustainability. The region is considered a particularly hostile territory, especially for activists, journalists, social, indigenous and environmental leaders who face a high threat of violence. The latest report by the NGO Front Line Defenders states that this is “the most dangerous region in the world for defending human and environmental rights, with more than 200 of the 304 documented killings taking place globally in 2019”.¹⁶ From the point of view of funding, there are increasing difficulties on the one hand, and scarcity of available resources and greater competition between organisations on the other. There are more administrative demands and bureaucratic obstacles, more legal or extra-legal impediments that affect to some extent the mobilisation of resources; more complex and/or disproportionate requirements set by the states for registration and limitations on receiving funding, especially when it comes to donations from abroad. Another form of pressure is harassment through smear campaigns and/or legal complaints. Government corruption and the influence of predatory business interests also affect the quality of civic space.

It is worth mentioning that the space for civil society is based on the enforcement of three fundamental rights: the freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression. If these three rights are respected, citizens can express dissent, propose solutions and contribute significantly to democratic governance. The importance of civic space is recognised by international law, which obligates governments to respect, facilitate and protect these rights. The role of civil society is recognised in several recent international agreements, including the SDGs.¹⁷

On the contrary, transparency and accountability are important factors of legitimacy and they are necessary for the sustainability of CSOs. It represents a responsibility because, to a large extent, the resources we manage are public: they come from the states, the international cooperation agencies, companies and/or individual donors. While accountability to oversee bodies and funders is required by law or contract, it is

¹⁵ Humberto Shikiya from CREAS in: *The Contribution of FBOs to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda in Argentina*, Buenos Aires 2019, page 5, in: <https://jlfic.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/RaD-Executive-Overview-online.pdf>.

¹⁶ See: Front Line Defenders Global Analysis 2019, Report published 2020, p. 6ff, in: https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/global_analysis_2019_web.pdf.

¹⁷ <http://civicus.org/images/ThreatsToCivicSpaceInLACountriesSP.pdf>.

important to be accountable to wider audiences. This is part of the commitments made by civil societies worldwide, as set out in the Istanbul Principles (Principle 5).¹⁸

The report published by Civicus and Innpactia entitled “Access to resources for Civil Society Organisations in Latin America. Facts and Challenges” accounts for the reduction in civic space, the implications and difficulties in mobilising resources. The report states that there is:

- “Unfair and unequal competition” for access of resources for local organisations that are disadvantaged vis-à-vis international organisations, the private sector, national state bodies and international agencies with greater capacity for fundraising;
- Few exclusive funds available for Latin American CSOs working with vulnerable groups;
- Low investment in the strengthening of CSOs: less than 3% of the resources accessible to CSOs were aimed at funding core operations, institutional strengthening and sustainability;
- Projectisation of existing funding: this might mean that the risk of working in areas less connected to the missions in favour of engaging in areas and work activities where more funds are available;
- Little investment in the promotion of human rights, political advocacy and activism (less than 6% of the resources);
- The significant role of Latin American donors in the region, although the majority of resources continue to come from the North. This makes CSOs vulnerable to changing trends in aid flows.

From an ecumenical diaconal concept based on faith and human rights, ACT Alliance, its partners and allies have been developing actions at the local, national, regional and international level aimed at denouncing the violation of rights and the economic, political, social and environmental crisis we are going through, especially triggered by the increase in violence that has claimed the lives of hundreds of people, with an emphasis on gender violence. In March last year, ACT Alliance convened a “Global Conference on LAC”. Together with different actors, they considered the complex and volatile regional situation, the intersection with global political processes and the implications for human rights, security, democracy, humanitarian needs and sustainable development. As a result of the discussions, they agreed to articulate their actions, capacities and resources. At the press conference, they expressed their rejection of the violent reaction against human rights and the rule of law, the reduction of space for civil society, the decrease in press freedom, the increase in corruption and the lack of transparency in political processes and the causes that generate exclusion. They stated: “God’s action dislocates us, saves us, demands follow-up and the courage to walk alongside the struggles of our peoples in the construction of democratic societies, in the promotion of economic, social and environmental justice, in the struggle for gender justice and justice for migrant and displaced populations. The gravity of the suffering of our peoples demands us to raise our voice in the face of the political and economic powers that cause the injustice and inequity that affect millions of lives.” The commitments included: *strengthen joint actions* to promote initiatives on gender justice and against all forms of violence; *ensure that human rights and environmental defenders are protected*; *strengthen the voice of children and youth*, so that they are full rights-holders in law; *accompany the communities in their processes of accessing justice* at the local and regional levels, supporting their demands and claims; *establish regional and global networks* to accompany the political and social crises in LAC.¹⁹

Partnership for SDGs: The Contribution of FBOs to the SDGs in Argentina

The Argentine Republic has a federal form of government, with a secular state that guarantees freedom of worship (Article 14 of the National Constitution), although there is no equality of worship since the Roman Catholic Church has a predominance over the rest (Article 2 of the National Constitution). Civil legislation

¹⁸ See <https://www.csopartnership.org/single-post/2018/02/15/Istanbul-Principles-for-CSO-Development-Effectiveness>.

¹⁹ Statement available at: <https://actalliance.org/act-news/act-conference-on-latin-america-commits-to-strong-action/>.

gives it public status (art. 146 (c) of the Civil and Commercial Code), while the other churches, confessions and/or religious bodies are “private” (art. 148 (e) CCC). In order to be legally recognised, they must be registered in the National Registry of Worship of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Worship, which is responsible for public policy on religious matters. Regarding the National Council for the Coordination of Social Policies (CNCPS, for its name in Spanish) as a focal point, it is the body responsible for positioning the SDGs at the different levels of the state, raising awareness among civil society of the 2030 Agenda, promoting mechanisms for participation and collaboration and coordinating the processes of adaptation to the SDGs in the different government agencies and SDGs follow-up. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Argentina is a strategic partner of the national government for the achievement of the SDGs in the context of an upper middle-income country. It provides technical cooperation for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the country. The SDG 17 aims to “strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development”.²⁰ The achievement of the SDGs requires different sectors and actors working together in an integrated manner and at all levels by pooling financial resources, knowledge and expertise. The cross-sectorial and innovative multi-stakeholder partnerships play a crucial role in achieving the development goals.

In December 2017, the UNDP and the Ecumenical Regional Centre for Advisory and Service (CREAS, for its name in Spanish) and ACT Alliance signed a Memorandum of Understanding that established a technical cooperation framework signed on the basis of the SDG 17. This laid the foundation for a strategic partnership for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, with the challenge of expanding and consolidating inclusive collaborative spaces in the search for innovative and sustainable solutions for the country. As a result of the agreement, the parties published the report, “Religion and Development: The contribution of faith-based organisations to the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development in Argentina”,²¹ with the support of the CNCPS and the Secretary of Worship of the Nation.

The report seeks to broaden the dialogue and analysis of sustainable development and the different faith perspectives and to contribute to the reflection on the relationship between development and religion in Argentina, identifying challenges and formulating analyses that contribute to finding new ways of cooperation and building strategic alliances. It includes a map of religious actors and documents which make visible the different religious perspectives on development and the 2030 Agenda. It also reports the results of the survey conducted on the contribution of the FBOs to the SDGs. For this purpose, a specific metric was developed and the contribution to SDGs monitored at the High Level Political Forum 2019, was prioritised. The expectation is that this measurement tool can be adapted and contextualised by other FBOs and can inspire new insights on the ethics of development and cooperation dynamics so that we leave no one behind.

This process had as an immediate precedent in the “Faith-based Organizations and 2030 Agenda Encounter for dialogue”, held in September 2017 at the Ministry of Social Development convened by the CNCPS. The meeting proposed to open a participation and communication channel to analyse the SDGs and to reflect about development from faith perspectives, highlighting the ethical component of the agenda. As part of the programme, the present FBOs presented their work in the field of sustainable development and identified the correlations between their actions and the SDGs.

²⁰ See list of SDG Goals of the United Nations: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

²¹ <https://jliflc.com/resources/the-contribution-of-faith-based-organizations-to-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development-in-argentina/>; see also: <https://actalliance.org/act-news/new-report-on-the-role-of-faith-based-organisations-in-achieving-the-agenda-2030/>.

Conclusions

Christian social service in Latin America takes place in a complex context in which the model of development is disputed and the diaconal work is challenged in its commitment for common welfare, justice and peace. Ecumenical diakonia, which is prophetic, contextual and political, is an integral part of the church's mission and a Christian way of living the gospel. Inspired by a Christian vision of the world, it interrelates, mobilises and adapts to changing and competitive environments, providing new opportunities for those whose rights are violated, giving hope of a better future and denouncing injustice and exclusion with concrete proposals for change.

These social services provided by Christian churches adopt different forms and strategies depending on the context, experience, the specialisation of the service, legal and fiscal frameworks, access to resources, and territorial priorities. To increase their impact and sustainability, FBOs expand their capacities and the scope of their actions by coordinating actions with other actors, creating new partnerships, strategic alliances, platforms and/or networks to design joint actions, and strategies to influence social processes that seek effective inclusion and promote justice for all. However, if gender inequalities and violence against women are not addressed, it will be impossible to achieve peace and make the ethical principle of leaving no one behind a reality.

The 2030 Agenda serves as a public platform for diaconal engagement and offers new opportunities for alliances and cooperation to enhance diaconal capacities for advocacy and joint resource mobilisation. Nevertheless, closing civic space jeopardises the sustainability of CSOs and risks leaving the most vulnerable behind and denying their voices in the development process. Strengthening transparency and accountability are key factors in building trust, legitimacy and sustainability. Innovative experiences such as the case study explored of Argentina are inspiring not only from the perspectives of dialogue, knowledge production and accountability, but also as new ways of development cooperation in a middle-income region that seeks sustainability by giving testimony of faith, justice and hope.

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17. DIACONIA AS INCLUSIVITY: LIVING COMMUNITY WITH THE EXCLUDED – A BIBLICAL DIDACTIC OF INCLUSION

Kambale Jean-Bosco Kahongya Bwiruka¹

Introduction

Since the institutionalisation of the Early Church, diversification of the forms and numbers of ministries has been essential as the Christian community grew. The ministry of spreading the Good News bequeathed to the disciples by Jesus Christ continued in two forms: (1) the *proclamation* of the gospel (accompanied by signs, miracles, and healings); and (2) fraternal *communion* (sharing, caring for the needy, etc.). This second form is also referred to as the *doing of the church*,² or diaconia.

If, traditionally, the first aspect of this mission was linked to the work of the twelve Apostles, the second has been in a certain way associated to the group of seven.³ However, this does not consecrate the exclusivity of the diaconal ministry to the unique category of “seven elected”. It shows, on the contrary, the value given to the *diaconal responsibility* by the Early Church, and its role to guarantee the success of the proclamation of the gospel by the church as an institution and the credibility of the Christian witness in the world. Thus, all Christians participate in this *communion life* at individual, ecclesial, community and institutional level. These diaconal interventions are not limited to pre-established areas, or social categories, but rather touch all areas and for the benefit of all categories of people who find themselves in need. This makes diaconia a multidimensional task.

Therefore, thinking of diaconia as a round table involves its consideration as a global and ecumenical learning process from an interchurch or rather an interfaith perspective. In this process, various actors act together in concrete programs and projects for positive change related to suffering and marginalised societies. These actors might be church organisations, institutions, groups, individuals, lay persons, clerics, women and youth, etc. Thus, from its theological and biblical origins, the diaconia concept has an inclusive characteristic, both in its actors and in the content components. While in relation to the actors, diaconia is a task in which all people can meet, ordained and non-ordained, in its content component, the field of diaconal intervention is very large and diversified.

Therefore, in such multidimensional context, specific skills are needed whenever an actor is committed to diaconal intervention. Then the questions of (1) why and how to get the required skills, (2) which specific training and learning approaches are needed, and (3) how to engage diaconal work in a global ecumenical context are very relevant. In responding to these three questions, it is important to highlight first the ecumenical and collective character of the diaconal work.

Diaconia as Ecumenical Work of All Christians

When Jesus was accomplishing his mission, proclaiming the *coming of the kingdom of God on earth*, even when he was referring to the rewards of the *just* at the end-time, he always associated this mission (preaching and teaching) with *signs* and *wonders*. These *wonders* are miracles, healing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing of the leprous, casting out demons, setting the captives free, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked,

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² Kjell Nordstokke, ‘Diaconia’ in *Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment*. An LWF Contribution to the Understanding of Practice of Diakonia, Geneva, The Lutheran World Federation, 2009, p.71.

³ Acts 6:1-6.

welcoming the strangers, etc. (Mt.10:7-8; 25:31-46; Lk.4:18-19). Some of these *wonders (actions of power)* served as *signs* to manifest the power of God among people, but others played a *diaconal role* of setting people free from their miseries. Proclamation and action are for Jesus' ministry one reality: his holistic mission. This holistic mission was entrusted by Jesus to all his disciples as individuals and to the church as the communion of all believers.

Since the living experience of the Early Church, this diaconal mandate has been integrated as the *being* and the *mission* of Christianity. One of the remarkable expressions of this living together of the Early Church right after the Pentecost day in Jerusalem is that believers '*had their possession in common*' so that nobody could suffer from unattended needs (Acts 2:44-45). This was not limited to the local community. It was extended to different communities and therefore was ecumenical, which has been since embedded in the first church experiences. For example, during the severe famine in Antioch, Christians provided help to victims (Acts. 11:27-30). When the church of Jerusalem was passing through difficult times, joint action of solidarity in collecting money from other churches was organised. Economically rich and poor communities, Jewish and Greek communities contributed willingly. Despite their differences in culture and economical capacities, they considered diaconal action not to be a *compassion to the poor* but rather a *being* of Christianity as communion in the 'ministry to the saints'. This is why even the small and poor church of Macedonia begged to get the 'privilege of sharing' in this common diaconal action (2 Cor. 8:4).⁴ Therefore, on each level of individual or ecclesial diaconal engagement, learning from Jesus' teachings and from the Early Church experience and practice is still unavoidable in diaconal didactic.

All Christians Involved in Diaconal Education

Jesus-Christ defined his mission in these words: "*The Son of Man came to carry out his mission and give his life as a ransom for many.*" (Mk. 10:45). According to the Tanzanian Lutheran Church (ELCT) understanding, Jesus became Deacon of God after he had accepted his Father's call to come to the world of sinners and sufferers in order to redeem them as servants of God.⁵ The whole mission of Jesus is service for others. This is a holistic understanding of diaconia. In this perspective, diaconia is the visible and practical engagement of every Christian towards their neighbour. Thus, *diaconal learning should be part of all Christian education*⁶ in the church. This involves the Sunday school classes, youth programs, baptismal catechesis, program of preparing for confirmation, wedding catechesis, biblical and theological training, and other specific Christian teaching opportunities. On this basic learning issue, Jesus' teaching provides many approaches for individual intervention as well as for the institutionalised diaconal work. Some of these teaching methods develop interaction between the learners and the facilitator in promoting a participatory learning. Such learner-centred pedagogical approach is relevant for both volunteers and professionals.

Teaching-Learning processes in a diaconal perspective

When one considers didactics in diaconia, one cannot avoid also considering some learning approaches developed in the classical pedagogy centred on the learner, like the Constructivist perspective, the principle of basic methods in learning processes, Education and Democracy, and Pedagogy of Autonomy and Self-Reliance.

⁴ Cf. *Called to Transformative Action*, p.19.

⁵ Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, *Diaconal Policy*, Dar es Salaam, 2016, p.1.

⁶ Kjell Nordstokke, *Diaconia in Context*, p.76.

Constructivist perspective

A large number of scholars⁷ have supported the idea that the scope of educational constructivism may be more fruitful in the field of the teaching-learning process. Constructivism includes a variety of theories about the acquisition of knowledge which have a great impact on the act of teaching and learning, whereby learning activities are central. Acquisition of knowledge includes construction of concepts and the consideration of personal and social values.

In emphasising the individuality and personality of the learner in the teaching-learning process, knowledge is constructed from previous experiences because the individual learns only what they perceive as important because of their life and the learning experience.⁸ The teacher seeks to understand the existing conceptions of learners and directs their activities with the aim of building knowledge compatible with the world around them. Consideration of these aspects can be a way of making the teaching-learning process pertinent for actors in diaconal education in utilising the experience from different interventions.

Principles of basic methods in the learning process

Human willingness plays a very important role in the teaching and learning process; it helps to acquire ideas and to achieve perceptions by means of independent research of any kind.⁹ Learning involves, according to Pestalozzi, the development of three dimensions: heart, head and hand which correspond to the three realities: desire, knowledge, and power. These are developed in three steps: first, one implements their free will with or against the fortuitous circumstances of the world; then, knowledge that allows them to be free of confused impressions and build a world of laws; and finally, the technical means to work by themselves.¹⁰ It ought to be noted that the new role of educators is not only the knowledge exposure to learners through established curriculum, but the individual interactions with the society is of utmost importance as the latter is rich with variety. Also, the educators should play the role of facilitating the learners in designing and implementing the learning atmosphere appropriate to the needs of the learners. Therefore, learners can discover on their own, different aspects of the learning process. However the learning process is not determined exclusively by the teacher's intentions and the curriculum but also by the behaviour of learners who pay attention or do not pay attention.¹¹ Willingness can be considered in diaconal didactic as basic attitude of actors, since most of them are volunteers motivated by their personal and spiritual commitment.

Education and democracy

Democracy in teaching and learning process is promoted by the educational ideas of John Dewey (1859-1952), considered as the most prominent American philosopher of the first half of the 20th century, and which continues to influence the field of education. For him, human knowledge is the product of one's efforts to

⁷ Biggs, John & Catherine Tang. *Applying constructive alignment to outcomes-based: teaching and learning*. 3rd Ed. (New York, McGraw-Hill: 2007); Westbrook, Robert B. « John Dewey (1859-1952) » in *Perspectives: revue trimestrielle d'éducation comparée* vol. XXIII, n° 1-2 (Paris: UNESCO, 1993), pp. 277-293.

⁸ Wendorff, Jörg A. "Aktivierende Methoden der Seminargestaltung" in Hawelka, Birgit et al. (eds), *Förderung von Kompetenzen in der Hochschullehre. Theoretische Konzepte und ihre Implementation in der Praxis* (Asanger: Kröning, 2007), pp. 17-30.

⁹ Pestalozzi, J. H. *Comment Gertrude instruit ces enfants*, [1801]. (M. Soëtard, Trans.) (Yverdon, Switzerland: Castella, 1985), p.147.

¹⁰ Pestalozzi, *Comment Gertrude instruit*, p.145.

¹¹ Scheunpflug, Annette. "Lernen in heterogenen Gruppen – Möglichkeiten einer natürlichen Differenzierung. Anmerkungen zum Thema Heterogenität aus der Sicht Allgemeiner Didaktik" In Kiper, Hanna, Susanne Miller, Christian Palentien, and Carsten Rohlf, Carsten (eds). *Lernarrangements für heterogene Gruppen. Lernprozesse professionell gestalten* (Bad Heilbrunn, Klinkhardt, 2008), pp. 66-77.

solve the problems that their experience led them to encounter.¹² Dewey's pedagogical approach is anchored in experiential learning which takes place in four stages during the learning process: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. The reflex of the first experiment gives ideas of their driving force, and ideas give meaning to this reflex: that immediate action is essential to observation and to make a judgment, and that action is essential to the achievement of objective. However, all experiences have a phase of "cut and try" what the psychologists call the method of trial and error. We try something, and when that fails, we do something else and continue until we succeed in something that works. Then, this method is adopted as a measuring unit in the subsequent procedure.¹³

Democracy in teaching and learning processes can provide a basis for the effectiveness of cooperative learning. For Dewey, to cooperate is to give differences and disputes a chance to manifest because there is a conviction that the expression of difference and disagreement is not only a right of others, but also a means of enriching one's own life experience as an integral part of the personal aspect of the democratic way of life. This approach is very important in diaconal learning, because different interventions occur in very new and complex contexts in a way that even previous experiences might not be helpful. There is always a need to be innovative when trying new strategies.

Pedagogy of autonomy and self-reliance

The autonomy and self-reliance approach is supported by Paulo Freire who suggests a kind of pedagogy of dialogue and demonstrates the possibility of liberating relationships through the creation of conditions for the trainability of educators and learners.¹⁴ For him, literacy requires an attitude of creation and re-creation and self-study that could lead to human intervention on the environment. Literacy cannot be administered as a gift or rule imposed but must grow from the inside to the outside, through the effort of the illiterate themselves, with simple collaboration with the educator.¹⁵ This dialogue between teacher and learner leans towards autonomy, which is also a process of maturation. Therefore, any pedagogy of autonomy must be centred on the experiences that stimulate decision and responsibility, the freedom of friendly experience.¹⁶ This freedom aims to let learners express their thoughts, hence enrolling in debates so as to enrich their understanding of a given subject. In that way, knowledge emerges as "invention" and "reinvention" in an ongoing training process. Learning in diaconia should also be considered as an endless and open-ended process, depending on each new context of diaconal intervention.

All these different pedagogical approaches can be applied in the interpretation of the Gospel, especially in the different teaching models provided by Jesus and the early Church in diaconal understanding and intervention.

Teaching helpfulness as Christian nature

A Christian, whether committed to a diaconal institution or not, has responsibilities toward people who fall into the category of being needy. They should learn that helpfulness is his/her nature, not just an option to take when they like. Understanding this can be facilitated by the constructivism learning approach based in the own personal experience of the actor, and the self-reliance approach in developing the motivation of their intervention from their inside.

¹² Westbrook, Robert B. « John Dewey (1859-1952) » in *Perspectives: revue trimestrielle d'éducation comparée* vol. XXIII, n° 1-2, Paris, UNESCO, 1993, pp. 277-293.

¹³ Dewey John. *Democracy and education: an introduction to the philosophy of education* (Bristol: Thoemmes press, 2002 [1916]), p.151.

¹⁴ Freire, Paulo. *Pédagogie de l'autonomie: savoirs nécessaires à la pratique éducative* (traduit et commenté par Jean-Claude Régnier) (ERES, 2006), pp. 18-19.

¹⁵ Freire, Paulo: *L'éducation: pratique de liberté*, Editions W, 1996, p.116.

¹⁶ Freire, Paulo. *Pédagogie de l'autonomie*, p.118.

Jesus, in his *sermon on the mountain* (Mt. 5:42), said: “Give to him who asks of you...” Through this teaching, Jesus drew the attention of his disciples that *there will always be people in need among them* (Jn. 12:3-8). Some of these needy strive just to assure their daily bread, their living, their health, their clothing, or other basic needs. Others are marginalised because of cultural, religious, social, economic and political conditions. This fragile situation is often involuntary with regard to the sufferer. They might be victims of political and economic mismanagement by their own governments, or affected by natural calamities, or collateral victims of bad conflict managements, etc. They, then, find themselves in situations whereby they can only survive thanks to the generosity of others. In this regard, Kjell Nordstokke was right when he wrote that, most often, diaconal actions occur in direct response to the needs and vulnerabilities of others, and for the purpose of promoting their rights. It is a reaction to both external challenge of sufferings and needs, and internal impulses motivated by compassion, solidarity and even indignation or protest when fellow human beings suffer injustice and are being excluded.¹⁷

Victims of vulnerability have not chosen their situation. They are neither the *idle* nor the *impostors* who don't want to work, and against whom the Apostle Paul recommended in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 that they “*should not eat*”. Diaconal didactic promotes neither *laziness* nor social-economic *parasitism*. It rather helps victims of injustice to regain their dignity, so that they can also contribute to liberate others and to become living witness of Jesus-Christ in the world.

No Christian witness without diaconal action

In a basic diaconal learning process, it should be said that Christian witness becomes meaningful by concrete actions and engagement toward the misery in the world. Therefore, silence, non-action, insensitivity and complacency toward injustice and suffering can be seen as *denying Christian faith*. Here, the principle basic method in learning process is relevant. The human willingness of using the heart, the head and the hand in diaconal intervention is appropriate.

In the biblical parable of *the Good Samaritan*, Jesus teaches about “*how to be the neighbour*” as a visible attitude and concrete action in fulfilling the second great commandment, which is “love to neighbour” (Lk. 10:25-37). He presents a contrast between the attitudes and actions of two different personalities. On one hand, the *religious people* (the Levite and the priest, leaders in matters related to relationship and love to God and to humans) and on the other hand, a *Samaritan* (whose religion and morality are questioned by the first group). Both groups face the same category of the world misery: a *stranger* who is a victim of violence. Injured and alone, the stranger is abandoned and helpless. In reaction to this encounter, the first group – religious people – decide to ignore him, and to distance themselves from him. Of course, they might have had credible reasons to behave like that, although none are mentioned in the biblical text.

For the third traveller – the Samaritan – on that same dangerous road, the encounter with the *unknown victim* changes his lifestyle. His personal agenda is affected, his transport facility is allocated to a new task; his budget is also involved, and his psychological as well as mental tranquillity are disturbed until the poor *unknown victim* is safe.

For Jesus, the reaction of the Samaritan is the best way of *being the neighbour* to someone in need. This is not only helping a victim, but moreover, empowering a vulnerable person to build their physical, psychological and moral capacities until they recover their dignity and become economically self-reliant and sociologically integrated. This is learning diaconia in action. Doing nothing in a similar case for whatever good reasons somebody might have discredits the authenticity of the Christian witness in the world and contradicts the love to the invisible God. Such diaconal interventions are only possible if they come from the bottom of a joyfully motivated heart.

¹⁷ Kjell Nordstokke, *Diakonia in Context*, p.74.

The joy of giving

Diaconia is a very demanding task since for most of the actors, there is no immediate and direct reward. Therefore, whenever reflecting on diaconal engagement, there should be relevant joyful reasons to learn, which could inspire commitment while a person is offering their time and goods to the benefit of the needy. Therefore, the self-reliance approach which promotes meaningful reasons from the bottom of the heart of the actor, will provide joyful commitment.

In the biblical texts of Luke 18:18-27 and 19:1-10, two stories explore different feelings towards diaconal actions. In the first story, a ruler, a very rich man, asks Jesus *what he should do to inherit the eternal life*. Jesus reminded him of the commandments. However, he said that he had observed them since he was young. Then Jesus asked him to *sell all that he had and distribute it to the poor*. Then *he became very sorrowful* (Lk. 18:22-23). Sharing the assets with persons in need was painful to him and made his request of *eternal life* very complicated.

In the second story, when Zacchaeus received Jesus and his disciples in his house, he felt thankful considering his very bad reputation in his society, and according to the religious context, he was aware that he was not worthy enough for such holy visit. Thus, full of joy, he said: *“Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor”* (Lk 19:8). For Zacchaeus, sharing his assets with the poor was a privilege he had never expected. He did it willingly and joyfully. In this regard, the Apostle Paul, in his exhortation to the church leaders in Ephesus (Acts 20:35), referred to such joyful experience as being the same as his own in his ministry. He was proclaiming the gospel, and at the same time, working with his hands in order to be able to help people in need. Accomplishing a diaconal action should provide joy to the actor first before the beneficiary. Learning this approach will turn diaconal engagement into a successful celebration.

Learning diaconia as celebration of inclusivity

Didacticism in diaconia also involves learning how to bring back the communion, those who have been excluded by religious or moral austerity. Jesus has strongly associated the celebration of the Holy Communion to diaconia, which consecrates sharing with others. It is a method of dialogue, reconciliation and inclusivity. Jesus never excluded anybody for whatever reason. Nobody was unworthy to share his food, to sit beside him and to have a friendly conversation with him. That is why diverse categories of incredible people gather around his table. The betrayer Judas Iscariot, Simon Peter who denied him, Zacchaeus the crook, and women with potentially questionable morality were all welcomed on Jesus’ table (Mt. 26:6-13; Lk.7:36-50; 14:7-24; 22:14-30).

This is the mystery of God’s love, his diaconal communion, which is not always understood and sometimes not accepted by religious believers. For these same reasons, Jesus was labelled a sinner (Mt.11:19), though this diaconal communion was his way of revealing God’s hospitality as a fundamental element of his messianic mission (Ps. 23:5-6).

Learning diaconia as a living communion with excluded communities will not be a leisure activity. There are a lot of risks and a price to pay. For example, in today’s context, expressing hospitality to the homeless, refugees, asylum seekers, those with drug addictions, street children, sex workers, people living with disabilities, victims of HIV/AIDS, etc. will not always be viewed positively in wider societies. In the case of refugees and migration, populist politicians could condemn the church as promoting or to supporting illegal immigration and therefore to contributing to weakening the social security system in their own countries. When it comes to developing diaconal action as communion with people living in questionable morality environments, according to some religious perceptions, people even within church organisations will raise critical concerns. In fact, this attitude of Jesus to include all people at his table of communion, contrasts with some church traditions which have turned the Holy Communion into an exclusive place, where only *worthy* people can join.

This moralistic use of church discipline may, according to Kjell Nordstokke,¹⁸ obscure the diaconal dimension of the Holy Communion and its power as transformative sacrament and space of inclusion in a world where so many experience exclusion. Instead of being a space of union, it has become a moment of manifesting division and self-centredness. Nordstokke also supports the idea that, in asking to the believers in Corinth to wait for one another during the Holy Communion, Paul most likely referred to the poorest among them who had to work until the late evening because of their status as slaves or servants. If others started the meal, not allowing the poorest to be part of the celebration, the very diaconal dimension of the communion would be jeopardised (1 Cor. 11). The table is a privileged space for reconciliation. It allows people to meet face to face with names, identities and their own stories.

However, this situation is challenged in modern society. Nowadays, physical communion has become more and more difficult. This is the ambivalent influence of communication media. While bringing people together from different extremities, at the same time, communication media, isolates those sitting at the same table. In this context, physical encounters do not provide all the advantages of communion anymore. Thus, new strategies of celebrating real communion need to be elaborated accordingly.

As a didactic learning approach, education and democracy could be an appropriate approach, since it is based on integration of the expression of difference as a means of enriching one's own life experience and as an integral part of the personal aspect of the democratic way of life.

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¹⁸ Kjell Nordstokke, *Diaconia in Context*, p.33.

18. THE DIACONAL PROFILE OF CHRISTIAN SOCIAL SERVICES WITHIN MULTICULTURAL AND SECULARISED SETTINGS

Beate Hofmann¹ and Annette Leis-Peters²

What is diaconal profile and why is it needed? The importance of these questions and how they are answered varies from context to context around the globe. In this contribution, we reflect on the concept of and the need for diaconal profile from the perspective of two geographically close contexts that nonetheless experienced very different developments with regard to Christian social services – Germany and the Nordic³ countries (in particular Sweden and Norway).

Reasons for Developing a Diaconal Profile

In the past 150 years, a unique structure of organised care-giving has been created within Christian responsibility in Germany and other European countries. This was mainly developed by two major Christian umbrella organisations for voluntary non-profit social service providers, namely Diakonia (Protestant) and Caritas (Catholic). It has become a central pillar of the welfare state, which relies on independent social organisations. They have organised their social activities as large employers with approximately 1.1 million full-time employees and 1.2 million volunteers⁴ in organisational units which are self-reliant and independent from the churches. With between 200 and 5,000 employees, the legal form of “social enterprises” represents the most widespread form of organisation. During the last 25 years, a social market has emerged in Germany because of the change in financing from cost-recovery to performance-orientation and through allowing for-profit care providers to operate on a European level. This requires social organisations to focus on costs, efficiency, performance indicators and entrepreneurial action, at the same time as their services and their organisation and administration are also strongly controlled by governmental regulations.

The competition of various providers for specialist workforces, resources, and care contracts leads employees, the public, sponsors, and users or clients to question the profile of social institutions. Christian social organisations, such as diaconal institutions, are expected to have a universal, unselfish ethics based on

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³ The Nordic countries include Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. This chapter focuses for two reasons on the situation in, and research from, Norway and Sweden. Firstly, the social, religious and research context in these two countries provide a specifically clear counterpart for comparative reflections with the German context. Secondly, one of the authors, Annette Leis-Peters has lived and worked in each of these two countries for almost ten years. The term “Nordic” is used since the similarities between these five countries, compared to Germany, are bigger than the differences, which, of course, also can be found in comparisons between the Nordic countries. Diaconia research is also going on in Iceland, Denmark and Finland, in particular at the University of Iceland, the University of Aarhus/Denmark and at the Diak Diaconia University of Applied Sciences, the University of Helsinki and the University of Eastern Finland.

⁴ See <https://www.bagfw.de/ueber-uns/mitgliedsverbaende> Accessed 27th July 2020.

love of the neighbour and not primarily on the economic criteria necessitated by today's market economy. The growing tension between these expectations and the consequences of marketisation and growing economic pressure in the diaconal institutions is mastered primarily by the establishment of reflexive discourses (mission statement processes, ethical discussions, diaconal educational offers for employees).

For the churches, the transformation of diaconal organisations into "corporate structures" and enterprises seemed strange, following the economic rules employed by professional management. It is not easy for church officials to understand why diaconal activities have turned into corporations with 5000 employees, forced to adopt the managerial behaviour and policies of economic enterprises. "Is this still a Christian organisation?" is a question often asked. There were strong expectations in regard to more emphasis on Christian faith or closer cooperation with church offices

The central question of increasing importance in these discussions refers to the uniqueness of Christian social services: Is there a difference between the services of diaconal institutions and those of private initiatives or other welfare organisations like the Red Cross? Finding an answer to this question is one of the challenges these diaconal institutions face, considering themselves as "love expressed in structures."⁵

Elements of a Diaconal Profile

There are two standpoints in this discussion among theologians. Some say there is no specific Christian way of helping; the help is Christian in and of itself and does not need any "baptism". It is human to help others. In a secular society, Christian values, like respect, dignity and the unique value of each human life, have become common standards for social work and health care. Representatives of this position point out that there is no specific Christian professionalism.⁶ They describe helping per se as an expression of the Christian faith, which cannot be additionally accentuated by Christians, and they reject attempts to describe a specifically Christian profile of social services in *Diakonia* and *Caritas*.⁷ The advantage of this approach is that it appreciates the helping practices themselves and does not need to determine their own identity by marking differences from others or claiming to have additional and special diaconal values.

The representatives of the opposite position argue for a specific Christian profile of Christian social organisations. There are very different methods of describing this: reasons for a particular profile through the location of *Diakonia* or *Caritas* in the church or with strong organisational connections to church;⁸ descriptions of central ethical standards such as the mercy of God, by which the quality of diaconal action should be characterized;⁹ or of dimensions of the Christian anthropology that should shape diaconal action.¹⁰ A mediation between these positions is provided by Thorsten Moos, who differentiates between the act of helping and its religious interpretation and describes the function of this interpretation as cultivating the help

⁵ Werner M. Ruschke, *Spannungsfelder heutiger Diakonie* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2007), p. 27.

⁶ Heinz Rügger and Christoph Sigrist, *Diakonie – eine Einführung. Zur theologischen Begründung helfenden Handelns* (Zürich: TVZ, 2011), p. 143.

⁷ Eberhard Hauschildt, "Wider die Identifikation von Diakonie und Kirche. Skizze vom Nutzen einer veränderten Verhältnisbestimmung", *Pastoraltheologie* 89 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2000), pp 411-415.

Herbert Haslinger, *Diakonie. Grundlagen für die soziale Arbeit der Kirche* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2009), Rügger / Sigrist, "Diakonie", 2011.

⁸ Reinhard Turre, "Diakonie – eine Ausprägung christlicher Religion" in *Theologie und Diakonie*, eds. Michael Schibilsky and Renate Zitt, *Veröffentlichungen der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie* 25 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus 2004), pp. 458-464.

⁹ Ulrich H.J. Körtnner, "Diakonie im Spannungsfeld zwischen Qualität, christlichem Selbstverständnis und Wirtschaftlichkeit", *Wege zum Menschen* 62 no. 2 (Göttingen: Vandhoeck und Ruprecht, 2010), pp. 155-167.

¹⁰ Rainer Wettreck and Veronika Drews-Galle, "Diakonie als Vertrauensmarke stärken" in *Praktische Theologie* 48 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2013), pp. 236-251.

ethics, depicting the moments of unconditionality and dealing with the aporia of helping.¹¹ This does not result in a specific criterion of difference in helping, but a Christian characteristic of helping.¹²

In Germany, a basic pillar of ensuring a Christian profile in social institutions under Christian leadership has so far been the personal attachment of employees to the Christian faith. In the 19th and 20th century, this happened through the development of new religious professions and lifestyles (deaconess, deacon) linked to diaconal institutions. Due to the decreasing interest in these professions and lifestyles and the expansion of social and care services provided by diaconal institutions, the connection between professional help and religious motivation has been primarily formally fixed in the mandatory demand of church membership of all employees since the 1960s.

Growing religious pluralism, migration, declining numbers of membership in Christian churches and demographic change all make it increasingly difficult to hire only church members in the diaconal institutions of both Diakonia and Caritas. The proportion of non-church employees in diakonia already fluctuates between 67.2% in Brandenburg (in East Germany) and 1.6% in Bavaria (in the South).¹³ In addition, there is an increasing plea to employ people with other religious orientations as employees and allow them to participate in God's universal love and the services of love towards our neighbours.¹⁴ For Christian social services, for example provided by diaconal institutions, this results in the task of developing their Christian profile in an increasingly religious and culturally plural workforce and finding ways of securing this profile in other ways if this no longer happens through church membership of the staff.

This implies a shift from a focus on organisational identity by having Christian staff members to a focus on aspects of organisational identity by having a Christian organisational culture. Such a "diaconal corporate culture" is rooted in Christian faith and Christian ethics, it is expressed in Christian guidelines and mission statements, and it is lived out in daily routines and practices. It includes the way members interact with each other and encounter those who seek help or advice, how they create rituals, the symbols they employ, the way they deal with limitations, the rites of passage they use in case of clients or employees, the way they decorate nursing homes or hospitals, and how they celebrate Sundays and Christian festivals, or even non-Christian festivals. All of these facets provide ways to make a difference for those who work for, live at, or ask for support from diaconal organisations.¹⁵

It is one of the basic management tasks in a diaconal institution to enable such a diaconal profile and to involve the employees in the responsibility to create a vivid diaconal culture. A diaconal profile can only be successfully created where an appropriate framework is established in the form of time, space, financial and human resources. Only then can the attitude and culture of institutions and services be filled with life. A lively diaconal culture arises from the participation of many, quite different, volunteers and full-time employees.

¹¹ Thorsten Moos, "Kirche bei Bedarf. Zum Verhältnis von Diakonie und Kirche aus theologischer Sicht", *Zeitschrift für evangelisches Kirchenrecht* 58 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebrecht, 2013), pp. 253-279, 267ff, here 271.

¹² Moos, "Kirche", p. 267.

¹³ Diakonie-Texts 06.2011, 20f, Available at:

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¹⁴ Dierk Starnitzke, "Diakonische Identität in einer pluralen Gesellschaft. Zwischen kirchlichem Selbstbestimmungsrecht und interkultureller und interreligiöser Öffnung der diakonischen Arbeit", *Zeitschrift für evangelische Ethik* 58 no.2 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus 2014), pp. 110-123.

¹⁵ Beate Hofmann, *Diakonische Unternehmenskultur. Handbuch für Führungskräfte*, 2nd edition (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2010). See also Edgar H. Schein, *Organisational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers 2010) (A Joint publication in the Jossey-Bass management series and the Jossey-Bass social and behavioral science series). Schein's concept serves as foundation for the concept of diaconal corporate culture.

Diaconal Profile in a Multireligious Society

Empirical studies¹⁶ on diaconal organisational culture and employees without religious affiliation or from other religious backgrounds (mainly Muslim) show the challenges that a pluralistic context and multireligious teams can cause for diaconal organisations and their leadership.

In a secular context, employees ask for reasons why a diaconal institution should provide space for religious rituals such as prayers, devotions, blessings etc. If users of social services of diaconal institutions, e.g. elderly people in a nursing home, ask for these rituals then they are well accepted. Another way of creating plausibility works through creating space for personal experiences with religious rituals. If employees without religious affiliation encounter Christian rituals as personal enrichment, e.g. as helpful break and space for reflection in daily routines, then they will support the practice of these religious elements in the practices of the diaconal institution.

The prime place for inculturation into a Christian corporate culture is the workplace. Educational settings (seminars, courses) can support the encounter with and the reflection of this corporate culture, but it is colleagues and leaders who provide the main access and trust in such an organisational culture. “The most important aspect is that leaders serve as a model. If they do not model, then the profile is not authentic. People will discover this very quickly,” says a team member in an interview.

The research results also show that there is a need for “anchor persons”. Christian or diaconal organisational culture is anchored in the professional practice of this person. For them a morning devotion, a prayer at the bedside of a sick person or a blessing for a dying person is an authentic part of their spirituality. Thereby, they provide a model for others and orientation in how to perform these rituals. However, it is important that these anchor persons can talk about why they do what they do. It is not enough that this “is a rule” or the way things are done here. There needs to be a personal story and witness why it is helpful to work this way.

Anchor persons can be members of religious communities or religious professionals. Leaders also have a crucial role as models for shaping corporate culture. However, regular team members also can take the role of anchor person and set up a diaconal culture, providing plausibility and orientation and empowering other team members to share the practice.

Clear concepts of the Christian identity of diaconal institutions provide the foundation of such an organisational culture. There need to be narratives, examples, guidelines. It is necessary to communicate them during job interviews and during the training. Employees need to have a chance to get to know, to reflect and to critically discuss these practices to adopt them as their own practice and as a regular element of their professional work. It should not be a special task of some religious professionals.

Christian social services run by diaconal institutions and other providers will also experience changes in their organisational culture by multireligious team members. Space has to be made for other religious practices such as Muslim or Jewish religious festivals, fasting in Ramadan, and daily prayer routines in order to show respect to other religions. There will be questions in regard to Christian rituals: How do we celebrate Christmas in a multireligious team? How do we celebrate graduation in Christian schools or a welcome ceremony for people from different religious backgrounds? How do we deal with dying in a multireligious community? What about hospitality at holy communion?

¹⁶ See Beate Hofmann et.al. (ed), *Merkmale diakonischer Unternehmenskultur in einer pluralen Gesellschaft* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2020). See also Maik Arnold et.al., *Perspektiven diakonischer Profilbildung* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2017), Tobias Foß, *Relevanz im Arbeitsalltag: das diakonische Profil von konfessionslosen Mitarbeitenden. Eine empirische Arbeit über Zugänge zur christlichen Lebensform* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2020), Hanns-Stephan Haas and Dierk Starnitzke, *Gelebte Identität: Zur Praxis von Unternehmen in Caritas und Diakonie* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2019).

Altogether, efforts to create an inclusive Christian profile in a multireligious environment will have to answer one fundamental question: Is it part of our identity to co-operate with people of faith from other religious backgrounds or is that disturbing our identity?

Compared to competitors, a diaconal profile that is understood and is expressed in this way in both the organisational culture and individual attitudes can make a difference.

Nordic Perspectives on the Discourse about Diaconal Profile

While there are many parallels between German and Nordic diaconal institutions when it comes to their history of origins in the 19th and first part of the 20th century, they have diverged since, at least from the end of the Second World War. At this time, strong and universal welfare states emerge in the Nordic countries. They aim at comprehensive welfare benefits and services for all citizens independent of class, type of employment, gender or where they live in the country. Municipalities provide the ideal structure for realising these aims since they exist everywhere. There is no comparable state-wide network of diaconal institutions as they have their roots in the initiatives and commitment of local individuals or groups. Differently than in continental Europe, Nordic citizens had and have full confidence in the state. Respectively, Nordic diaconal institutions are questioned in their role as providers of professional care and welfare services. They are therefore not integrated in the establishment and the development of the Nordic welfare states. This is for example illustrated by a famous speech of Alva Myrdal, one of the founding mothers of the Swedish welfare state. The speech was held at a national diaconia conference in 1971 and focuses on the role of church congregations in welfare (by complementing public welfare by taking care of the existential needs of their members). Along the way, the Social-Democratic minister mentions that the professional services of diaconal institutions should and will be replaced by public services as soon as possible.¹⁷ In a situation with hardly any legitimation for professional diaconal services, the answer of theologians and diaconal institutions was either to embrace the (secular) welfare state as having emerged from the Christian tradition, to focus on professional services without emphasising the diaconal profile, to demand more space for Christian and diaconal service provision or to quit service provision in order to act as a critical outside observer of the welfare system. The latter two alternatives linked the diaconal profile to the critical voice role of diaconal institutions.¹⁸

Since then, Nordic welfare politicians have re-discovered voluntary organisations like diaconal institutions as welfare providers. Both the austerity of the welfare state during the last decades and the growing diversity in the Nordic societies made them attractive collaboration partners in the matter of welfare and care. Several

¹⁷ Cf. Annette Leis-Peters, “Hidden by civil society and religion? Diaconal institutions as welfare providers in the growing Swedish welfare state”, in *Lutheranism and the Nordic Welfare States*, Special Issue of the *Journal of Church and State* 56 no. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 105-127.

¹⁸ Cf. Trygve Wyller, “Staat und Fürsorge – Wahrhaftigkeit und Berufung. Anmerkungen zu einer kritischen Betrachtung der Diakonie in der modernen norwegischen Gesellschaft” [State and Care – Truthfulness and calling. Comments to a critical examination of diaconia in modern Norwegian society] in *Diakonie an der Schwelle zum neuen Jahrtausend. Ökumenische Beiträge zur weltweiten und interdisziplinären Verständigung* [Diaconia at the threshold of the new millenium. Ecumenical contributions for a global and interdisciplinary understanding], ed. Theodor Strohm, *Veröffentlichungen des Diakoniewissenschaftlichen Instituts an der Universität Heidelberg* 12 (Heidelberg: Winter, 2000), pp. 211-252.

Annette Leis-Peters, “Ledare med kritiska röster. Utmaningar i ledarskap av diakoniinstitutioner med utgångspunkt i en jämförande svensk-tysk fallstudie” [Leaders with critical voices. Challenges in the leadership of diaconal institutions from the perspective of a comparative Swedish-German case study], in: *Ledelse i diakonale virksomheter* [Leadership in diaconal activities] (ed) Einar Aadland (Trondheim: Akademika, 2012, pp. 247-263.

important strategic policy papers around and after the millennium show the evidence for this.¹⁹ One of the main arguments for expanding the Nordic welfare system with non-public welfare and care providers was to ensure liberty of choice for the service users and to match the growing diversity in society with a variety of service providers. Recent mapping studies show that this strategy was only partially successful. While there is an actual growth of non-public for-profit organisations among the Nordic welfare and care providers in general and in particular in Sweden, the share of voluntary, value-based, not-for-profit providers has been stagnating.²⁰ Interestingly, Nordic political scientists point to a connection between the lack of growth among voluntary providers and the question of profile.²¹

Is diaconal profile in diaconal institutions needed or even possible in a context where the public opinion is not sure whether diaconal profile is necessary? How do Nordic theologians and diaconia researchers reflect on diaconal profile? How are their considerations affected by the challenge of having to refer to a secular public sphere that expects that all expression of religion should be avoided in the public since religion should be practiced in the private sphere?²² What can a diaconal profile look like when the population might accept diaconal and church institutions as providers for extraordinary services for marginalised groups, but is hesitant about receiving standard welfare and health services from them as a study in Norway and Sweden showed?²³ Does the growing multiculturalism and multi-religiosity in the Nordic countries make it easier to have a visible diaconal profile?

Compared to the German discourse, there is no larger and explicit discussion about diaconal profile among Nordic theologians and researchers in the field of diaconia. However, several important strands in the general Nordic diaconia discussion can be easily related to the question of diaconal profile. The four selected strands below help particularly well to understand what diaconal profile in diaconal institutions and services could be in the Nordic countries.

Internationally, Nordic theologians are most known for highlighting the importance of diaconia within the church structures. This is illustrated by the comprehensive debates about the diaconate as part of the ministry that took place in the Nordic countries since the 1980s. These debates have resulted in the restructuring into a three-led church ministry that includes the diaconate in almost all of the Nordic churches.²⁴ Nordic theologians have also been driving forces in strengthening the concept of diaconia in international church debates.²⁵ This means that in a situation where society did not ask for professional diaconal services in welfare and health services, it became both natural and necessary to look for diaconal profile within the church.

¹⁹ Cf. for example NOU 2011:11, “Innovation of the Care Services” (Oslo: Ministry of Health and Care Services 2011) or SOU 2000:38, “Välfärd, vård och omsorg” [Welfare, care and support] (Stockholm: Ministry of Health and Social Affairs 2000) or SOU 2019:56, “Idéburen välfärd” [Value-based Welfare] (Stockholm: Ministry of Finance 2019).

²⁰ Cf. Karl Henrik Sivesind and Jon Saglie, *Promoting Active Citizenship. Markets and Choice in Scandinavian Welfare* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

²¹ Per Selle: “Frivillighetens marginalisering” [The marginalisation of voluntarism], *Tidsskrift for velferdsforskning* [Journal for Welfare Research] 19 no. 1 (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget/Scandinavia University Press, 2016), pp. 76-89.

²² Cf. Inger Furseth (ed), *Religious Complexity in the Public Sphere: Comparing Nordic Countries* (London/New York: Palgrave, 2019).

²³ Olav Helge Angell, “Kyrkan och välfärden. Svenska uppfattningar i ett norskt perspektiv” [The Church and the Welfare. Swedish Opinions in a Norwegian Perspective] in *Välfärdsinsatser på religiös grund. Förväntningar och problem* [Welfare Commitments on Religious Basis. Expectations and Problems] (ed) Anders Bäckström (Skellefteå: Artos, 2014), pp. 139-162, and Miriam Hollmer and Anders Bäckström, “Svenska kyrkan och välfärden. En undersökning av attityder” [The Church of Sweden and the Welfare. A Study of attitudes], in: Bäckström, *Välfärdsinsatser*, pp. 31-62.

²⁴ See for example Tiit Pädam, *Ordination of Deacons in the Churches of the Porvoo Communion: A Comparative Investigation in Ecclesiology* (Uppsala: Faculty of Theology, 2011).

²⁵ A good example of this is the working paper The Lutheran World Federation, *Diakonia in Context*, edited by. Kjell Nordstokke (Geneva: LWF, 2009), available at: <https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-diakonia-context-transformation-reconciliation-empowerment>, accessed 26th June 2020.

Diaconal profile is neither self-evident in churches nor in diaconal institutions but reflections about diaconal profile in these both settings can complement and inspire each other.

A second reaction to a social context where the need for diaconal contributions to the welfare and care services is not self-evident, leads to wider discussions about the role of diaconia in society. The Swedish theologian Erik Blennberger has not only developed the most detailed model for the possible different roles of diaconia in society ranging from voice and society guide, over pioneer and innovator to complement, alternative, replacer or simply service provider.²⁶ Together with his colleague, Mats J. Hansson, he also explains that diaconia best can be understood as an act or an activity and that it is helpful to think about what makes this act diaconal. They suggest that such an act can be defined as diaconal based on the character of the act, the motives and intentions of the act, the persons who perform the act, the organisational setting of the act, the addressee of the act or if the act expresses Christian identity.²⁷ The profile of any service provided by diaconal institutions and church organisations is thus closely related to both how diaconia is defined and which role in society it aims to fill. This does not automatically mean that diaconia research has to limit itself to activities that can easily be defined as diaconal. The Swedish sociologist of religion, Anders Bäckström, locates diaconal studies and the search for diaconal identity “between a quality-based private sphere, where the health and welfare of individuals is central, and society’s need for public welfare solutions”.²⁸

The participants of the third important discourse in the Nordic debate about diaconal profile are clearly influenced by secular values in health care and welfare such as human rights, equal treatment and user involvement. The diaconal profile that they discuss emerges from the discussion between the biblical and theological foundations on the one hand and the secular welfare values on the other hand. Examples of this are approaches that focus on avoiding the power hierarchy between receiver and provider of welfare services²⁹ or on including both the user, the researcher and the practitioner perspective in all empirical research about diaconia³⁰ Both critical historical analyses of diaconal contributions, for example in the field of services for people with disabilities³¹ or theological and gender analyses of the role of women in diaconia³² point to the need to include the secular perspectives, such as user rights or gender, in the work with the diaconal profile. Empirical case studies about Norwegian diaconal institutions and their leaders illustrate that this is not only a theological work, but also a task for the leaders of diaconal institutions.³³

²⁶ Cf. Erik Blennberger, “Diakoni, etik och ideologi” [Diaconia, ethics and ideology] in: *Diakoni – tolkning, historik, praktik* [Diaconia – interpretation, history, practice] (eds) Erik Blennberger and Mats J. Hansson (Stockholm: Verbum, 2008), pp. 89-117: 113f.

²⁷ Cf. Erik Blennberger and Mats J. Hansson, “Vad means med diakoni?” [What is meant by diaconia], in Blennberger/Hansson, *Diakoni*, pp. 13-27.

²⁸ Anders Bäckström, “Religion between the Public and the Private. About Diaconal Studies as an Academic Field”, *Diaconia. Journal for the Study of Christian Social Practice* 3(1) (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2012), pp. 44-57: 55.

²⁹ Cf. Stephanie Dietrich, “Reflections on Core Aspects of Diaconal Theory” in *Diaconia as Christian Social Practice. An Introduction* (eds) Stephanie Dietrich, Knud Jørgensen, Kari Karsrud Korslien and Kjell Nordstokke (Oxford: Regnum, 2014), pp. 13-27.

³⁰ Cf. Sturla Stålsett, Arnhild Taskdal, and Per Kristian Hilden, “Research as Diaconia. Commitment, Action and Participation”, *Diaconia. Journal for the Study of Christian Social Practice* 9(2) (Göttingen: Vandehoeck und Ruprecht, 2018), pp. 165-180.

³¹ Cf. Inger Marie Lid (ed): *Diakoni og velferdsstat. Utvikling av en diaconal praksis i samspill med myndigheter, sivilsamfunn og borgere* [Diaconia and welfare state. Development of a diaconal practice in co-operation between authorities, civil society and citizens] (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2018).

³² Cf. Ninna Edgardh: *Diakonins kyrka. Teologi, kön och omsorgens utmattning* [The Church of Diaconia. Theology, Sex and Care Fatigue] (Stockholm: Verbum, 2019).

³³ Cf. Harald Askeland, Gry Espedal and Stephen Sirris, “Values as Vessels of Religion? The Role of Values in Everyday Work at Faith-Based Organizations”, *Diaconia. Journal for the Study of Christian Social Practice* 10 no. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2019), pp. 27-49.

The fourth strand unfolds itself from the discourses before and goes in accordance with the results of the German empirical studies about diaconal profile. Diaconal profile is about a constant reflection and communication work and not about finding and implementing the right diaconal profile. Therefore, communicative concepts such as religious literacy³⁴ or bilingualism between secular and theological language³⁵ have recently been introduced into Nordic discussions about diaconia and diaconal profile. The contributors to this discourse emphasise that it is not only necessary to include secular perspectives and values into the reflections about the diaconal profile, but that any diaconal profile has to be communicable both within and outside a diaconal organisation and to employees, volunteers and users who are Christian, secular or have other religions.

Conclusion

We underlined that our reflections about diaconal profile are profoundly contextual. Consequently, we are very aware that they might only be of limited relevance for other global contexts, bearing in mind that the British sociologist of religion Grace Davie has characterised Europe religiously as the exceptional case.³⁶ Nevertheless, we have identified three aspects which might be worth thinking about in very different contexts across the world.

Firstly, reflecting on the diaconal profile has to take place in churches as well as in diaconal institutions, i.e. faith-based welfare organisations. Neither churches nor diaconal institutions know better, but have to complement each other constantly to be credible within and outside their own organisational frameworks.

Secondly, any diaconal profile is a response to a social context. Therefore, it is essential to account for how the diaconal profile together with the actual definition of diaconia and the understanding of the role of diaconia relate to the social context from which they emerged.

Thirdly, the task of finding and expressing a diaconal profile cannot be solved but is, in its essence, an ongoing project. It is part of every aspect of diaconal activities, may they take place in diaconal institutions or in churches. Expressing diaconal profile means communicating it. Creating a corporative diaconal organisational culture implies both reflecting about the diaconal profile and communicating it constantly.

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³⁴ Cf. Leis-Peters, Annette, "Religious literacy in welfare and civil society. A Nordic Perspective", in *Re-imagining Religion and Belief. 21st Century Policy and Practice*, ed. Christopher Baker, Beth R. Crisp & Adam Dinham (Bristol: Polity Press, 2018), pp. 145-167.

³⁵ Cf. Tron Fagermoen, "Beyond Bilingualism. Gustaf Wingren and the Public Voice of Diaconia", *Diaconia. Journal for the Study of Christian Social Practice* 11(1) (forthcoming).

³⁶ Cf. Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case. Parameters of Faith in the Modern World* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2002).

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PART II

CONCEPTS AND PROFILES OF DIACONICAL MINISTRIES IN DIFFERENT WORLD REGIONS

19. PATRISTIC APPROACHES TO DIAKONIA – DIAKONIA IN THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN REGION

John N. Njoroge¹

Introduction

This article focuses on the Diakonia of the Ancient Mediterranean Christianity with special attention given to the Patristic Approaches, thoughts and practices. The article tracks the biblical understanding of diakonia and how this understanding has been taught and practiced by Orthodox Christianity up to today. It is important to understand the meaning of diakonia on the basis of biblical and patristic teachings, as well as monastic, liturgical and missiological practices within the Orthodox Church tradition.

The Term Diakonia in Ancient Mediterranean Christianity

The term diakonia is derived the Greek verb *diakonein*, which means to serve. It is from the same verb from which the word *diakonos* is derived to denote a male or female servant at the table. Diakonia is a theological term referring to Christian service of charity or philanthropic praxis of the church throughout its history.² The usage of the term diakonia can be traced back to the teaching and compassionate works of Jesus Christ. The teachings and compassionate works of Jesus Christ became the basis of the praxis diakonia for the apostles and their disciples in ancient Christianity, as recorded in the book of the Acts of Apostles. In the light of these teachings and practices i.e. “to serve, not to be served” (Mt. 20:28), diakonia meant serving and providing care to others. For the ancient Christians along the Mediterranean, diakonia was a philanthropic service demonstrating the actualisation of the gospel in both the word and deeds as Christ taught. Diakonia is the ultimate action or gesture of love to the other through selfless serving. In the ancient Christian understanding, diakonia was never separated from philanthropy. Apparently, diakonia denoted the philanthropic care and service to others as a Christian duty.

According to Demetrios J. Constantelos, the ancient Christian understanding and practice of diakonia was adopted from the language, thought, and experience of ancient Hellenism. In ancient Hellenism, the term diakonia was used to mean philanthropic care and practice; it was theocentric and synonymous with *agape*.³ Agape has a prominent place in Christian Theology and it is a driving power that cherishes Christians’ actions of service to others. *Agape* and *philanthropia* are *theo-centralised* terminologies in the orthodox liturgical worship, and from which emanates the praxis of diakonia for the Christians during and after liturgy.

Ancient Mediterranean Christianity has its theological thoughts built on the cultural and intellectual basis of Hellenism.⁴ This influenced the rapid growth and blossoming of Christian practices through the processes

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² See Teresa Joan White’s entry on diakonia from the revised edition of the Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement, published jointly by the World Council of Churches and the Wm. Eerdmans in 2002.

³ Demetrios J. Constantelos, “Origins of Christian Orthodox Diakonia: Christian Orthodox Philanthropy in Church History” in *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 52, 2007, pp. 1-28.

⁴ John Meyendorff, “Greek Philosophy and Christian Theology in the Early Church” in *La Theologie dans L’eglise et dans le Monde*, ed. Démètre Theraios and Georges Lemopoulos Etudes Theologiaques de Chambesy no. 4 (Chambésy 1984), p. 66.

of inculturation⁵ in both the Greek-speaking East and the Latin-speaking West of the Roman Empire. The inculturation process here is a “fulfilment” of Jewish messianic expectations and “fulfilment” of the Hellenic quest for the epiphany of the Logos, or the “unknown God” (Acts 17:23) instead of the total replacement of pre-Christian religious traditions. The same school of thought applies to the diakonia of the early Christian biblical exegesis, patristic teachings, monastic, liturgical and missiological praxis of the church.

The bible provides evidence of the practice of diakonia in both Old and New Testaments respectively. The Old Testament has sufficient evidence especially from the Torah and the Prophets of the diaconal and charitable ways to alleviate the sufferings of the poor and foreigners as well as advocacy for widows and orphans. Through the Torah, Israelites were instructed by God: when they reap the harvest their lands, not to reap to the very edges of their field or gather the gleanings of their harvests. Neither were they to strip their vineyards bare rather they were to leave the gleanings of their harvest and the fallen grapes for the poor and alien (Lev. 19:9-10). The God of Israel is a just God known of executing justice for the widows and orphans (Dt. 10:18-19; 14:29). It was expected the Israelites to accord justice to the widows and orphans, offer home to the aliens for their God is a just and compassionate. Those who would opt otherwise and oppress the widows, the orphans and the aliens God’s wrath would reach them as a punishment (Ex. 22:21-24).

In the New Testament, diakonia was literally demonstrated through Christ’s service and teachings. The followers of Jesus Christ were expected to demonstrate their faith in Christ by acting like Him. The virtues of mercy, compassion, kindness and love to humanity is paramount for the praxis of Diakonia. God’s love for mankind made him give His only begotten son so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). The vertical *agape* was reciprocated horizontally through the sacrificial death of Christ. Christ came to serve but not to be served, and he showed this to his disciples practically through his washing of their feet, an act he did not ask them to reciprocate but to pass on in serving their fellow human beings (13:1-17).

Ancient Christian Practices of Diakonia

The praxis of Diakonia for the apostles and the church starts in Acts of the Apostles, chapter 6 with St. Luke’s account of the institution of the diaconate.⁶ St. Luke notes that the collegiality of the apostles decided to pick seven deacons to serve at the table as the disciples continues to evangelise (Act. 6:1-6). This was a result of complaints from the Greek Christians who observed the negligence of their widows (Act. 6:1). This is an indicator that the church was taking care of the needy amongst them and that it was an important practice among the believers. Although the diaconate in the Orthodox Church today is a clerical order, exercised at the Eucharistic table, it is paramount to expound St. Luke’s text on Diakonia and St. Paul’s understanding of love, communion of inclusion (Gal. 3:28) and contribution towards the Jerusalem church (Act. 11:27ff.; 2 Cor. 8). According to Miltiadis Vantsos & Marina Kiroudi, in Christian teaching practiced by early Christian communities, love of God is not just a verbal confession or an emotion, but it requires philanthropic practice toward one’s brethren.⁷ This is qualified by St. John the evangelist when he writes; “*whoever claims that he loves God, but hates his brother, is a liar, however He who loves God, also loves his brother*” (1 Jn. 4:21). Loving one brother, which was denoted by the concept of brotherly love “*Philadelphia*” meant not only expressing emotional empathy but fulfilling the divine call of philanthropy. This is well articulated by St.

⁵ See John Njoroge, “Towards An African Orthodoxy: A Call for Inculturation”. *Ortodoksia* Vol.56 Light Press: Kaarina, Finland 2016, pp. 65-84.

⁶ Thomas E. Breidenthal, “Exodus from Privilege: Reflections on the Diaconate in Acts” in *Anglican Theological Review* 95(2) (2013) pp. 275-292.

⁷ Miltiadis Vantsos & Marina Kiroudi, “An Orthodox View of Philanthropy and Church Diaconia”, *Christian Bioethics* 13 (3) (2007), pp. 251-268.

James in his universal letter; he says that “there does not exist any benefit in merely wishing the naked and hungry well, while not clothing and feeding them” (James 2:16-17).

In a broader understanding of ancient Christian practices of Diakonia, serving at the table by the deacons in Acts of Apostle, inclusivity and offertory in St. Paul’s letters is actualisation of *agape*. Actualisation of *agape* was not merely a theory for Christians but a realised living of the same love as manifested in the incarnated *Logos* (Tit. 3:4-7). This means that Diakonia in the early church was contextually a praxis of service of social care beyond the normal almsgiving. It was philanthropic in nature, which was an actual reflection of what God is, for God is love.⁸ This was a distinctive characteristic of the early Christian communities, where *agape* was expressed to all; breaking down the negative classifications based on ethnicity and gender practiced in the Greco-Roman world. The modern world is not an exception from the Roman Empire because even today communities do experience and exercise discrimination based on social hierarchies. The early church practices of Diakonia reminds us that *we are one in Christ* for there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female (Gal. 3:38). This impacted Christians in their respective communities to not only practice Diakonia as an expression of love and empathy to the other but also recognition of the poor and the marginalised as people, who are equally the privileged just as those who are economically and socially advantaged. This understanding contributed greatly to the patristic teachings on man being created in the image and likeness of God in the context of *philanthropia* (Gen. 2:26-27).

During the patristic times, Diakonia was taught and practised based on both the biblical teachings and early Christians philanthropic social actions. The fathers and the mothers of the church based their theology of Diakonia on what Christ himself had taught. The nation of God’s love to save mankind and the inheritance of the Kingdom of Heaven was connected and qualified by individual Christian philanthropic service to the poor, widows and orphans. This was highly influenced by the sacrificial love of Christ on the cross, redemption of sin and as a condition to entering into the Kingdom of God as St. Matthew writes:

Come, o blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you received me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you visited me [...] Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me. (Mt. 25:31-46)

Church fathers and especially St. Basil the Great (330-379 AD) championed diakonia through *philanthropia*. The office of the bishop included taking care of the widows, orphans and elderly. St. Basil, who as a bishop and a monk, systematically and passionately organised philanthropic diakonia. St. Basil’s philanthropic diakonia influenced the orthodox theology of diakonia, monasticism and liturgical worship. In one of his homilies, Constantelos quotes:

What are you going to tell the Judge [God] when He asks you about your selfish style of life? The bread you do not use is the bread of the hungry; the luxurious garment hanging in your wardrobe is the garment of the person who is naked; the shoes you do not wear are the shoes of the one who is barefoot; the gold [money] you keep locked away is the money of the poor; the charities you do not distribute are injustices you commit, injustices for which you will be judged. Basil called upon all the faithful to feel embarrassed hearing about the philanthropic accounts of the Hellenes, and urged them to imitate the philanthropic work of the early Christians.⁹

⁸ Demetrios J. Constantelos, “Origins of Christian Orthodox Diakonia: Christian Orthodox Philanthropy in Church History” in *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 52(1) (2007), pp. 1-28.

⁹ *Ibid.*

The Xenodocheion and the Basilias as Centres of Ancient Hospitality and Care

St. Basil's influence on monasticism was not only in creating rules but also on philanthropic diakonia. The best example is his financing of a philanthropic facilities known as "basilias" where the pilgrims, needy, travellers and guests were accommodated. This was an enhancement of the 4th C.E practice of hospitality in *xenodocheion*¹⁰ and particularly in the monasteries. This is still practiced in the orthodox monasteries today. Guest houses are located at the entrance adjunct to the cathedral and the kitchen. This would mean that the pilgrims, poor, travellers, guests and the sick would be welcomed in the monastery, would attend the church services, eat and be accommodated. The sick were served with a good disposition as if they were brothers of the Lord.¹¹ St. Basil's oration instructs that hospitality, sympathy for the suffering, and service to the sick should be particularly characteristic of monks.¹² St. Basil's teachings on diakonia have been integrated within the orthodox asceticism, episcopacy and worship. This eludes to the understanding that diakonia connects both the service giver and the service recipient by satisfying physical needs and spiritual obligations respectively.

St. Basil's philanthropic diakonia has evidently influenced the liturgical worship of the Orthodox Church. Such evidence is found in this prayer found in his liturgy:

Remember, o Lord all those in authority grant them peace... and inspire their hearts with good things for thy church and for all thy people...remember o lord this congregation here present...fill their store-house with all manner of good. Nourish the infants and educate the youth, support the elderly and comfort the fainthearted; ...liberate those who are troubled by illnesses; sail with those at sea; accompany the wayfarers; plead for the widow; defend the orphans, free the captives; heal the afflicted. O God, look after those who are on trial, or condemned to the mines, or to exile and bitter slavery, or in any way hard pressed, in want, in extremity and all who plead for your boundless compassion. Remember O Lord those who love us as well as those who hate us... for you, O Lord, are the help of the helpless, the hope of the hopeless, and rescuer of the tempest-tossed, safe haven for sailors, healer of the sick. Be all things to all people, for you know each of us and what we would ask, our homes, our needs.¹³

Divine Liturgy marks the centre of the orthodox faith, where spirituality enacts living the faith as experienced by a worshipping community. This brings in the words of George Florovsky who observed that "the Church is first of all a worshipping community. Worship comes first, doctrine and discipline second."¹⁴ "The *lex orandi* has a privileged priority in the life of the Christian Church. The *lex credendi* depends on the devotional experience and vision of the Church".¹⁵ The vision of the church is realised in the Eucharistic celebration as continuous state of adoration, prayers, thanksgiving, worship and intercession, as well as contemplation and actualisation of God's love. In return, the faithful, having being energised by the divine grace, are sent out into the world for *liturgy after the liturgy*¹⁶ which includes diakonia.

¹⁰ Xenodocheion is a Greek word meaning guesthouse.

¹¹ Basileiou Kaesareias, "Oroi Kata Epitomen", In K. Karakoles (ed), Basileiou Kaesareias tou megalou Apanta ta Erga, vol. 9 (Thessalonike 1973), p. 186.

¹² See St. Basil the Great's monastic rules set down between 358 and 364 C.E.; it is possible that he was greatly influenced by the monasteries founded by St. Pachomius of Thebaid.

¹³ See the liturgy of *St. Basil the Great at the Orthodoxy Liturgy*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) pp. 132-134.

¹⁴ George Florovsky, *The Elements of Liturgy in The Orthodox Catholic Church* (New York: St.Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1959) p.24, also see Petros Vassiliadis, *Lex Orandi, liturgical Theology and Liturgical Renewal*. (Athens: Indiktos, 2005) p.15.

¹⁵ George Florovsky, "The Elements of Liturgy", in G. Patelos (ed), *The Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement*, Geneva 1978, pp. 172-182: p. 172.

¹⁶ Bria Ion, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy*, pp. 19-35.

Monasteries as Centres of Encounters and Diaconic Care between Travellers and Monks

The early Christian practice of hospitality is a hallmark of orthodox means of mission, evangelism and witness. *Xenodocheion* for guests and strangers is extended to accepting sick travellers, and develops into the nursing sector within the monasteries which becomes part of their mission. For example, monasteries spread within the Egyptian desert became a centre of encounter between the Nubian kingdom travellers and the Christian monks. Through this encounter, Christianity spread as far as the kingdom of Nubia located in present day Sudan in the fifth, sixth and early seventh century. Monasteries witnessed the gospel of Christ through *aiakonia* as a gesture of charity for their faith and material possessions. Over time monasteries had accumulated enough resources to take care of the poor, guests and needy through profit made from the sale of the monks' earthly possessions before their entrance into monastic life, the sale of their farm produce, donations from the wealthy faithful, and tax privileges or funding by state support of their philanthropic activities.

This kind of diakonia was also practiced in other parts of the Byzantine Empire; for example, in Syrian monasteries, nuns and deaconesses provided care for the women in need, deacons and monks cared for men in need, respectively. Diakonia was an indicator of a flourishing Christianity where both laity and the ordained were involved in social care, liturgical-pastoral care, teaching, administrative-juridical duties for the wellbeing of the whole person. This diaconal ministry enhanced church-state relations to a point where Emperor Justinian (483-565) stressed philanthropy and promulgated philanthropic legislation which covered not only the capital but also the provinces of the Roman Empire. He established separate residential institutions to care for the various types of people in need. During his reign, institutions were set up to care for poor pilgrims in Jerusalem and through the pilgrims, the idea of hospices reached the Western church.¹⁷

The “Didache” as In-depth Instruction on Christian Philanthropy and Social Service

Charitable activities earned minority Christians recognition by the majority non-Christian populace and their authorities. This is because philanthropic diakonia was for all without discrimination. Early Church Christians had been instructed through the *Didache*, in-depth teachings regarding philanthropy and social service.¹⁸ For example, parts of *Didache* instructed Christians to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ to love one's neighbours. This love is demonstrated through philanthropic social actions especially to widows, the sick, the poor and orphans. St. Gregory the Theologian elaborates on this by saying, “As long as there is time, let us visit Christ, let us heal Christ, let us feed Christ, let us dress Christ, let us meet Christ, let us honour Christ by doing it to our neighbour”.¹⁹

Diakonia in the modern orthodox world is largely practiced at the level of local churches and dioceses. The reason for this is because of hostile systems of political rule, for example the Ottoman Empire (1299-1923) and communism in many orthodox countries, where diakonia could not be fully developed in institutional forms. Currently, orthodox national churches, archdioceses, dioceses and respective local parishes are involved in active organised diakonia mainly through providing homes for the elderly, hospitals and orphanages. The Holy and Great Pan-Orthodox Council official document on the Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World states:

¹⁷ See Teresa Joan White's entry on diakonia in the revised edition of the Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement published jointly by the World Council of Churches and the Wm. Eerdmans in 2002. Available at <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/justice-diakonia-and-responsibility-for-creation/diakonia>

¹⁸ *Didache of the Twelve Apostles*, 5.5.

¹⁹ See St. Gregory the Theology Homily quoted by Miltiadis Vantsos & Marina Kiroudi in “An Orthodox View of Philanthropy and Church Diaconia”, *Christian Bioethics* 13(3) (2007), pp. 251-268.

In fulfilling the church salvific mission in the world, the Orthodox Church actively cares for all people in need, including the hungry, the poor, the sick, the disabled, the elderly, the persecuted, those in captivity and prison, the homeless, the orphans, the victims of destruction and military conflict, those affected by human trafficking and modern forms of slavery. The Orthodox Church's efforts to confront destitution and social injustice are an expression of her faith and the service to the Lord, Who identifies Himself with every person and especially with those in need: Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me (Mt. 25:40). This multidimensional social service enables the Church to cooperate with various relevant social institutions.²⁰

It is also worth noting that philanthropic diakonia has taken roots in the modern mission outreach of the Orthodox Church. Following the active presence of orthodox churches in the diaspora and in Africa, philanthropic diakonia is gradually becoming contextualised to meet current psychosocial, material and spiritual needs of our society. Currently, there are well-organised and instituted philanthropic facilities across the Orthodox Churches including in the diaspora, for example the National Philoptochos Department of Social Work of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.²¹ In Africa and Kenya in particular where the philanthropic diakonia of the church goes hand-in-hand with mission and evangelism, we have several orphanages like St. Barnabas Orphanage and School (Nairobi Archbishopric), St. Makarios Children Home (Diocese of Nyeri and Mt. Kenya Region) and St. Tabitha Children Home (Diocese of Kisumu and Western Kenya).²² The presence of the Orthodox Church in Africa has also promoted international orthodox churches to extend their philanthropy overseas through mission organisations. For example, when Fr. Spartas Mukasa of Orthodox Church in Uganda visited Egypt in 1946 and Greece in 1959, respectively, the Greek Church initiated the formation of missionary organisations such as the Apostolic Diakonia of the church of Greece and Orthodox Missionary Fraternity of Thessaloniki. Likewise, Fr. Theodore Nankyamas who extended his connections to America in 1965 and later to Finland influenced many parishes and youth groups pledging themselves to prayer and financial help.²³ It is through his appeal the Orthodox Christian Mission Centre (OCMC) in the U.S.A was formed, making it possible to reach out to many who are in need in Africa and beyond.

The Office of a Social Deacon/Deaconess in Mediterranean Christianity

Reflecting the calling to serve humanity in the world today, the church has to thoroughly consider the role of deaconate in the early church and perhaps reinstate the order. The early church acted as both Eucharistic and charitable fellowship. Regarding the charitable aspect, the deaconate was responsible for taking care of the widows and orphans, dispensing hospitality to strangers, and relieving the needs of the poor (Acts 6:3; 1 Tim. 8:8). After a few centuries, the role of the deaconate (both male and female deacons) gradually changed to assisting the bishop or the priest in the liturgical worship and the administration of the sacraments.²⁴ This change confined the diaconate to the ordained ministry resulting in narrowing down the role to male deacons, thus leaving out female deaconesses as it is witnessed in the Orthodox Church today. However, scriptures,

²⁰ See the official Documents of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church on the Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World, section "F" on Mission as a Witness of Love through Service, available at: <https://www.holycouncil.org/-/mission-orthodox-church-todays-world>. The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church was held on 19th to 26th June 2016 in Crete, Greece.

²¹ See the National Philoptochos Department of Social Work of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America available at: <http://philoptochos.org/socialservices>.

²² Tillyrides A. Makarios (Archbishop), "Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa" *Orthodox Archbishopric of Nairobi* (Year Book Review) (2018) p. 90. Also see <https://orthodoxmissionkenya.org/>.

²³ John Njoroge, *Towards an African Orthodoxy: A Call for Inculturation*. Ortodoksia Vol.56 (Kaarina: Light Press, 2016), p. 70.

²⁴ Stuart G. Hall, *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church* (London: SPCK, 1991), p. 237.

the fathers, liturgical texts and the canons provide enough evidence of the ordination of deaconesses²⁵ and theologians have continued to provide critical evidence, theological and missiological reasons seeking the re-institution of female deacons.²⁶ Following the famous statement of the Inter-Orthodox consultation on “The Place of the Woman in the Orthodox Church and the Question of the Ordination of Women”, the reinstatement of deaconesses in the orthodox church would practically mean the restoration of manifold services (*diakoniai*) with extension into the social sphere, in the spirit of the ancient tradition and in response to the increasingly specific needs of our time.²⁷ Revival of the ministry of deaconesses would profoundly open the roles of women in the active life of the church through the diaconal service.

Conclusion

Ancient Mediterranean Christianity practiced philanthropic diakonia following the teachings and the example of Jesus Christ. Although philanthropy was present during the pre-Christian Greco-Roman world, Christianity was distinctive because its philanthropic care was given to all, inclusively and without discrimination. This approach indicated a distinctive methodology for Christian witness in the Roman Empire. Philanthropic diakonia and its theology developed and practiced by the fathers of the church, e.g. St. Basil the Great and St. John the merciful of Alexandria, has greatly influenced how the eastern churches practice diakonia today.

In the eastern orthodox churches, philanthropic diakonia has a prominent position in liturgical, monastic and missiological texts and activities. This has been founded on the concept of *agape* and God’s love to humanity to an extent of sacrificing His only begotten son for the salvation of the world. The incarnated Christ taught the same love and his followers are called to demonstrate the same love both vertically and horizontally i.e. to God and to fellow human beings respectively. The modern world is experiencing different forms of challenges; human beings face social-economic, political and psychosomatic challenges. It is therefore the role of the church to offer philanthropic services to those in need without discrimination as well as advocate for justice, equality and respect to human dignity. Every member of the body of Christ is called to participate in the philanthropic diakonia in unique ways as per his or her charisma from the Holy Spirit.

The Orthodox Church needs to reinstate the office of deaconess to take an active role in philanthropic diakonia and social mission of the church. This call cannot be ignored as in the present times where humanity awaits Theo-centric Christian services which could be achieved through women in our church as witnesses of the gospel. Gradually, the orthodox churches have started to take action on restoration of deaconesses, for example, in 2017, The Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa Theodoros II, consecrated five women to the diaconate in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, primarily to assist in missionary work of the churches.²⁸

²⁵ See article, A Call for the Rejuvenation of the Ministry of the Ordained Deaconess, Addressed to His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I and the Secretariat of the Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Church Submitted by Saint Catherine’s Vision (SCV): An International, Pan-Orthodox Christian Fellowship of Women Theologians and Other Lay Servant-Leaders. Available at: <https://orthodoxdeaconess.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/December-SCV-Call.pdf>.

²⁶ Petros Vassiliadis, Niki Papageorgiou and Eleni Kasselouri-Hatzivassiliadi (eds), *Deaconesses, the Ordination of Women and Orthodox Theology*. (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017).

²⁷ See the statement of the Inter-Orthodox Consultation on the Place of the Woman in the Orthodox Church and the Question of the Ordination of Women held on Rhodes, Greece, 30th October – 7th November, 1988.

²⁸ See the laying of hands of five deaconesses to serve in the mission of the orthodox church in Congo by H.B. Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, Theodoros II available at: <https://www.patriarchateofalexandria.com/index.php?lang=en>.

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20. SOCIAL MINISTRY – SOCIAL WORK WITH DRUG-ADDICTS IN PENTECOSTAL-CHARISMATIC CHURCHES IN RUSSIA

Tatyana Gorbacheva¹

Russian Context

Today Pentecostal-Charismatic churches in Russia are well known for their social work in the area of drug and alcohol rehabilitation. The history of this movement goes back to the first half of the 1990s. The political crisis and the fall of the USSR had many economic repercussions: many became unemployed and were disoriented not knowing how to adapt to the unknown reality of the market economy. The levels of drug addiction grew tremendously: in the USSR from 1984 to 1990 the number of registered drug-addicted persons grew from 35 254 to 67 622 people, in the Russian Federation from 14 324 to 28 310 people.² Taking into account the poor condition of medical institutions after the fall of the USSR, the fewest resources were given to emergencies and children, even less so for the drug-addicts, who had little possibility of recovery. Until May 2004, all those addicted to drugs were sent to prisons in the same way as drug dealers and distributors. Later, criminal law distinguished between the drug-addicted and drug-dealers, establishing a set number of drugs, carried by a person, to lead to criminal offence. The Decree N 231 allowed the drug-addicted to seek help more openly.³

Engagement for Drug-Rehabilitation

According to the report by Sergey Mativosian,⁴ one of the pioneers of drug-rehabilitation ministry, his social work started when a church member of *Istochnik Zhizni* (Source of Life) Charismatic Church in St. Petersburg asked for help with her drug-addicted daughter, who had left home. The church ministers found her in one of the basements near the market where drugs were sold and distributed. They were shocked to see the reality of the lives of drug-addicts in this basement. They took the girl and brought her to a church member's home. They washed her, fed her and prayed over her until she got well. They felt that the Lord called upon them to help drug-addicts in this desperate situation. Their ministry started on the 29th May, 1995 on the basis of the church *Iisus Gospod'* in the Kengisep district of the Leningradsy region. Sergey Mativosian took a lead in this work. At first, they helped drug-addicts to get medical care in the hospital, later to join a community outside St. Petersburg in the village, Preobrazhenka. They lived together and prayed for delivery from drug-addiction. Faith helped them to start life once again.

Later the church connected with a TV studio and the resultant documentary, "*Podvali Dybenko*" covered the life of the drug addicts in this basement. The documentary made the work of the rehabilitation well-known and soon there were so many people who wanted to access the rehabilitation services, that waiting list was so long that they had to wait for half a year to be admitted. In March 1996, the Charitable Fund of the Centre of Rehabilitation *Novaya Zhizn'* (New Life) was registered.⁵ Local authorities gave the land including and

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² Problem of drug-addiction in Russia: statistics: *RIA News* Available at: <https://ria.ru/20070626/67829656.html>.

³ Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation of May 6, 2004 N 231 "On approval of the sizes of average single doses of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for the purposes of Articles 228, 228.1 and 229 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation at: <http://base.garant.ru/12135355/>.

⁴ Report by Sergey Mativosian, 03.12.2009 Available at: <https://www.cef.ru/infoblock/greetings/letter/article/1353641>.

⁵ Charitable Fund «New Life» registered by the legal institution of the Leningradsky region on 01/03/1996 г. № 0083, OGRN 1034701420489.

around the disused mental hospital in Preobrazhenka. Over the next two years the ministry grew so much that they opened an extension in Kotly of the Kengisep Region. From 2003, EU TACIS started the project KINCH – shelter for the homeless on the territory of *Novaya Zhizn'*, helping to remodel houses and thus opening them to wider categories of people in need. Since their ministry was charitable and they did not have funding, the church supported their entrepreneurial endeavours. They farmed, grew crops, tended animals, fished, and opened a car repair shop, a shop for the production of paving slabs, and a woodworking shop. Soon, they became the leader of farming enterprises in Kengisep district, with increasing farming capabilities. In order to diversify their activities, the Autonomus non-commercial organisation was registered in 2004.⁶

Konstantin Bendas, the Chair of the Coordination Council of Rehabilitation ministries of Russian United Union of Evangelic Christians (Pentecostals) stated that *Novaya Zhizn'* set an example how to help people in drug-addiction, which motivated other churches to start a similar ministry. Many came to see the work and be trained; rehabilitation centres were then set up in Tumen, Moscow, Abakan, and Astakhan. Reformed addicts left the rehabilitation centres and returned home and usually joined their local Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. However, their integration into existing churches was not simple, both because of the specific subculture of former drug addicts and the specific culture of the churches. Quite a few of the former addicts with leadership potential found that it easier to open their own ministries of rehabilitation among their friends, often from addict communities. For example, Oleg Tihonov returned to Tomsk and started a rehab ministry, later a Christian rehab community. Two years later, a church *Proslavlenie* of 200 rehabilitants was organised. Today, this is one of the largest Charismatic churches in that region with more than 1000 members.⁷

Most of the rehabilitation centres worked as the part of a local church's ministry and therefore were not officially registered. Around 2000, some started to gain official registration as charitable funds or non-commercial entities. This was for several reasons: for legal status when renting the buildings; to be within regulations of the police and other regulatory bodies; to build relationships with businesses who supported them and local officials. The last reason proved the most difficult as Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in many regions are treated as sects and in opposition to traditional Orthodox beliefs. Their activity is viewed with suspicion, and when state officials send requests to the local Orthodox authorities regarding more information about Pentecostals, they are told that these churches are dangerous sects. The social work with the drug addicts has undoubtedly increased the authority of Pentecostal-Charismatic churches in the eyes of society in general, however it has also increased tensions with the Orthodox Church.

Currently, there are more than 500 rehabilitation centres linked to Pentecostal-Evangelical churches. Around 350 centres are in the Russian Union of Christians of Evangelical Faith (Pentecostal). The work is coordinated by the Coordination Council of Rehabilitation ministries and leaders are trained by educational program *Voshozhdenie* (Climbing). The second organisation, which has many rehab centres, is the Russian Church of Christians of Evangelical Faith, which has around 200 centres. Being associated with the International Assemblies of God, they have carried out the educational program TeenChallenge since the 90s, lately contextualised into Russian culture and presented with the International ministry ISAAC and Charitable Fund "TearFund".⁸ The Russian Orthodox church started its own rehabilitation work in 2012 and now has developed a network of 60 Orthodox rehabilitation centres.⁹

⁶ Autonomus non-commercial organisation «New Life» 01/12/2004 by Interregional tax inspection of Leningradsky region № 3 OGRN 1034701423932.

⁷ Interview with Konstantin Bendas, Chair of the Coordination Council of Rehabilitation ministries of Russian United Union of Evangelic Christians (Pentecostals) taken by author 07/12/2019.

⁸ Third session of the Institute of Preparation of the Leaders of Rehabilitation centres in Barnaul <https://hve.ru/ministries/hve-centr/2897-2012-03-22-14-08-14>.

⁹ According to the information of Found – site of anti-drug activity of the Russian Orthodox church <http://poisk.protivnarko.ru/>.

From 2006 to 2012, the anti-drug action “Train to The Future” was conducted together with the Federal Service of the Control Over Drugs (FSCN). The railway company provided six carriages with doctors, politicians, musicians and ministers, who conducted various activities as they stopped at the cities involved. Concerts and counselling, seminars for young people and conferences were all highly evaluated by officials and many drug-addicts got real help.¹⁰ The partnership proved to be very successful. Unfortunately, anti-sect activists of the Russian Orthodox Church presented negative views of this work to the government. They blamed the rehabilitation centres for recruiting followers into the sects, exploiting drug-addicts labour in the centres and using violence as part of the detox. These accusations damaged the positive cooperation of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches with the officials. Since 2008, any cooperation of Pentecostal and Charismatic ministries with FSCN has been stopped until 2016 when the FSCN was restructured and became a part of the Russian Ministry of the Interior.

Social and political situations for drug-rehabilitation work have changed across the decades from the 1990s, but impact on the development of churches and church movements was very significant during all these years. From 1998, the development of rehabilitation centres gradually started to be united with the strategy of planning new churches throughout the country. Those who experienced freedom from drugs and a drug-addicted style of life had a zeal to bring hope to those still in the bondage of drug-addiction. The teams went to different towns and villages of Russia, where they easily could find places of drug distribution and there, they preached the Gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Through this spontaneous movement, the church network *Kraugolny Kamen* (Corner Stone) was born in 1998 from the first church in the Siberian town of Achinsk. At this time, the network developed a goal – to plant a church in every town of Russia. They integrated social ministry and a missionary strategy on the basis of perception that the future missionary force is people, who are presently in places of sin: in drug-addiction and prisons. Now they have over 125 churches in Russia and started external missions in Cuba and Abhasia.¹¹

Another similar organisation, *Iskhod* (Exodus), connected rehabilitation with G12 church development structure and missionary obligations from rehabilitants to serve a certain amount of time in the churches after their rehabilitation program. Five years later, they separated church development and rehabilitation as, at that time, many churches embraced not only drug-addicts and their relatives, but people from different social circles. Together with the experts from mental institutions, they were the first to develop professional programs of social rehabilitation, and this has been used in all the rehab centres run by *Iskhod* since.

Concept of Social Ministry

In 2008, the Russian Unified Union of Evangelical Churches (Pentecostal) issued the Concept of Social Ministry. Its development required assessment of its social ministry by specialists. The research of the *Novaya Zhisn'* program was undertaken by the Federal Buro of Medical-Social Expertize, who studied the methods and results of drug-addicts rehabilitation. The results stated that 59.1% of those who passed through the whole twelve-month program had strong remission and total sobriety for 4-5 years.

The research and positive results of the work brought some improvement to the area of social interaction except for the FSCN, as explained above. Successful rehabilitation centres started to receive state grants for their work and could improve living conditions and gain funds for professional assistance from psychologists and psychiatrists. Some Pentecostal-Charismatic rehabilitation centres started to cooperate within a larger evangelical framework and broadened their religious affiliation. Some of them even developed a formal distance from any church in order to get state recognition and receive funds for the programs.

¹⁰ September 11. Beginning of Russian anti-drug action «Train to the Future» <http://www.detirossii.ru/7616.php>.

¹¹ Interview with the secretary of “Kraugolny Kamen Zlata Starenky” Zlata Starenky, 20/01/2020.

As for now, regardless of its positive or negative evaluation, the rehabilitation movement became a noticeable event in the history of the Christian church in Russia. The positive results of such social work can be summarised as following:

- development of work with drug-addicts,
- development of ministry to their families and to co-dependents;
- building relations with social and government institutions in the area of social work;
- many lives were touched and transformed by this social ministry.

Among the critical issues of this movement are:

- relationships between mother churches and rehabilitation ministries;
- funding of the non-commercial rehab centres which separated from the churches;
- effective rehabilitation programs for the new types of drugs;
- unsettled or drifting world-view positions which, in some cases, have changed from a radical faith approach to secular or even anti-religious for the sake of the sponsoring organisation.

After 25 fruitful years of experience in social work in the sector of drug-rehabilitation, it can be observed that its future depends on the strategic vision of Pentecostal-Charismatic denominations, leadership training, and political factors – particularly the level of tolerance towards religion in Russia in general and towards Pentecostal-Charismatic influence in particular. A more cooperative or a more anti-sectarian position of the Russian Orthodox Church will also play significant role.

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21. DIAKONIA AND SOCIAL ASSISTANCE IN THE THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE OF THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

Ion Vicovan¹

The Concept of Diakonia or Social Assistance in the ROC

The function of the Church in the world is the salvation of men. To this end, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Founder and Head of the Church, gave His Apostles the power to bind and remit the sins of men, to teach them, to sanctify and lead: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Mt. 28:19). “Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained” (John 20:23). One of the Fathers of the Church, St. Cyprian of Carthage (200-258), would say that “No one can attain salvation except within the Church. Outside the Church, there is no salvation”.²

The mission initiated by the Saviour, entrusted to the Holy Apostles, has been continued by their successors, bishops and priests (the Apostles when they had ordained them elders in every church, Acts 14:23), to whom St. Paul addressed: Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood (Acts 20:28).

However, the Church fulfils its work of salvation of the people by the threefold ministry,³ with its three dimensions (teaching, sanctifying and leading). The church serves and has the duty to minister to everyone and at every time, according to St. Paul’s word, “I am made all things to all men” (I Cor. 9:22), even though its ministry does not have the effect of saving all whom it serves. The ministry of the Church has been understood, since the beginning, as helping the neighbour (Acts 45-46): the Christian agape, the religious service at meals, donations, then the redemption of the slaves, the establishment of social settlements such as the Basiliad, a ministry that was practiced, diversified and that developed throughout the whole history of the Church.

The great Romanian theologian, Dumitru Stăniloae (1903-1993) emphasises the indissoluble connection between faith and the diakonical or social work as follows: “The practical activity is a way of strengthening faith, an most efficient way since this activity takes place in the atmosphere of solidarity with the activities of one’s neighbours, as social assistance. Faith and charitable activities” – as the same theologian argues – “are not in an alternative relation, but the two necessary faces of the same energy, they are cause and effect or the inner heart and the outer body of any form of life.”⁴

In the Orthodox Church, the worship itself is the epitome of philanthropy, of God’s love for us and our love for one another. The Holy and Divine Liturgy, the Holy Sacraments and the Hierurgies (i.e. liturgies or rites of worship), all express, in different forms and content, God’s unlimited love for men, from which people would learn to love one another. Within worship, many of the biblical texts that remind us of God’s love, the commandments He gave us and His identification with the underprivileged are read: For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have

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² St Cyprian of Carthage, in Rev. Prof. dr. Ioan G. Coman, *Patrologie (Patrology)* (Dervent Monastery, 1999), p. 64.

³ Rev. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Forward to His Holiness Antonie Plămădeală’s PhD Thesis*, “Biserica slujitoare în Sfânta Scriptură, în Sfânta Tradiție și în Teologia contemporană” (*The Ministering Church in the Holy Scripture, in the Holy Tradition and in Contemporary Theology*), in *Theological Studies* XXIV, 5(8) (1972), p. 338. We mention that the paper was later published in Sibiu, in 1986, as *Biserica slujitoare (The Ministering Church)*.

⁴ Dumitru Stăniloae, “O direcție nouă de activitate bisericească: Asistența socială” (A new direction of church activity: social assistance), in *The Voice of the Church*, year VII, 9 (1948), p. 8.

everlasting life (John 3:16), and These things I command you, that ye love one another (John 15:25). The Gospel of Matthew reads: Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me (Mt. 25:40).

How the Theology of Diakonia is Taught in ROC

Considering the theological and soteriological importance of the philanthropic ministry, its long history, as long as that of the Church, but also its topicality and necessity, it has held a special place both in the life of the Church (the Romanian Orthodox Church) and within the faculties of theology from the Romanian Patriarchate.

After a rich and centuries-old history of the philanthropic work of the Romanian Orthodox Church, with the rise of the communist regime in Romania in 1948, the many sufferings and imposed restrictions brought onto the Church in Romania also included the prohibition of its charitable work. In other words, all the social institutions, parishes and monasteries of the Romanian Orthodox Church were either abolished or confiscated; however, the ROC continued to carry out some discrete, uninterrupted social work.

After the 1990s, with the restoration of the freedom of manifestation for the Church, it resumed the diakonical work that had been so brutally interrupted by the communist-atheist regime with great determination. Thus, synodal decisions were made in this regard, specialised sectors (“Diakonia”) were created at the level both of the patriarchy, the eparchy, the deanery and the parish, and, in time, numerous and various social welfare institutions and offices etc. providing special services were established.

But all this strategy and social structure required qualified personnel. Thus, starting with the academic year 1991-1992, within the faculties of theology, the specialisation of Social Assistance Orthodox Theology was established.⁵ If, until the adoption of the “Bologna system” (in 2005), the duration of studies for “Social Assistance – Orthodox Theology” was four years (8 semesters), after this year the duration of studies was reduced to three years (six semesters). It also required the modification of the curriculum and subjects to be studied. According to ARACIS (which is the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education), the quota of the subjects, the courses in Social Assistance – Orthodox Theology must be 80% specialised subjects and 20% theological subjects. This is a criterion which the different faculties of Theology with this specialisation all respect.

We mention that similar specialisations also exist in sociology faculties. The fundamental difference between the two specialisations is that theology students also acquire significant theological training. This stipulates that they also attend the courses of Biblical Theology, namely *The Old and The New Testament*, *Historical Theology: Universal Church History and Romanian Orthodox Church History*, *Dogmatic and Symbolic Theology*, *Systematic Theology: Christian Morality*, and *Orthodox Spirituality*. Attending these theological courses is equally beneficial for both social workers (theologians) and recipients / beneficiaries of social services.

Among the specialised courses we mention: Introduction to Sociology, Introduction to Psychology, The Basis of Social Assistance, Methodology of Social Research, Theories and Methods of Intervention in Social Assistance, Deontology of the Social Assistant Profession, Social Assistance Counselling, The Organisation and Management of Social Assistance Services, Family and Child Welfare, Social Assistance for Delinquents, Social Assistance for People with Disabilities, Social Assistance for the Elderly, Social Assistance for People with Chronic and Terminal Illnesses, Applied Social Assistance and Compact Specialised Practice, The Management and Evaluation of Social Assistance Project, Social Assistance in the Probation System, Social

⁵ Pr. Lect. univ. dr. Mihai Vizitiu, Virginia Popa, “Istoria învățământului teologic superior” (The History of Higher Theological Education), in *Theology and Life*, no.1-6 (2007), p. 138.

Assistance of the Unemployed, Social Assistance in Schools. In other words, the theological social workers put (more) soul in the ministry of their neighbours while also having a religious, inner motivation.

Instances of the Social Assistance Practice in the Romanian Orthodox Church

From a social-philanthropic perspective, the history of our Church is very rich. Its beginnings are attested with documents in the second half of the fifteenth century, and it had an ascending trend until the year of its abolition, 1948. Although officially interrupted, it continued, as stated above, in a discrete and specific manner, in parishes and monasteries in the communist period (1948-1989) as well. After 1990, the philanthropic activity of the Church was resumed, diversified and developed throughout the country. On the one hand, the Romanian Patriarchate concluded several cooperation protocols with some state institutions that include: the protocol between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Government of Romania regarding social inclusion, in particular the support of the disadvantaged (2007), the protocol between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Ministry of Health regarding the partnership “Medical and Spiritual Assistance” (2008). Based on these or other protocols, charity priests are present in penitentiaries, military units, hospitals and nursing homes for the elderly.

On the other hand, faithful to its mandate, its dogma and tradition, the Church has created social and medical institutions. Every year, the number of institutions that the Romanian Orthodox Church establishes for the benefit of disadvantaged persons increasing considerably. Specifically, the Church has built hospitals and clinics, foster care homes for the elderly, houses and daycare centres for children, centres for mothers with children or for women who face domestic violence, dental offices and social-philanthropic foundations. The church also provides social and cultural services (afterschool) and so on.

At the beginning of each year, the diocesan assemblies of the dioceses in the Romanian Patriarchate report the social-philanthropic activity that they carried out in the previous year. The report, drafted for each eparchy, contains the activity of the social institutions, the number of beneficiaries and the value of the provided services. All these reports are collected and presented by the Patriarch of ROC in the National Church Assembly at the beginning of the year. According to the latest central report at the national level (from February 2019), the Romanian Orthodox Church has the following social institutions: 146 social canteens and bakeries, 43 institutions offering medical services and pharmacies, 104 daily centres for children, 20 day centres for the elderly, 47 residential centres for the elderly, 31 social welfare offices and community centres, 61 social kindergartens and afterschool groups, 14 protected dwellings, 106 information, counselling and resource centres, 48 family-type centres, 2 adult educational institutions, 18 emergency centres (for homeless people, victims of domestic violence and victims of human trafficking), 26 campuses, 48 educational centres and 101 other institutions and services with different specificities.⁶ According to this report, the amount allocated by the Romanian Orthodox Church for charitable activities in 2018 was 24 million Euros. Furthermore, we also need to mention that at the level of the patriarchy or eparchies, several charitable projects are currently being carried out: “The Table of Joy”, in partnership with Selgros Cash & Carry and Carrefour Romania SA supermarkets (programme consisting of weekly donation of food and hygienic-sanitary goods to social centres), the food aid programme “Taste of Joy”, in partnership with the retailer Auchan Romania SA, the medical caravan “Health for Villages” (carried out by the volunteers of the Cathedral of the Salvation of the Nation which, in 2018 alone, had over 12,000 beneficiaries), the national campaign “Donate blood! Save a life!” of the Romanian Patriarchate (which in 2018 alone gathered over 3,500 volunteers and collected over 16 tons of blood) and so on.

⁶ Report – *The Philanthropic Activity of the Romanian Orthodox Church in 2018*.

Brief Evaluation of the Activity of ROC in the Field of Social Assistance: Positive and Negative Aspects

Positive aspects: The resumption and establishment of social-philanthropic institutions and the permanent increase of their number and their diversification is a significant positive aspect to be mentioned. In each parish within the Romanian Patriarchate, there is a nucleus (the parish committee), that deals with the organisation and development of social activities in that specific community (intended for children, the elderly, single persons and so on). Another positive aspect is the involvement of many faithful volunteers, as well as of various institutions in social projects or actions. For example, the food aid programme “The Table of Joy”, carried out by the Romanian Patriarchate in collaboration with the hypermarket Carrefour Romania (starting in 2009) is relevant in this regard.⁷ In addition to the actions of social institutions, more and more parishes have established accredited social assistance offices, which offer social services. Another positive aspect is the unification of several Orthodox associations and foundations, which function within and with the blessing of the Romanian Orthodox Church (8 entities) in a unitary structure, i.e. the “The Philanthropy Federation”, “through which coordinated, coherent work can be done to increase the impact and efficiency of the social-philanthropic or charitable activities of the Church”. Another positive element is the publication of manuals and guides on good practices in the social institutions of the Church.

Negative aspects: We need to mention the (still) insufficient number of social institutions, for both children and the elderly, given the levels of aging in the population. We also want to point to the awareness of the importance of volunteering among people which is not yet fully developed, and, last but not least, we point to the lack of professionals in covering the needs in the social field (at the level of city halls).

As a conclusion it can be stated that the resumption and establishment of social-philanthropic institutions and the permanent increase of their number and their diversification in the Romanian Patriarchate is a significant positive aspect of church developments in Romania. More efforts are still needed in training for Christian social services and encouraging volunteers to join this essential social witness of the Orthodox churches in Romania.

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22. CHRISTIAN SOCIAL SERVICES IN THE SERBIAN CONTEXT – A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Ilija Jovic and Dalibor Petrovic¹

Introduction

Social development advancement marked a high level of interest during the 20th and the 21st century in the field of theology and the Church activities. Various Christian denominations occupied their interests with the different social and moral problems that confronts the modern society; resulting in theologised social challenges. Orthodox theology, both Eastern and Oriental, has not given the social aspects of the gospel the same attention as the Protestant and Roman Catholic theology has employed on the same aspects, which has left a visible effect on the movements of liberation theology and missionary outreach worldwide.

There is a considerable work in the field of ecumenical relations regarding social concerns. These questions were mostly raised in context of missiology and mission work. Nonetheless, our title carries indication that explores scarcely studied facts of modern theology constructions of social theology inside Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC). Amidst current economic challenges and rising expectations driven by demographic and labour shifts, religious resurgence is evidence of the search for new meaning and forms of community across the world. These new realities require new ways of approach and expression that can be investigated by researching Orthodox theological and philosophical thought.

Different local autocephalous Orthodox Churches have their own historical contexts that have conditioned development in our discussed topic. After descent of communism on Balkans, in challenging and turbulent transitional and post-socialist period, Orthodox Church gained more prominent role in public life of the State then it was case in past half a century.

We will try to outline social services in Serbian Orthodox environment by situating these church activities in its respective context. The objective of this article is introducing into the topic of social questions inside SOC, therefore, through historical prism we will focus on theological framework of institutionalized social activities of the SOC in order to outline development on this matter.

Historical Conditions

Even though social- charity activities were very common in SOC, especially during the rule of Nemanjic dynasty, arrival of the Ottomans on Balkans vacuumed, conserved and if not stopped these activities. For sure they could not exist in any organisational way nor had its theological expression in written form.² In this period Church had to take role of national guard as Ottomans did not recognize any authority except religious.³ Main carriers of social activities were monasteries who were also the only centres of education. Monasteries were centres where hospitals, schools, orphanages as well as other various charity activities took place and they played an active role in carrying fullness of these activities.

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² Life of the Saints of that time represent valuable source for understanding theology behind social activities of the Church under the Ottoman rule.

³ Millet system of the Ottomans has shaped role of the SOC. This centuries long system positioned SOC as bearer of national identity in sense of responsibility, resulting in the perception that being a Serb means being Orthodox. For more see: M. Radovanovic, “*O potrebi moralne i duhovne obnove*”, *Glas Crkve*, 1/91.

Besides Orthodox population inside the Ottoman Empire, another substantial number of Serbian-Orthodox lived in regions that were under Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Orthodox population, even though living in strongly catholic monarchy, had their own maturation marked and influenced with development of West European philosophical and religious thought, primarily values of Enlightenment and Reformation.

After First and Second Serbian Uprising in 19th century and creating of modern Serbian State, 20th century brought upon SOC and her organisation enormous human casualties and economic destruction.⁴ Two Balkan wars were mere an introduction into First World War. End of Second World War followed decades long vicious anti-religious communist rule that ended with civil war on Yugoslavian soil. Culmination of the civil war attended continuous crisis on Kosovo and Metohija region resulting in NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999.

In this instability of social-economic and political systems of the region, SOC had to find ways to remain faithful to the Gospel and carry out its good news. In first line constant political turbulences of the region, have and have been conditioning direction of theological thought. Being only existing organisation and institution with continuity, SOC rooted deep into society and its identity. As previously indicated, national identity over centuries started to merge with religious identity having for consequence that social activities of the SOC are seen as those of and for nation.

The Orthodox faith has witnessed a revival that was the result of the political changes after the breakup of the former Yugoslavia, conditioning by development in Western societies where “Serbian Orthodox Diaspora” is situated and rapidly growing. Subsequent political changes in 2000s brought revitalization of religious life. State laws brought new legal status of the SOC, providing access to State funds and other benefits that were not possible before. Marginalized church started regaining more space in public sphere.⁵ In addition to this, various challenges of the contemporary society, such as processes of globalisation and speeding changes in value systems, particularly through ideological shift in relations individual-society are impulses that are shaping theology and developmental direction of charitable institutions.

The SOC, took the choice of keeping away from media and public statements, and aimed at preaching about political or social statements to the faithful inside the church services to deal with current challenges. The humanitarian activities through which commodity aid was channelled is not only a response to the wars that have taken place in the former Yugoslavia (SFRY). Rather collapse of communist regime created space for Church to be more publicly active.

Theological Approach to the Social Challenges

Due to experience of aggressive anti-religious State systems, as well as Ottoman rule, SOC puts in question and hypothesis of the reality of the Christian economic welfare as well as the righteousness as a primary socio-political concern. The means by which SOC facilitates the political development and socio-economic changes are inter-personal action inside community of believers. Church is seen as society of believers, and as such they do not identify themselves with any economic order or political systems and programs.⁶ Rather,

⁴ For more accounts on human casualties and expropriation of SOC's property see: Djoko Slijepcevic, *Istorija Srpske Pravoslavne Crkve I: Od Pocetka IX vijeka do kraja Drugog svjetskog rata*, (Belgrade: JRJ, 2002). Djoko Slijepcevic, *Istorija Srpske Pravoslavne Crkve III: Za vrijeme Drugog svjetskog rata I poslije njega*, (Belgrade: JRJ, 2002). Another valuable study on this matter is: Radmila Radić, *Verom protiv vere: država i verske zajednice u Srbiji 1945-1953*, (Belgrade: INIS, 1995).

⁵ Radmila Radic and Milan Vukomanovic, “Religion and Democracy in Serbia since 1989: The Case of the Serbian Orthodox Church”, *Religion and Politics in Post-Socialist Central and South-eastern Europe Challenges since 1989*, *Palgrave Studies in Religion, Politics, and Policy*, Ed. By Sabrina P. Ramet, Palgrave Macmillan, (2013), 201-202.

⁶ It is not allowed for clergy members to be members of any political party nor to preach on political topics inside the Church services. However, SOC has been active in political and state matters. For more see valuable study: Radmila Radic and Milan Vukomanovic, “Religion and Democracy in Serbia since 1989: The Case of the Serbian Orthodox

they are to be conscience members of society. Social actions are understood as reactions of the Church to the current needs and responses according possibilities and availabilities of means and resources. These moments of socio-political changes are recognised and acted upon accordingly, but they have not been sufficiently theologically approached in written form. Nonetheless, theological considerations have interacted with philosophical and political challenges, particularly Marxism and currently what is named as western secular humanism.⁷

Theological expressions in writings are not aiming to be contribution to an ecumenical dialogue but they are meant for guidance of local contexts and challenges. In his short study, Adrian Ignat elaborating and concluding on early fathers and their theology on social activities, brings observations that are striking with their actuality. That is to say, contemporality of early church fathers means that Cappadocian and early church views are not just held as such but in theological background of organisational matters of SOC they did not change. Contemplating on theological background of social work, Ignat writes:

Such ideas are not expressed with systematic clarity in most of the writings of the early church; certainly they are not expounded with economic sophistication. The church's economic ethic was more distribution than production oriented. Even distributional side of economics was seen more in terms of the moral responsibility for acts of charity than as a problem for systematic reform-although, as we shall see, there appear to have been some efforts towards systematic sharing of wealth within the churches themselves. The moral urgency of acts of charity was often grounded in direct teachings of Jesus Christ and New Testament epistles.⁸

Indeed, distribution-sharing orientated charity on basis of seeing community as *koinonia* and stewardship of common property, with focus on concrete person, represents economic concept on what charity agencies function and sustain themselves.

Theological problematics of social trinitarianism did not gain much in theological considerations regarding outlining theological framework of social questions.⁹ Due to the incoherent characteristics of theological considerations on socio-political issues, responses have not been consistent and systematically approached. Rather in comparative approach to Protestant and Catholic theology, Serbian Theology tries to express itself in reflection to its own challenges. It is worth mentioning, that SOC did not have same development as Western theology regarding these questions, and that is one of the reasons why theological expression on this matter stays perplexing and rather unclear. Recent development to understand the Trinity and its relational implications on socio-political level is not coherent enough. In this new dynamics in theologizing social questions, concept of Theosis (θεώσις) appears as a key principle where participatory sharing in the image and likeness of God is to be structuralized in society.

Conclusion

Contextual development that has been conditioning theology and activity of social services inside SOC can be summarised as follows: several countries of canonical jurisdiction, "Diaspora", administrative centre in Belgrade, political and social inconsistency and instability. Due to the diversity of socio-political contexts that surrounds SOC, each diocese should be examined separately before situated in wider context of Orthodox

Church", Religion and Politics in Post-Socialist Central and South-eastern Europe Challenges since 1989, Palgrave Studies in Religion, Politics, and Policy, Ed. By Sabine P. Ramet, Palgrave Macmillan, (2013), 180-211.

⁷ Stream of theological and philosophical thought that resembles today's theological reflexions can be traced in the works and life's of two prominent theologians of 20th century, St. Nikolaj Velimirovic and St. Justin Popovic.

⁸ Adrian Ignat, "The Poor are the Treasure of the Church", *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 4:2 (2013): 165.

⁹ Here are applicable words of Florovsky who says that: "the richness of social ideas was left without an adequate embodiment", For more see: George Florovsky, 1950-1951. "The Social Problem in Eastern Orthodox Church", *Journal of Religious Thought*, Vol. VIII, No. 1 (Autumn/Winter), pp. 41-51.

theological fluidity. Only after such research, they can be engaged into serious ecumenical encounter with other sister churches of Protestant and Catholic world.

Theological, ecclesiological and structural understanding of social work in particular Serbian context requires firstly understanding of historical and political conditions. History is very present, events from distant past are very active in presence. It expressed itself not in organized and structural ways as we know it in Western Christianity but it had rather spontaneous momentum. These moments of political changes are recognised and acted upon. Therefore, pastoral care and not missionary outreach is one of main characteristics of social services.

The SOC did not aspire to formulate announcements and decrees or to aligned to theological justification of certain socio-economic or political order. Its philosophy circles around the belief that moral, ethical and socio-political conundrums are far more complicated and even dangerous to be solved or formulated in a one-word solution. Adding to which the complicity of the current contemporary world and peculiar local challenges. Thus, these social activities have not been theologically shaped in depth nor produced any theological statements, the Church calls for sophisticated level of problem solving. Nevertheless, that is not to promote that there was a time where the church did not include itself in application of solutions to such conundrums and socio-political situations. Rather its utmost attempt to address modern issues with modern solutions as the ready solutions from the past cannot be applied to current situation given the drastic changes in the contemporary societies that created a diverse level of challenges to be addressed.

Self-understanding of SOC and its theology in terms of a man as *imago dei* – man as image and likeness of God, and Deification – Theosis, even though not clearly underlined, represent main theological background of all charity organisations.

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23. THE UNDERSTANDING, ROOTS AND PRACTICES OF *DIAKONIA* IN THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH¹

Bishoy Kamel²

Introduction

The first mention of the term *diakonia*, in the New Testament, is found in the book of Acts. Compared to the widows of the Hebrews, the Hellenistic widows felt neglected in the church's efforts to minister to their daily needs.

In response, the leaders of the church, led by St. Peter, gathered with the people, agreed to appoint a group of seven men, led by St. Stephen, later called *deacons* by the church community, to take care of the physical and social needs of the community.

There are a few things we can learn from the biblical *praxis* of the *diakonia*.

1. The gathering demonstrates participation of all people towards the goal of equality and justice;
2. These deacons were chosen with specific qualifications to do specific jobs, to resolve tensions which arose, that is to say to attend to the needs of the Hellenistic widows;
3. The concept envisioned a development from individual biblical responsibility of a Christian to the communal responsibility towards each other.

John N. Collins discusses *diakonia* with reference to Mark 10:45, "For even the Son of Man *did not* come to *be served*, but to *serve*, and to give His life a *ransom* for many."³ He describes *diakonia* as applied Christian teaching or applied Christianity. However, *diakonia* is better understood as a life of sacrifice for the other as modelled in the life of Lord Jesus Christ who came to serve. Indeed, Collins makes this clear when he indicates that it is not just offering service but offering one's self as a ransom, dying for others as the Lord Jesus Christ presented that Model which presents the biblical and dogmatic foundation to our Coptic understanding of *diakonia*.

Diakonia reflects the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ to love one's neighbour – a commandment which is also found in the *Torah*.⁴ It is understood as practical theology, in which God's love is revealed in us when we take care of our neighbours.

Symeon, the New Theologian, emphasised his biblical understanding of *diakonia* by stating that Adam was created by God who placed him in the garden of Eden to *tend* and *keep*.⁵ God created Adam with this natural tendency to service and work, as *hegumen*.⁶ This presents the concept of a servant-leader, being the head of creation, yet its servant in the same time.

¹ Adapted from my Doctorate of Ministry's research project, Claremont School of Theology, 2020.

² The Very Reverend Fr. Bishoy Kamel held the position of the community development integrated projects team leader of projects funded by WCC to the Coptic Church in Egypt and the Centre for Human Resources and Leadership Training in BLESS. Since his ordination to the Coptic community in Los Angeles, Fr. Bishoy held the position of the Secretary of Santa Verena Charity and was board member in various charitable and community-oriented organisations. He is also assistant to the general Bishop of Diakonia & Development Department in the Diocese of Los Angeles and also teaches under ACTS theological school on Leadership & Team formation and Church Administration.

³ John N. Collins, *Diakonia Studies: Critical Issues in Ministry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 79.

⁴ Matthew. 19:19, 22:39, Mark 12:31, Luke 10:27, Romans 13:9, Galatians 5:14, James 2:8, Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:9-10, 18, 25:8-55 (NKJV).

⁵ C. J. DeCatanzaro, trans., *Symeon the New Theologian: The Discourses* (Mahwah, N.J. Paulist, 1980).

⁶ *Hegumen*, ἡγούμενος, Greek word understood in the context of Adam to be organiser, leader, the one in charge, or govern as in case of "Pilatus Pelatus" as a *hegumen*. Extracted from the liturgical prayers of the Passover week according to the Coptic rite (Passover Monday, 9th hour exposition).

The term *diakonia* was generally understood, as service, developed to several liturgical and non-liturgical roles in different churches and communities.

Diakonia always remained an integral practical way of living the faith, of “*praxis*”, of the early church teaching and service as the practical doctrine through which Christians live and apply the commandment of love to the other. By choosing the seven men to serve as deacons, the *diakonia* was developed from just a concept of practical living faith, lived by every Christian to become the basis of establishing what was later understood as “faith-based entities”, where *diakonia praxis* is not only performed by all Christians but by a professional, well-trained personnel as well. This development became the basis of two models of *diakonia*:

1. the Bishopric of Public, Ecumenical and Social Services, known as BLESS of Egypt, established in 1962 by the late Pope Kyrillos VI;
2. the Department of *Diakonia* and Development under the Diocese of Los Angeles, established by H. E. Metropolitan Serapion in 2016.

These two models were established as a professional entity in the Coptic Church to carry out the *praxis* of charity (love & *diakonia*), not only within the Coptic community but also throughout the community at large, since love, *diakonia praxis* of charity, has no boundaries of space, time, gender or race.

The concept of *diakonia* has developed over the last few decades in Egypt, especially strengthened by the ecumenical movement, to a degree that would be characterised as paradigm shift.⁷

In an essay, Stephanie Dietrich⁸ summarises the *diakonia* as understood by the Coptic church, as science in interdisciplinary. The author points out that *diakonia* has the following characters:

First: The ecclesial dimension of *diakonia*, was originally viewed as the work and vocation of individual workers. However, it is now recognised as essential and integral to the nature and mission of the Coptic church.

Second: The holistic nature of *diakonia* takes into consideration the physical, mental, social and spiritual dimensions of human life and experience.

Third: The prophetic aspects of *diakonia* are reflected in the bold expression of diaconal actions in solidarity with marginalised and suffering people.

To the Coptic church, *diakonia*, in its essence, consists of ministry, service and pastoral care rooted and founded in love and compassion. It is not mere social services or rendered *praxis* as a reaction to social reformation although it may also harbour social reformation.

In expressing *diakonia* in relationship to empowering others, the Coptic church has been running programs and projects, like Round Table programs, addressing Egyptian community challenges, to enable people to decide and develop their lives, as individuals and community, economically, physically, and educationally.

The emphasis on empowering and on equality in essence are concepts, not only related to materialistic or tangible dimensions but also to intangible social, psychological, mental, and spiritual dimensions. No one is ever deprived of the love of God and God’s compassion – this needs to be emphasised, being inspired by the unique role of servant-leadership as presented by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

***Diakonia* and Development in the Coptic Orthodox Church**

The concepts of *diakonia* and development in the Coptic Orthodox church are perceived as two sides of the same coin in terms of *praxis* in the field. *Diakonia* and development have always been embedded in concepts of social, prophetic and political *diakonia* as they find expression in practical sense in acts of mercy and truth.⁹

⁷ Stephanie Dietrich et al “Mercy and Truth met Together”, *Diakonia as Christian Social Practice* (Eugene, OR.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), p. 28.

⁸ Stephanie Dietrich, “Mercy and Truth met Together”, p. 29.

⁹ Stephanie Dietrich, et al “Introduction”, *Diakonia as Christian Social Practice* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), p. 4.

Hagiography, the life of saints, and the Coptic church history, both old and modern, inform us about how *diakonia* and development are an integral part of the life of the church of Egypt and the Coptic community, following the biblical model of Lord Jesus Christ as a servant-leader for *diakonia* and development. The following list explores key models, who are celebrated by the Coptic church models for their *diakonia*:

- *Santa Verena of Thebes (Luxor) (3rd century)* taught cleanliness and hygiene to Western Europe.¹⁰
- *Anba Abraam of Fayyoun (19th century)* friend of the poor was known for his charity praxis, similar to St. Nicolaus of Mora, the personality of Santa Claus.¹¹
- *Pope Cyril IV of Alexandria (1854-1861)*, father of reform is credited with establishing the great second printing house in Egypt and printing many church books.¹² He was also a visionary and strategic thinker. He had seen the future of the church and the Coptic community including education of girls. He established the first girls' school in Cairo, in 1855, in addition to boys' schools, fifty years before Qasim Amin¹³ (1863-1908) who fought for the liberation of woman in Egypt, in modern history.
- *Habib Girgis*, was an educator, writer, poet, thinker, and a reformer who initiated Sunday school movement in Egypt late 19th century (1876 – 21 August 1951). He is known as the light in the darkness. He established a holistic Coptic Sunday school movement that not only cared for the Coptic community education, especially children, but also cared for their physical provision. According to Suriel, studying Girgis' biography, "one can argue that Girgis developed in addition to various curricula and books, the physical infrastructure of the Coptic Orthodox Seminary system, and orders of male and female *diakonial* orders".¹⁴
- *Athanasius of Beni Suef, Egypt (1923–2000)*. The late metropolitan contributed to the Sunday School movement, a reform movement in the Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt, like his predecessors. He established a wide order of serving nuns (Banat Mariam, "daughters of Mary"), who played a role in various social projects and community development in poor and struggling Coptic communities in Egypt. Athanasius has contributed many articles on the theology of development. He also participated in establishing the department of faith and justice in the World Council of churches (WCC). These were pioneers in *diakonia* and development field in Egypt, mentioned in the modern history of the Coptic church presenting social acts and deeds considered *diakonial praxis* per today's perspectives. They contributed to the concept of *diakonia* as a theological practice and founded systems to serve disadvantaged communities suffering in poverty in Upper Egypt.

The Development of Ecclesiastical *Diakonia* Models

In almost every Coptic parish in Egypt, a "*diakonial* entity" was established, a group of ministers headed by a consecrated deacon or archdeacon, called "*Al diakonia*", "الديكونية". This ministry group would receive the community in-kind donations (tangible) and other monetary donations and redistribute them to the needy and the poor, each according to their needs. During the papacy of Pope Kyrillos VI (May 1959 – March 1971), he established an episcopate for education, and another special episcopate for social services to strengthen the

¹⁰ "Saint Verena Charity", Diocese of Los Angeles, accessed 12th March 2020, Available at: <http://santaverena.org/our-patron-saint-verena/>.

¹¹ "Coptic Orthodox Church Network," Bishop Abraam of Fayyum, accessed 12th March 2020, Available at: <http://www.copticchurch.net/topics/synexarion/abraam.html>.

¹² Bishop Suriel, *Habib Girgis: Coptic Orthodox Educator and a Light in the Darkness* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2017), pp. 46-48.

¹³ "Oxford Islamic Studies Online" accessed 12th March 2020, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e149>.

¹⁴ Bishop Suriel, *Habib Girgis*, p. 47.

efforts of local parishes and Dioceses in their response to the social needs of the Coptic community in Egypt, called BLESS, the Bishopric of Public, Ecumenical and Social Services.¹⁵

On extending the work of these two episcopates outside of Egypt to look after the spiritual needs of the Coptic community abroad, BLESS played an important role in raising awareness among these communities of the social needs of the Coptic community in Egypt and how to play an integrated role in responding to these needs. This concept of the *diaconal* group was developed into Community Development Committees (CDC), by BLESS, in each Diocese and parish churches starting in 1986, on residing of H.G. Bishop Serapion as General Bishop for BLESS (1986-1995).¹⁶

This reflects the call of St. Paul to Christians in the diaspora to collect for the saints, to take care of the mother church in Jerusalem.¹⁷ Therefore, the Coptic Orthodox church always understood that there is a *diakonial* responsibility towards people in need in the community. This responsibility was established on the understanding of the gospel truth, presented by St. Mark – that the Lord came to serve, not to be served and give Himself ransom to many – was also developed into the concept of development. This is emphasised by what the Lord taught in the gospel of St. John, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”¹⁸ Adopting the saying, “instead of giving a fish, teach how to fish”, BLESS, supported by the World Council of Churches (WCC), established a community development department to enable communities and empower individuals to take the lead in a transformation of their lives and situations to a better status.

Similarly, in response to needs and social problems which were faced by the Coptic community in Los Angeles which faced the Coptic community in Los Angeles, the Diocese of Los Angeles, presided by His Eminence Metropolitan Serapion, has established an ecclesiastical *diakonial* entity, known as Department of Diakonia and Development (DDD), headed by H. G. Bishop Abraham along with another Department for Christian Education, headed by H.G. Bishop Kyrillos. These departments are based on the same concept of responding to the needs of the people and supporting the individual parish efforts to face the Coptic community’s challenges.

The Department of Diakonia and Development’s role is to empower local Coptic churches to respond to their Coptic community members’ needs which is considered as part of the department mission statement. The department also extends its ministries to the community at large, as a strategy of integration into the new community. The department achieves its vision, mission and goals through participatory servant-leadership training of *diakonial* community leaders and volunteers, integration of services and follow-up Client Relationship Management (CRM) system for quality assurance. It is not by any means a substitute of what local Coptic churches do as part of their Christian calling.

This rapid shift in the need and response, required a specially designated *diakonial* entity. Hence, the Diakonia and Development Department was established which affirms, once again, not only the involvement of the church in the social life of its congregation, but also to their physical and psychological needs as a natural dimension in its mission. It was also geared towards enabling people to develop and enhance their status through education awareness, vocational training, and more suitable programs. Flexibility, adaptability, and harmony at the same time are the basis of this *diakonial* department structure in response to the continuously changing needs of the community.

Diakonial community leaders and volunteers serve in a *diakonial* field. They come from various backgrounds, are trained, follow the biblical calling to love the other and serve following the model of the

¹⁵ “Bishopric of Public & Social Services, BLESS Egypt”: <https://blessegypt.org/>.

¹⁶ H.E. Metropolitan Serapion was the General Bishop of BLESS from 1986-1995, after which he became the Bishop of Los Angeles.

¹⁷ Romans 12:13; 2 Corinthians 9:12 (NKJV).

¹⁸ John 10:10 (NKJV).

Lord Jesus Christ, giving themselves as ransom for many.¹⁹ Helping one another and receiving help are acts of mutuality. There is no giver and recipient relationship, but all have the same value of being created in God's Image and His Likeness and are partakers of God's love. This is clarified most by the New Testament teaching about taking care of the stranger, the hungry, the naked, and also later the widow and the orphan.²⁰

Model I: The Egyptian Model²¹

The Bishopric of Public, Ecumenical and Social Services, known as BLESS, was established on 30th September, 1962 to provide a wide range of diaconal services to the poorest communities in Egypt. Within the Coptic Orthodox Church, BLESS is viewed as a major social body that provides its services to all Dioceses. At its establishment, BLESS was assigned to conduct three major roles:

1. Community development;
2. Charity and financial support; and
3. Ecumenical relations.

BLESS moved gradually from charity deeds to community development programs and projects, enabling Coptic communities in various Dioceses in Egypt to take their lead in enhancing their own situations. BLESS developed its leadership staff continually by enabling them to study abroad and get degrees in community development and public administration. BLESS, representing the Coptic Church, shared in the ecumenical WCC consultation in Larnaca, Cyprus, in 1986, "*Diakonia 2000, called to be Neighbors*",²² that emphasised the ecclesiastical nature of *diakonia*, where lay people including specialists or professionals, worked together for their development. In this role, the Coptic church, represented by BLESS, would enable their communities to identify the root causes of poverty in their own situations and to address their own needs and problems, in order to enable people to lead their own development. The leadership of BLESS adopted the training model of the Lord Jesus Christ training His own disciples. He selected, coached, equipped and appointed with specific mission statements.²³ Metropolitan Athanasius expressed it in his *diakonial* praxis by developing a *diakonial* order, Banat Maryam "Daughters of Mary" to care for the venerable communities in Egypt.²⁴ The wisdom of Lao Tzu advocated: "Go to the people. Live with them. Learn from them. Love them. Start with what they know. Build with what they have. But with the best leaders, when the work is done, the task accomplished, the people will say 'We have done this ourselves'".²⁵

Model II: The C-Model, The Los Angeles Model

The concept of the C²⁶-Model comes from the understanding of how the Church understands the relationship of Christ to His Congregation.

The Church is the body of Christ. The Church is represented by a Corban-Cone Model (C-Model), where Christ is the centre of the Corban leading His Church to heaven above, represented by the Cone.

¹⁹ The call to love, see John 15:17, 1 John 13:34 and Romans 13:8 and the call to serve, see John 12:26 and John 13:14 (NKJV).

²⁰ Matt 25:35; James 1:27(NKJV).

²¹ BLESS Egypt, "<https://blessegypt.org>."

²² I personally attended this consultation 1986.

²³ Mt. 10; Mt. 28:20 (NKJV).

²⁴ Pieternella van Doorn-Harder, *Contemporary Coptic Nuns* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1995), p. 4.

²⁵ "Anecdote," accessed March 12, 2020 <https://www.anecdote.com/2008/02/lao-tsu-on-communities-practice-development/>.

²⁶ In this section, letter "C" is capitalised for the emphasis of where "C-Model" title comes from.

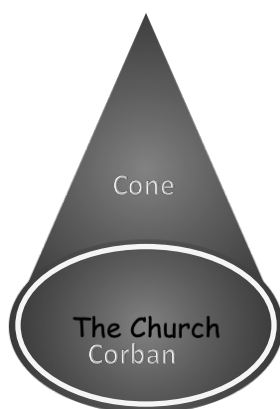


Figure 1 Church-Corban-Cone

The idea originated from the Coptic church teachings about who we are to Christ. This C-Model is the basis used to construct the department of Diakonia and Development.

The Corban-Cone structure shown in Figure 1 is a hybrid between hierarchal vertical structure (centralisation) and circular horizontal structure, representing people participation (decentralisation or autonomy). The C-Model emphasises the hierarchical conciliarity of the department organisational structure, where the dynamics of communications, formal and informal, within the structure of decision-making is shared equally among all positions regardless of their authority level.²⁷ It is a hybrid model where servant-leadership, a paradox, is the key feature of Corban-Cone structure's success.²⁸ The complexity of the C-model as well as its flexibility of communication lies mainly in understanding the role of servants' leadership guided by the centrality of Christ as the core of the structure. Thus, the vision, the mission and the goals, as well as the strategy of the structure and the performance of the *diakonial* community leaders, each in their own

position, are achieved in harmony in response to the changing needs of the target group (population to be served in each ministry field). The design keeps servant-leaders responsible and responsive to the population to be served.

Conclusion

The continuous success of any organisation depends on the style of leadership and its merits and values invested in this leadership style. One of those merits and values is "servant-leadership". The authors of *The Bass Handbook of Leadership*²⁹ noted that, "the servant-leader is servant first, then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead".³⁰ John Collins records that the Lord Jesus demonstrated servant leadership by emptying himself to minister or serve to the point of death in his focal comment in Mark 10:45.³¹ Jesus Christ did not only teach his followers or use words to explain how to attain certain goals, but he led by example. Christ acted before He taught his disciples. Servant leaders encourage skill and moral development of their followers by modality. Thus, the followers see and understand what is the leader is saying and teaching. Servant leadership is perfected in the life and



Figure 2 The Lord Jesus Christ washes the feet of His disciples

ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ and continues today by the work of the Holy Spirit in and through the church and its ministry leaders of the Coptic church.

This model, best represented by the Lord Jesus Christ, was amplified in John 13 when He washed the feet of His disciples. Figure 2 constituted the emblem of BLESS and now constitutes the Department of Diakonia

²⁷ Benjamin D Williams. and McKibben T. Michael, *Oriented Leadership, Why Every Christian Needs It* (New Jersey: Orthodox Church of America, 1994), p. xii; p.103.

²⁸ My own terminology, where Paradox is positive existence of two attributes unexpected to be found by the human mind. Odds meet; Also, later found it mentioned by Ken Blanchard & Renee Broadwell, *Servant Leadership in Action* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2018), p. 14.

²⁹ Bernard M. Bass with Ruth Bass, *The Bass Handbook of Leadership, Theory, Research, & Managerial Applications* (New York: Free Press, 2008), p. 51.

³⁰ Bass and Bass, *The Bass Handbook of Leadership*, p. 27.

³¹ John N. Collins, *Diakonia Studies: Critical Issues in Ministry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 79.

and Development today. “He is the teacher and the Lord and they rightly address Him this way, yet He bowed down to wash their feet and asked them to follow His example”.

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Weblinks

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- <http://www.blessegypt.org> BLESS Egypt.
The official site for Bishopric of Public, Ecumenical & Social Services.
- <https://www.mindtools.com> on training on Management.
- <https://www.kenblanchard.com> on Servant Leadership.

24. DIAKONIA IN THE GREEK (RUM) ORTHODOX TRADITION: THE CONTEXT OF SYRIA AND GOPA-DERD

Alexi Chehadeh†¹

Introduction

From my perspective, the idea of developing a handbook about contextual theologies of 'Diakonia' is a complementary opus to the WCC study document entitled: "Ecumenical Diakonia" (issued in June 2017).² In this official study document, it is stated: "Diakonia aims at responding to the contextual challenges when moving in changing landscapes."³ While this handbook has another character than that of a WCC study document, both documents on ecumenical diakonia emphasise the contextual dimension of different approaches and the ecumenical understanding of diakonia. It is of high value that an Orthodox contribution about diakonia is encompassed in this Handbook, especially when "there is a significant lacuna regarding Orthodox Christianity in the emerging literature on religion and humanitarianism [...] absence of case studies and theoretical coverage of Orthodox Christianity in humanitarianism, human security, and development."⁴

As an Orthodox Priest of the Church of Antioch and All the East, where the disciples of the Lord have been called 'Christian' for the first time ever in history (Acts 11:26) and from where Christianity was spread to the whole world, I consider myself a servant/*diakonos* of the Lord and His Church. Thus, through my own faith, I vow to fulfil the commitments of my mission by committing to the words of the Lord: "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all" (Mk. 9:35) into action.

Accordingly, it is not enough to only theoretically believe in the diaconal work and philanthropic deeds of our Saviour, who "did not come to be served (*diakonethenai*), but to serve (*diakonesai*). But rather we should imitate Him in His love (Mk. 10:45),⁵ because we "were baptised into Christ and have clothed ourselves with Him" (Gal. 9:27). "This means doing the work He has been doing, during His earthy life, with love towards others"⁶ (Mt. 10:7-8; John 14:12; Gal. 5:13-14).

This signifies that a Christian cannot fathom and live a complete fulfilled life, without considering the aspect of serving people, synonymously referred to as "Diakonia/service." The significance of carrying out diaconal work, rooted in the sacramental life of the Early Church, is "reflected by the use of the word '*diak*,' the essence of the word 'diakonia,' which is recurrent nearly one-hundred times in the New Testament."⁷

¹ Archimandrite Dr. Alexi Chehadeh was Director-General of the Department of Ecumenical Relations and Development at the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East, based in Damascus-Syria. He passed away during the Corona Pandemic in a hospital in Damascus, Syria, on 15th of August 2020. For more information, see <http://www.gopaderd.org/about-us/our-director>.

² World Council of Churches, Executive Committee, "Ecumenical Diakonia," (Bossey: Switzerland, 2017). <https://kirken.no/globalassets/kirken.no/smm/dokumenter/2019/wcc-ecumenical-diakonia-study-document.pdf>.

³ World Council of Churches, Executive Committee, "Ecumenical Diakonia," p. 3.

⁴ Elizabeth H. Prodromou and Nathanael Symeonides, "Orthodox Christianity and Humanitarianism: An Introduction to Thought and Practice, Past and Present in the Review of Faith & International Affairs," Volume 14, 2016, issue 1(3). https://www.academia.edu/23736660/Orthodox_Christianity_and_Humanitarianism_An_Introduction_to_Thought_and_Practice_Past_and_Present.

⁵ Miltiadis Vantsos and Marina Kiroudi, "An Orthodox View of Philanthropy and Church Diaconia" *Christian Bioethics*, 13(3) (2007), pp. 251-68: p.251. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13803600701732082>.

⁶ World Council of Churches, Executive Committee, "Ecumenical Diakonia," pp. 44-5.

⁷ World Council of Churches, Executive Committee, "Ecumenical Diakonia," p. 40.

Origins, Definition, Development and Goals of Orthodox Diakonia

It should primarily be noted that a comprehensive literary analysis on diakonia in the oriental tradition requires solicitous consideration of interdisciplinary research, which is not applicable in this context due to the limitations of the text volume.⁸

The term diakonia, which derives from the Greek verb *diakonein* to serve,⁹ has been used to express philanthropic care, love of the human person¹⁰ and practice, attendance on a duty of ministration.¹¹ Even with its diverse meanings, diakonia's "essence is summed up in one – serving the neighbour, rooted and modelled on Christ's service and teaching."¹²

Countless other terms have been utilised up until our present time to indicate service or love towards human beings. These terminologies can be traced back to ancient Greek lexica, where they are not only abstract expressions, but signify practiced actions towards certain segments in society, and also through fasting for the sake of providing others with the food saved.¹³ Thus, the commonly used terms in pre-Christian and Early Christian times have influenced the terminology of diaconal work by the Church Fathers.¹⁴

Orthodox diakonia, or Orthodox Social Service, has been well-defined and understood as being at the core of the social mission of the Orthodox Church,¹⁵ and reflected in Orthodox Theology,¹⁶ which does not dissociate faith and spiritual life from the involvement in social matters and problems.¹⁷ An important characteristic in the Orthodox understanding of diakonia is that the latter is considered as part of the spirituality that flows out of the liturgical life of the Church.¹⁸ Hence, it is the practical expression of the "liturgy after liturgy" act, and it follows the concept of having two combined Altars, where both the Eucharistic Sacrament and the Sacrament of the poor can each be respectively celebrated.¹⁹ The first refers to the Altar within the sanctuary, while the second alludes to that Altar outside of the Church, in the physical world. On the primary Altar, we offer Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who not only presented Himself to His Disciples as the First Servant (John 13:14-15), but also sacrificed Himself for the entire world (John 3:16). Outside the Church, we encounter the second Altar: "the Altar of the poor," to whom He proclaimed the good news (Isa. 61:1), and whom we have to serve with utmost attention and love, regardless of their religious,

⁸ A very short summary about this subject in the new time is provided by Dagica Tadic-Papanikolaou, "Orthodox contributions for the understanding and practice of diakonia (the "Liturgy after liturgy")," in *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism, Resources for Theological Education*, Pantelis Kalaitzidis et al. (Eds) (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2014), pp. 728-29.

⁹ Dagica Tadic-Papanikolaou, "Liturgy after liturgy", p. 725.

¹⁰ Lina Molokotos-Liederman, "Orthodox Social Service and the Role of the Orthodox Church in the Greek Economic Crisis." (Faith in Europe, 2009), p. 1. Available at: <https://www.faithineurope.org.uk/lina.pdf>.

¹¹ For other uses of the term diakonia/daikonos in the Ancient Greece, see World Council of Churches, Executive Committee, "Ecumenical Diakonia," p.40.

¹² Dagica Tadic-Papanikolaou, "Liturgy after liturgy", p. 726.

¹³ Dagica Tadic-Papanikolaou, "Liturgy after liturgy", p. 725.

¹⁴ Demetrios J. Constantelos, "Origins of Christian Orthodox diakonia: Christian Orthodox Philanthropy in Church history," pp. 2-7. Round Table "Education for change and diaconia." The paper presented at the conference on the Social witness and Service of Orthodox Churches (April 30 to May 5, 2004, The Lay Academy in the New Valamo monastery, Finland).

¹⁵ Ferris, Elizabeth. "Faith-Based and Secular Humanitarian Organizations," *International Review of the Red Cross* 87 (2005): pp. 311-325: 313. Available at: https://international-review.icrc.org/sites/default/files/irrc_858-6.pdf.

¹⁶ Orthodox Diakonia Worldwide. An Initial Assessment, May 2009, p. 4. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/10350014/_ORTHODOX_DIAKONIA_WORLDWIDE._AN_INITIAL_ASSESSMENT_.

¹⁷ Demetrios J. Constantelos, "Origins of Christian Orthodox diakonia: Christian Orthodox Philanthropy in Church history," p. 9.

¹⁸ Lina Molokotos-Liederman, "Orthodox Social Service and the Role of the Orthodox Church in the Greek Economic Crisis." p. 1.

¹⁹ Dagica Tadic-Papanikolaou, "Liturgy after liturgy", p. 726.

ethnic and social affiliations. More so, this is the very way in which we deliver those services (Mt. 25:31-46), whether in form of micro-diakonia or macro-diakonia.²⁰ At the very early stages of the profound and surprising spread of Christianity, the diaconal work was probably limited to the distribution of goods to the poor. Later, it was advanced to include institutional care for orphans, widows, people with disabilities, strangers, prisoners, and the elderly. Almsgiving was irrefutably understood as an obligatory duty for all believers.²¹

Although spirituality is a distinguished feature of the life of the Orthodox Church and its faithful, the service of the Church is not limited to spiritual and liturgical aspects²² (Rom. 15:25-27), for it “also embraces man as a psychosomatic creature in every fold and accompanies him from the moment of his birth until the moment of his earthly departure.”²³ The Church believes that only humans have been created “according to the image and likeness of God” (Gen. 1:26), and serving others is at the same time serving the Lord Himself (Mt. 22:37-40, 25:40; 1 John 4:20-21), which is also a practical expression of living faith (James 2:14-17). This indicates that serving others is a chance gifted to us, which we can use, to enter the Kingdom of God²⁴ (Mt. 25:34-46).

Thus, the Early Christian community, not only in Jerusalem, but also in Galatia and Antioch (Gal. 2:10; Acts 11:27-30) for instance, understood the message of God’s love and compassion²⁵ (Mt. 5:45), which embodied itself in the death and resurrection of the Son of God for the salvation of the entire world. Consequently, and “along with witness to the transforming work of God in Christ through the Spirit, the Orthodox service to others is a basic part of the work of God and it is redeeming and transforming the entire universe.”²⁶ Accordingly, Christians demolished the barriers between social affinities and ethnicities (Gal. 3:38), following the example of their Master (Eph. 2:14), serving the fellow beings from the beginning of Christianity; a fundamental element that lies at the heart of Church life.²⁷

Expressing their love in active charity, the first community chose seven men to act as deacons “full of faith and of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6:1-6), who offered help and assisted people in need.²⁸ This noble charitable work has been continuously carried out in all newly-established communities, even outside of Jerusalem, where donations have been given according to each one’s financial capacities (2 Cor. 8:8-10, 13; 9:7). The commandments of the Lord state that even enemies have received philanthropic diakonia, in which Christ’s Disciples have imitated Him (1 Peter 1:16). This clearly indicates the presence of an indissoluble relationship between discipleship and diakonia.²⁹

The first Christian community unreservedly felt the experience that God is love (1 John 4:7-8, 11; 1 Cor. 13). They understood that those who love God should unconditionally love their neighbour (Mt. 22:36-40; 1 John 4:20). The teachings of the Twelve Apostles (Didache)³⁰ strongly directed the Christian community to care for people in need. The Orthodox Church reads the “Sunday of Last Judgment”, the passage of the Gospel

²⁰ Orthodox Diakonia Worldwide. An Initial Assessment, May 2009, p. 6.

²¹ Demetrios J. Constantelos, “Origins of Christian Orthodox diakonia: Christian Orthodox Philanthropy in Church history,” p. 8; 10.

²² Prodromou and Symeonides, “Orthodox Christianity and Humanitarianism”, p. 2.

²³ Vantsos, Kiroudi, “An Orthodox View of Philanthropy and Church Diaconia”, p. 252.

²⁴ World Council of Churches, Executive Committee, “Ecumenical Diakonia,” p. 71.

²⁵ Lina Molokotos-Liederman, “Orthodox Social Service and the Role of the Orthodox Church in the Greek Economic Crisis.” p. 1.

²⁶ Grant White, “The Liturgy After the Liturgy and Mystagogy: Orthodox Responses to the Common Call,” in *Evangelism and Diakonia in Context*. Rose Dowsett et al (eds)(Oxford: Regnum Books, 2015), pp. 97-106: p. 98.

²⁷ Miltidias Vantsos, Marina Kiroudi, *An Orthodox View of Philanthropy and Church Diaconia. Christian Bioethics*, 13 (2007), pp. 251-268: p. 257.

²⁸ Dagica Tadic-Papanikolaou (the “Liturgy after liturgy”), p. 726.

²⁹ World Council of Churches, Executive Committee, “Ecumenical Diakonia,” p. 47.

³⁰ <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0714.htm>.

(Mt. 5:31-46) to remind all parishioners of their duties and merciful work during the Great Lent towards people in need, for that God will have Mercy for the merciful (Mt. 5:7).

During and after the fourth century, Christians started to institutionalise the philanthropic diakonia through the construction of different purpose-oriented and differently targeted sets of institutions, such as hospitals, orphanages, schools, nursing homes, houses of the poor, cemeteries for foreigners, leprosariums and other welfare services.³¹

It is worth mentioning that we cherish numerous examples of laypersons, Bishops and clergies, who accepted their worldly duties with humility, rejected all the authority which came with it, and practiced diakonia unpretentiously with no set goals or pre-conditions. They sacrificed their lives and prosperities for the benefit of the poor and marginalised people,³² with whom Christ identifies Himself (Isa. 53; Mt. 25:31-46). Saint Basil the Great was one of the first Bishops who spent most of his bishopric life establishing new service institutions and facilities, allowing people to receive the care they needed.³³ John Chrysostom is, amongst others,³⁴ an exceptional figure, who has selflessly devoted his life for such compassionate philanthropic and diaconal works towards man.³⁵

GOPA-DERD's Role in Syria as a Faith-Based Organisation (FBO)³⁶

Before coming to GOPA-DERD (The Greek-Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East – Department of Ecumenical Relations and Development), it is important to remind ourselves of what follows herewith. Several faith-based organisations, such as GOPA-DERD, have played, and are still playing, an eminent role in all kinds of crises of different natures, certainly during a time of persecution, injustice and discrimination of human dignity, that has even led to the agonising loss of life of a few staff members while serving this valuable mission.³⁷

Faith-based organisations sincerely embrace certain characteristics that shape their standards and moral values, making them reliable and priceless agents as they provide services to people that “add quality to the mandate of diaconal actors to respond to human and social challenges. Among these are central constituents of Christian faith: The image of God as a loving and caring God; the image of human beings as created in God’s image and created to live in community with each other; the memory of Jesus and His prophetic ministry; the promise of God’s spirit that brings life and energizes the liberating action.”³⁸

It is noteworthy that although GOPA-DERD was established in 1994, and is one of the oldest diaconal actors of its kind, it was neither stated nor cited in the Orthodox Diakonia survey, which was conducted in 2009.³⁹

As the “Charitable Arm of the Church”, as referred to by its spiritual Father and leader His Beatitude Patriarch John X,⁴⁰ GOPA-DERD respects the UN Charter and Universal Declarations of Human Rights,

³¹ In the major cities of the Roman Empire, nearly one hundred philanthropic institutions have been identified between 330-1453. Demetrios J. Constantelos, “Origins of Christian Orthodox diakonia: Christian Orthodox Philanthropy in Church history,” p. 12.

³² Dagic Tadic-Papanikolaou, “Liturgy after litrgy”, p. 725.

³³ Vantsos, Kiroudi, “An Orthodox View of Philanthropy and Church Diaconia”, pp. 259-60.

³⁴ Dagic Tadic-Papanikolaou, “Liturgy after liturgy”, p. 726.

³⁵ Demetrios J. Constantelos, “Origins of Christian Orthodox diakonia: Christian Orthodox Philanthropy in Church history,” pp. 9-12.

³⁶ <http://www.gopaderd.org/>

³⁷ Compare, World Council of Churches, Executive Committee, “Ecumenical Diakonia,” p. 44.

³⁸ World Council of Churches, Executive Committee, “Ecumenical Diakonia,” p. 72.

³⁹ See Orthodox Diakonia Worldwide. An Initial Assessment, May 2009.

⁴⁰ His Beatitude took after His election the following slogan the mainstream for His patriarchy: “In Grace we grow, in service we transcend and in love the structure is strengthened.” Additionally, His Beatitude describes in this letter the

while considering all international standards of providing services, such as, but not limited to the “Core Humanitarian Standard” (CHS). In principle, it carries out its relief and development work according to the commandment of love and sacrifice and considers the “Good Samaritan” (Luke 10:25-37) its idol and role model for the delivery of its humanitarian assistance.

In the forefront and as an act of pure charity, GOPA-DERD concentrates on people’s needs and recognises that their suffering is rooted in unjust political, social and economic structures. Therefore, GOPA-DERD decided to move from providing modest support in the early decades of its existence, to engaging in national development programs in times of crisis.

To this end, GOPA-DERD considers one’s entire well-being, consisting of both material and spiritual aspects as crucial components to be embraced and preserved, while offering assistance, taking into consideration the changing functional subsystems, namely the social, political, and economic influences surrounding the individual and the country.⁴¹ GOPA-DERD has therefore developed a substantial structure in its diaconal service, starting a few decades ago with “micro-diakonia”. It started by helping some individuals, communities, churches and monasteries,⁴² and later became a high-scale assistance organisation, “macro-diakonia.”

It focuses on implementing projects based on a needs-oriented approach through multi-sectoral relief and development works and it helps almost two million Syrians per year, composed of all social segments and age groups, using its collective twenty-five years’ worth of experiences and its own assets. Two-thousand staff members, distributed and spread in nearly all Syrian Governorates, are at the service of others. Almost 24 UN-Agencies⁴³ and other INGOs, based in and outside of Syria, are funding GOPA-DERD. This takes place in a time where Syria has been affected by crisis, terrorism, loss of school, health service centres, losses for the youth generation, misuse of women and girls, etc. the list is endless – all in an attempt to destroy God’s creatures.

As a result, GOPA-DERD decided to help the most vulnerable Syrians through various sectors that include Protection (care of elderly people, Gender-based Violence (GBV), Child Protection (CP) and Psychosocial Support (PSS)), Education, Medical and Mental Health, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), Shelter, Distribution of Food and Non-Food Items, Livelihoods, just to mention a few.⁴⁴ Even though this type of assistance may inadvertently mostly be material support; nevertheless, the main goal remains at the heart of serving the soul and the salvation of the human being from the evil one, because “we are God’s fellow workers.” (1 Cor. 3:9).

Conclusion

In this paper, it is undeniably clear that the origin of the theoretical and practical diakonia is Christ Himself, who not only taught His followers to love one another, but also sacrificed His life for His beloved ones. Furthermore, the commandments He requested His Disciples to preserve and cherish, are also valid for us today in praxis, explained how diakonia is the believer’s spontaneous response of gratitude directed to the

needs of care of families, women, poor, people with special needs and others, and emphasises on the role of the Church institutions as instruments at the service of the people and on the responsibility of the Church for the construction and development of the societies, in which the Church is present. See the Pastoral Letter of His Beatitude Patriarch John X, Damascus 17-02-2013. <https://www.antiochpatriarchate.org/en/page/pastoral-letter/115/>.

⁴¹ Compare Vantsos, Kiroudi, “An Orthodox View of Philanthropy and Church Diaconia”, p. 263.

⁴² Monasteries have played from the time of early Christianity an imminent role as diaconal intuitions in many ways. Dagic Tadic-Papanikolaou, “Liturgy after liturgy”, p. 726.

⁴³ For the importance of the “added / core values,” such as the moral ones and the accessibility to hard-to-reach areas and communities, of FBOs for UN Agencies, International Organisations, Governmental Donors, see World Council of Churches, Executive Committee, “Ecumenical Diaconia,” pp. 73-75.

⁴⁴ <http://www.gopaderd.org/index.php/about-us/our-programs>.

suffering neighbour, and can be practiced to help and serve everybody, who may walk into our life, even if uninvited, as an enemy.

For the reason that Christ identifies Himself with the poor and marginalised people, the service being provided is not only to those in utmost need for it, but is at the same time a service to the Lord Himself. It is a way through which we can inherit Eternal life, no matter what form or shape this service takes, for it has been developed and modified throughout millennia, taking into account different economic, political, social and religious factors.

The Divine Liturgy, the “birthplace” of diakonia, extends its value and effectiveness, after the completion of the celebration at the Church, to the whole world, to the “Altar of the poor,” and to all those in need through diaconal work.⁴⁵ Accordingly, serving the people is an expression of faith and love; it is a “Messianic” act, the ministry of the Church. For this reason, GOPA-DERD has adopted the slogan “Faith in Actions.”

GOPA-DERD has developed its programs and services in-line with civil society’s needs, in order to meet the necessities of the people, generation after generation. It expanded its diaconal scope of work during the last three decades, especially after 2011. GOPA-DERD works as a neutral entity and thus can additionally promote dialogue, build bridges between the assorted segments of society and harmonise relationships between population strata and contribute to the peace-building process in Syria.

Furthermore, GOPA-DERD’s goal is – in addition to the physical services it provides – the uplifting of one’s spirit, increasing peace of one’s mind and soul. GOPA-DERD considers the human being as being one unit and entity, where the body and the soul are undivided and both dimensions count equally. As such, the improvement of the economic and financial situation of the most vulnerable is an honourable act of love that should, in turn, shed light on this suffering, raise global awareness and hope, and offer people a better psychological and salvific future (Jer. 29:11).

Today, according to the rapid social changes taking place worldwide and the increasing numbers of people in poverty, in addition to those in need of basic services, it is very important to support long-established and experienced faith-based organisations,⁴⁶ well-known for their credibility, which are characterised and can be measured by impartiality, accountability, integrity, and transparency.

My last words are addressed to my brothers and sisters in Christ, with the aim at placing all of us in front of our responsibilities towards people in need, generally speaking, but also towards our brothers and sisters in Christ in the Middle East, especially in Syria. According to Acts 2:44-45, the members of Early Christian Church had much in common, “selling their possessions and goods, they shared with anyone who was in need.” We should acknowledge the fact that we are members of one Christian family throughout the world. Hence, we should understand that geographical, man-made political decisions, as well as designed borders causing boundaries between humans, cannot raise any fences between this one family, which believes in the one Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

We should always remember that giving a donation is not a new phenomenon in Church life, but rather one which is found already in the early characteristics of those who started to believe in Christ and His true message to the world. St. Paul has written to different parishes during his years on earth, asking them to support their brothers and sisters in other parishes (2 Cor. 8-9). Thus, involvement in ecumenical diakonia and sharing across borders is a central and essential mark of each church in the world.

⁴⁵ Dagic Tadic-Papanikolaou, “Liturgy after liturgy”, p. 730.

⁴⁶ Faith-based organisations are facing different types of challenges and difficulties carrying out their humanitarian and diaconal activities. Orthodox Diakonia Worldwide. An Initial Assessment, May 2009, pp. 23-24.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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Websites:

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25. DIACONIA IN SOUTHERN AND CENTRAL AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY

Bosela E. Eale¹

Introduction

The Church of Jesus Christ understood that the transformation of communities is an essential part of its mission task. The focal point of its mission has been the preaching of the Good News of Jesus Christ, the call to faith and repentance of all for men and women, and the process of teaching its members to observe all things that Jesus told them. Obedience to Jesus' command leads to the transformation of physical, social and spiritual lives, which call for a holistic ministry. In most times, this has been well done in some places but also poorly done in others. However, it has been assumed that the reception and the living out of the Gospel would begin to transform both individual and community life. While we recognise today that missionaries often envisioned a model of the transformed community that looked like the ones they knew from their own cultures, there is no doubt that this transforming dimension was essential aspect of mission.

Diaconia is a collective notion for many kinds of activities, services and actions. It is important to note that, along with many other notions, the word *diaconia* means the preaching of the Gospel, as well as the service of the apostles in general and in particular the creating or awareness and raising of funds for the Palestinian in need at the Jerusalem Community (cf. 2 Cor. 8:4).² As a core concept of the New Testament, *diaconia* constitutes not only a proper object of study in itself and highly instructive for conceiving of the church's mission, but also as a kind of heuristic for understanding various aspects of contemporary society's representation of 'service'. *Diaconia* has been understood simply as 'service', the response to the needs of the poor and the suffering. Loving one's neighbour, caring for the poor, and proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ are activities all Christians ought to do.³ It is to be noted that *diaconia* is a part of the integral mission of the Church and it can be exercised in different ways. Nordstokke states that *diaconia* is a theological concept that points to the very identity and mission of the church and its practical implication is a call to action, as a response to challenges of human suffering, injustice and care for creation. The present use of the word has largely shaped how Christians have tried to be faithful to the biblical call to be a neighbour throughout the history of the Church.⁴ Seemingly, *diaconia* is part and parcel of our obedience to God's law. The New Testament makes it abundantly clear that obedience to God's law requires not a legalistic obedience under compulsion, but the loving obedience which derives from faith: the attitude and actions which are the expression of faith. The concept of *diaconia* could also go beyond Christian tradition in embracing sociological and political issues. This could be case where the Church advocates for the respect of human dignity as well as human rights and other issues.

Diaconia in the Early Southern African Church

European missionaries to southern Africa throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries played a strangely unclear role in the history and affairs of the region. On the one hand, they were driven by a strong desire to

¹ Prof. Bosela Eale is Director of the Unit on Peace, Diakonia & Development at the All African Conference of Churches.

² Archbishop Jeremias, Theological foundation of diaconia. Report at the 3rd Annual General Meeting of European Federation for Diaconia-EURODIACONIA, 26 – 30 May 1999, p.1.

³ Benjamin Hartley, "What's in a Word? Diakonia and Deacons in the Bible and Today". In *Mission and Methodism*, 2015, p. 7.

⁴ Kjell Nordstokke, *Diaconia in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment*, p.8.

honestly assist humanity and carry about material and social changes which would improve quality of life for others. On the other hand, they were possessed of a moral self-righteousness which led them to make hasty and unapprised judgements upon local mores, norms and values that they were barely equipped to understand. The first manifested itself in an involvement in local agriculture, irrigation and technology which, being environmental and hence independent of larger cultural issues, found a small measure of acceptance in rural society. The second sought to impose an alien morality and work ethos upon the local people without realising that these undermined their most basic social and cultural tenets and were, therefore, largely resisted.⁵ Therefore, it is not very clear in the early stage of missionary work in this region of Africa whether diaconia was part of the agenda of missionaries. In the case of South Africa, besides the gospel, the focus of the missionary work along with colonial power was focused on the development of agriculture. Williams⁶ argues that local acceptance of early missionaries in the Eastern Cape was due more to their technological capacity to introduce furrow irrigation into an otherwise drought-stricken land than upon their Christian teachings. Seemingly, Gustave asserts,

Ultimately the success of the missionaries in southern Africa appears to have hinged upon their ability to provide viable agricultural land for indigenous settlement at a time when Black-owned land was being increasingly alienated for white usufruct. Residence on mission lands however had its price.⁷

The Church in Africa, among other things, can be defined as a “young church”, given that most of the African continent only came into contact with Christianity in the past 100 years. For much of this time, the foremost task of both the early missionaries and the subsequent pastoral actors has been that of preaching the Gospel to people who were hearing it for the first time.⁸ Diaconial work in the church was not the primary agenda of missionary work in southern Africa, as it has been the case in different parts of the continent. The main agenda was to let Africans know God, since the assumption was that no one there knew God. It was only later, while the preaching of the Gospel was being carried out, that the need for diaconial work arose. This arose in the context of injustice and discrimination as portrayed in Acts 6:1-7, while diaconial work in Africa arose out of the felt need in the mission field. This led to develop the ministry for caring in sectors such as education, health and social work at large.

Diaconia in Central Africa Region’s Churches

The Central African region is one the most affected regions in terms of suffering and poverty amongst other problems. Internal conflicts and wars have caused a lot internal and external displaced people in the region. These are the cases of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Chad, the Central Africa Republic, the Republic of Cameroon, to name a few. Like the case of Southern Africa Christianity, the missionary work in Central Africa region aimed at sharing gospel with the local people. Missionary teams from Portugal, Belgium, France, Germany and the United States of America disembarked on the continent along with colonial powers. As said earlier, the main objective for missionary teams was the share the gospel, while the colonial powers pretended to bring civilisation to indigenous people and at the same time, they focused on exploiting their natural resources. Along the line, the need for diaconal work was felt by the missionaries. For

⁵ Adolph Gustave, *European Missionaries in Southern Africa: The role of missionaries’ settlement in Southern Africa 1800*. Collections in the Archives (1925), p. 1.

⁶ Donald Williams, *The Missionary on the Eastern Frontier of the Cape Colony, 1799-1853*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand, 1959.

⁷ Adolph Gustave, p. 2.

⁸ Polycarp Pengo. A Paper Presented at the Inauguration Ceremony of the Research Area for Interdisciplinary Studies Related to African Culture by the Honorary President His Eminence Polycarp Cardinal Pengo (SECAM President) at the Pontifical Lateran University, 25th November 2011.

the diaconal work in the Central Africa region, missionaries focused on building schools along with health care facilities. Nowadays, churches are trying to diversify their diaconal work. United Evangelical Mission (UEM) is one of the organisations which helps its member churches in diaconal work. Commenting on some diaconal projects of the Disciples of Christ Community in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kabango writes:

Generally, it is admired how women and men come together to implement remarkable projects in a difficult context of the Equateur Region of the Democratic Republic Congo. Church leaders, UEM health and development co-workers, ordinary farmers, mainly widowed women, orphans, ethnic minorities (Pygmies), construction workers, nurses/ doctors at the Ambulance Boat, all work together to address severe poverty challenges. In remote areas, the churches reach out to the poorest of the poor. It is a people's success story and a high appreciation to churches who lead development initiatives in a way where a unique partnership work was able to be observed. It has to be emphasized that church projects are investing in education, healthcare, in social development, in all those aspects which improve the quality of life of people who live within the ambit of the project. The goal is to improve the quality of people's lives in the most holistic manner. It was observed how ownership is growing through the involvement of local congregants.⁹

Churches need to be equipped in order to help to improve their ability to respond to the needs of their communities. Similar to the Disciples of Christ Community in DR Congo, the Evangelical Church of Cameroon is also involved in diaconal work. It runs extensive educational, medical and social services. Several social centres take care of children and youth who are in need of assistance as part of their diaconal work.

The Nature of Diaconal Ministry Today

The Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa (LUCSA), is one of the prominent sub-regional churches actively involved in *diaconal* ministry. Today, diaconal work is not done in the same way as it was in the early era of the Church on the Africa continent. *Diaconal* work by Missionaries in those days was mainly focused on education and health care. As one can observe, there is a paradigm shift regarding the nature of diaconal work on the continent. For the Lutheran Communion in the Southern Africa, the purpose of diaconal work means to live out the gospel message of service to God's people and all creation. The core of their diaconal ministry is based on Luke 4:18-19, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." The *diaconal* work entails developing a disaster and emergency response for a management team to be able to respond quickly and effectively when disasters strike the sub-region.¹⁰ LUCSA is actively engaged in raising the voice of action against injustice, the alleviation of poverty and is the organisation's driving force behind advocacy and outreach. As can be seen, the *diaconal* work in LUCSA is inextricably linked to its understanding of the Gospel through the cross, which calls us to serve the need of God's people.

Equally, the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) is also involved in the diaconal work in the same sub-region. The nature of their diaconal work is not wholly different from what is being done by the Lutheran Communion of Southern Africa. They advocate that the challenging growing demands of modern society and the growing needs of communities should be an imperative for the church to be involved in diaconal work. Through its various structures and organisations, the MCSA is able to respond appropriately

⁹ John Wesley Kabango. 2019. UEM Support Emphasizes Progress for the Vulnerable Population. News Details on a Trip to DRC. UEM.

¹⁰ Lutheran Communion in South Africa (Diaconal Issues Desk, 2014).

to spiritual and social needs of communities. They also assert that this can happen, while local societies need to recognise the place for ministry and mission outside the normal church structures with provisions made for the appointment of a deacon.¹¹

From the two above examples, one can understand that there are new trends in diaconal work in this region. Diaconia is not only about the issue of dealing with the needy people in the circle of the church; it is not only about the issues of distributing food or clothes to the hungry and naked within the church. Diaconal work should be understood and exercised beyond the church circle, in such a way that it embraces the entire society. This will require the church to be equipped with methods and strategies as to how this could be implemented. The Church therefore needs to be more professional when it enters into this dimension of diaconal work since lobbying and advocacy need to definitely become part of its diaconal work.

Rethinking Diaconal Ministry Today

Acts Chapter 6:1-7 is one among the passages which deal with the ministry of *diaconia* in the Bible. Even though *diaconia* ministry draws its origin from the Bible as a ministry of caring for and serving humanity in Christ's name, its practice is more contextual than stereotyped. Changes within Africa in recent decades in the process of de-colonisation, the end of Apartheid in South Africa, political and economic upheavals, tragedies, conflicts and exploitation, as well as opportunities, growth and success engaged the serious attention of the global church. During the seminar on human resource management and leadership for *diaconia* and development held jointly by AACC and WCC in Maputo, Matthew Ross from WCC made the point that the African experience of *diaconia* differs enormously from some parts of Europe and North America, where highly specialised and professional diaconal agencies have been developed, often funded by both churches and by governments.¹² He adds that, in diaconal ministry, what may work in some parts of Europe may not work elsewhere. Ross raises a concern regarding the establishment of agencies for diaconal ministry when he says that the creation of separate agencies can in a way stop churches from directly focusing on the practical needs of people. Much diaconal work performed by churches in Africa is directly integrated with all other church work including worship, caring and fellowship working hand-in-hand, whereas much of the care is done by unpaid church workers motivated by faith and love. This is a lesson to the world that 'caring' is not conditional just on money and *diaconia* work in this regard does not necessarily need money in order to be practiced.¹³ *Diaconia* is a collective notion for many kind of activities and actions that are inseparable from the integral life of the church and its impact in the community. Equally, Phiri asserts that churches continue to engage in diaconal action. Understanding and practices differ from time to time and from context to context, but the mandate for diaconia remains for all churches.¹⁴

We also need to open a round of reflections on the possibilities of the concept of *diaconia* beyond the Christian tradition. The Church should consider extending its diaconal work to the entire society, embracing other aspects of social life. For its diaconal work, the Church ought to consider doing advocacy as part of diaconal ministry. I argue that advocacy encompasses raising awareness related to larger concerns that affect the poor and the community. It involves speaking out to public authorities, whether in support or disapproval of the deeds of the government, financial institutions and policy makers.¹⁵ Being the representative of Christ on Earth, the Church is called to positively impact the lives of people created in God's image and likeness.

¹¹ Ernie Nightingale. The Methodist Diaconal Order Report (Southern Africa, 2011).

¹² Matthew Ross, Report of the seminar on Human resource management and leadership for diaconia development and development held in Maputo, Mozambique from the 17th – 21st June 2019, p.7.

¹³ Idem.

¹⁴ Isabelle A. Phiri. 2018. *An Overview on the Imperative of Diakonia for the Church*, p. 3.

¹⁵ Bosela Eale, *Justice and Poverty as Challenges for the Christian Churches*. Globethics.net, 2015, p.250.

Conclusion

For its diaconal ministry, the Church is called upon for a commitment to alleviate the suffering of all people who are victimised through structures of oppression and neglect. The Church should eradicate causes of injustice and all that robs life and dignity of the people. It is in this regard that the Church will play a key role in advocacy for diaconal work. Diaconal work today should be practiced not only within the church but should be extended to the entire society where the respect of human dignity should be observed by all and for all.

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26. EXAMPLES AND CONCEPTS OF DIACONIA IN SOUTHERN AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY

Willie van der Merwe¹

Introduction

Although alleviating the plight of the poor, the marginalised, the sick, the vulnerable and those suffering because of an unjust society was always seen as part of the calling of church since its planting at the southern tip of Africa in 1652,² the diaconal landscape in this part of the world changed fundamentally since the beginning of the 20th century. The aim of this article is to reflect briefly on some of the changes during this century with the purpose to describe briefly how a social development platform developed from where the current economic, political, social and ecological challenges of the Southern African region can be addressed.

The article will be presented in four sections. The first section describes very briefly the South African context at the beginning and the end of the 20th century. In the second section, a brief overview of the development of the South African social welfare and development sector and how that impacted the diaconal practices of the Dutch Reformed Churches is given. The third section alludes to some important theological discourses and how that influenced the development of diaconal practices within the family of Dutch Reformed Churches. The article will be concluded with a fourth section mentioning some of the challenges facing the *diaconia* of the church in Southern Africa.

The examples used in this article are mainly from the family of Dutch Reformed Churches being the oldest church in South Africa. It is a pity that examples from other church traditions and denominations in Southern Africa could not be included due to limitations regarding the length of this article. There are, however, many more interesting examples of innovative and exciting developments happening in Southern African Churches.

Hope and Despair

Comparing the mood in South Africa at the turn of the 19th century with that at the turn of the 20th century reveals a significant resemblance which can be described with the phrase *hope and despair*. Without going too deeply into the historic events contributing to this mood towards the end of the 19th century, it is however necessary to note a few specific events which have to a certain extent triggered the beginning of a new era for the diaconal work of the Dutch Reformed Church as well as other churches.

One such an event was the discovery of diamonds in the 1860s and 1870s in the Northern Cape region and the discovery of gold in 1884 in the Witwatersrand area. This happened at a time when people, especially in the north of the country, were still recovering from the impact of the First Anglo-Boer War (1880-1881) and poor agricultural conditions such as droughts and pestilence impacted negatively on a mainly subsistence farming economy. The prospects of a new life of prosperity conceived by the news of the discovery of diamonds and gold spurred a migration of thousands of people to the Witwatersrand and also to Kimberley in the Northern Cape in search for the proverbial “pot of gold”.³ However, these discoveries also created a

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² Christianity, or at least the Reformed version of it, arrived at the southern tip of Africa in 1652 when the first Dutch settlers set foot in Africa to start a settlement, to provide fresh produce to their fleet sailing between the Europe and the East. These settlers were mainly employees of the United East-India Company (Verenigde Oost- Indische Companjje) which dominated the trade between Europe and India in the 17th century.

³ A well-known example is the “Witwatersrand Gold Rush” in 1886 which led to the establishment of Johannesburg. After only ten years since the “rush” occurred, Johannesburg was the largest town in South Africa.

new, complex and very competitive economic situation and many prospective miners coming from an existence farming context never found that life of prosperity they were hoping for. Soon, the mining camps that arose overnight turned into settlements with a high incidence of severe poverty and social disruption.

Another event that must be mentioned was the Second South African War or Anglo-Boer War. The discovery of gold in the Witwatersrand area intensified the already tense relations between the two Boer Republics⁴ in the north of South Africa and the British Empire and, in 1899, the Second South African War broke out. This war continued for three years until 1902 and its results were devastating to the economic and social life of the two Boer Republics. Many farms were destroyed because of the scorched earth policy of the British forces, many women were widowed and hundreds of children orphaned.

These two examples will hopefully suffice to illustrate the mood in South African society at the beginning of the 20th century. On the one hand, there were the prospects of a new economic dispensation due to the discovery of minerals and, on the other hand, many people were suffering because of the scars of the two Anglo-Boer Wars and continuing poor agricultural conditions.

A similar situation of hope and despair existed in South Africa towards the end of the 20th century. The first democratic election in April 1994 which marked the end of Apartheid gave a new hope to millions of South Africans and phrases such as “the birth of a new South Africa” or “the dawning of a new South Africa” were frequently used to describe the hope South Africans had in the 90s of the previous century.

However, the *Diagnostic Overview*, published in 2011 by the National Planning Commission of South Africa, tells a different story. According to this document, millions of South Africans are still suffering from poverty, unemployment and inequality and the Commission concluded:

South Africa is considered an upper middle-class country by virtue of the average national income per person or GDP per capita. However, this status masks extreme inequality in income and access to opportunity. Deep poverty is widespread and constraints human development and economic progress.⁵

This already alarming situation is aggravated by the deeply rooted effects of Apartheid in the 20th century. The Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs (DELSA), a division of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) sounded the following warning: “the long-run development trajectory in South Africa has been one that has generated a very high-inequality society with a strong racial component in the inequality”.⁶

In his recent State of the Nation address (SONA 2020), the president of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, acknowledges the “stark reality” which South Africans must face every day. South Africa seems to be one of the most unequal societies in the world in terms of income distribution with unemployment figures hovering around 30% and more than 15 million South Africans who need a monthly grant to survive.

The Emergence of a Social Welfare and Development Sector for South Africa

The Dutch Reformed Church was the first institution to recognise the deteriorating socio-economic circumstances of especially the White Afrikaner at the end of the 19th century when this problem was raised

⁴ In the 1830s, various groups left the Cape Colony in search for freedom from the reign of the British Empire. A number of these groups settled in the northern regions of the country and two states (also referred to as “Boer republics”) were formed namely the South African Republic (Republic of Transvaal) and the Orange Free State claiming their sovereignty and freedom from English influence.

⁵ National Planning Commission, *Diagnostic Overview* (Pretoria: Government Printer, 2011), p. 8.

⁶ M. Leibbrandt, I. Woolard, A. Finn, and L. Argent. *Trends in South African income distribution and poverty since the fall of apartheid*, OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers (OECD, 2010), p. 67.

in a synod in 1886.⁷ To a large extent the Poor White Problem, as it was later referred to, served as a catalyst for the emergence of a social welfare and development sector for South Africa and it is therefore necessary to briefly allude to some of the processes followed in the first three decades of the 20th century to deal with this issue.

In October 1934, the Council for the Care of the Poor of the Federated Dutch Reformed Churches of South Africa hosted a national congress in Kimberley. This conference was preceded by a series of conferences focusing on the plight of poor Afrikaners. The first of these was held in Cradock, on the theme: The need of rural areas and the migration to cities. The term “poor White” was also coined during this conference. A second conference followed in 1922 in Stellenbosch with the focus on poverty and education. The third conference was a year later in Bloemfontein with a broader focus than the previous conferences and people from the different regions of the country attended. All three conferences called for “a more scientific approach to the poor white problem”.⁸

In 1927, representatives from the Carnegie Corporation visited South Africa and during their visit different groups requested the Corporation to fund an inquiry into the Poor White Problem. A Management Council to steer the project was formed in 1928, and in 1932 the Carnegie Report on the Poor White Problem was published. This report, comprising five volumes, had 124 findings and recommendations.

The Dutch Reformed Church immediately took action and appointed three commissions to study the findings and recommendations made by the Commission of Inquiry. In January 1934, this church held a meeting where 40 smaller sub-commissions studied aspects of the Carnegie report. The recommendations and proposals of these groups were sent to the three study commissions who consolidated all the suggestions into 99 recommendations. These recommendations were presented during the national congress in Kimberley. The Kimberley Congress (1934) took 124 resolutions and, looking at the resolutions as a whole, it is not difficult to see that it actually formed a framework, or even a programme, for uplifting the white Afrikaner. These resolutions covered many aspects such as a more scientific approach to the poor white problem, the training of social workers and other professionals, the establishment of a dedicated government department for social welfare, programmes focusing on strengthening the Afrikaner’s position in the country’s economy, programmes focusing on job creation and many more.

In the years to follow, a lot was done to implement these resolutions. A Department of Social Welfare was founded in 1937, a number of universities started departments of Social Work and Social Work as a discipline was established, trained social workers entered communities and, within a few decades, Social Work developed into a well-organised profession. From the 1950s, a whole corpus of social legislation and social policies were developed.

Imperative to the new dispensation in South Africa which started with the first democratic election in 1994, was the transformation of the social welfare sector. A policy document, the White Paper on Social Welfare, was published in 1997, the same year in which the Non-Profit Organisations Act (NPO Act) was promulgated. Both these documents have significant implications for the sector. The aim of the White Paper was to create “an equitable, people-centred, democratic and appropriate social welfare system”, whilst the NPO Act aims to inter alia to establish an administrative and regulatory framework within which non-profit organisations conduct their affairs.

The Dutch Reformed Church stayed deeply involved in the development of the South African social welfare sector and in some instances played a leading role; for example, the first director-general of the Department of Social Welfare was a minister of this church. In 1944, the different presbyteries in the Cape

⁷ Since this synod, the Dutch Reformed Church has been engaged in various actions aimed at uplifting the Afrikaner, including the establishment of institutions to care for people living with disabilities, women with crisis pregnancies, orphans and children in need of care, youth hostels and older persons, schools and professional social services.

⁸ Vosloo,R, “The Dutch Reformed Church and the poor White problem in the wake of the first Carnegie Report (1932): some church historical observations” in *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 37(2) (September 2011) p. 6.

Peninsula formed the first Council for Christian Social Services and trained social workers were employed. In 1951, the Dutch Reformed Church opened the Hugenote Kollege in Wellington to train Christian social workers. Today, the Dutch Reformed Church is still one of the largest providers of social services in the non-governmental sector in South Africa.

This is, however, not the full picture. It is also important to note that, from its onset, the South African social welfare sector developed along racial lines and focused on the white Afrikaner. This policy led to severe inequalities in terms of social services delivery and social development. Due to these policies, black churches and other social movements had to develop their own social welfare system, also termed “an informal system”, which functioned primarily alongside the formal, regulated and well-structured social welfare system. The net effect of this is that many churches serving mainly the black population of South Africa are still excluded from the formal social services system.

A New Understanding of Diaconia Emerges

Until the end of the 19th century, caring for those in need happened in local congregations and faith communities. The economic, political and social context of the white Afrikaner at the turn of the 19th century however urged the Dutch Reformed Church to take a more organised approach. In 1915, the Dutch Reformed Church of the Cape Colony decided to appoint a commission to organise the existing diaconal projects into a more united structure and to use this platform to initiate more projects. Following the German example of *Innere Mission*, this commission was called the *Commissie voor Inwendige Zending* (Commission for Inward Mission) to distinguish this new initiative focusing on the poor white Afrikaner from the already existing mission work of the church focusing on people from other cultures and races.⁹

The previous section alluded to the leading role the Dutch Reformed Church played in solving the Poor White Problem as well as the establishment of a social welfare sector in South Africa. It is therefore understandable that this church from the onset positioned its future diaconal work within this new framework of a professional and well-structured social welfare system. It was, however, unforeseen how this development of synodically organised, professional church social services would later influence the church’s self-understanding of its diaconate. Gradually, a perception developed within the church that the diaconal work of the congregation should be seen as diaconate whilst the church’s professional social services are perceived as professional social services. Furthermore, due to the fact that the church’s professional social services function within the statutory framework and social policies of the country, these services should rather be seen as agents (or service providers) of government. These perceptions caused a rift between the congregation and the church’s professional social services in many instances and caused serious debates about the definition and conceptualisation of *diaconia* in various church forums over the last few decades.

These debates happen within a larger discourse within the Dutch Reformed Church on its self-understanding and ecclesiology. Many factors served as catalysts for this discourse such as the harsh criticism of various ecumenical structures nationally and internationally regarding the Dutch Reformed Church’s support of and participation in Apartheid. The *Confession of Belhar* which was drafted by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in 1982 and adopted in 1986 was another significant factor. This confession again emphasised the unity of the church and the need for reconciliation, justice and true peace in the world. Also, important were the debates within the Dutch Reformed Church on the church’s identity and role in society in response to the Confession of Belhar and the subsequent policy document *Kerk en Samelewing* (Church and Society), which was adopted in 1986.

⁹ At the end of the 19th century, the Dutch Reformed Church was already involved in mission projects in South Africa and a number of other African countries e.g. Zimbabwe, Zambia, Nigeria, Kenya and the Sudan. Most of these mission projects or “mission stations” as it was also called, followed a holistic approach and together with preaching the gospel and Bible classes a whole range of diaconal projects were started such as schools, hospitals and agricultural projects.

Another contributor to the discourse on its ecclesiology was a new definition of the concept of mission which was crafted in 1986 during a Mission Conference held by the family of Dutch Reformed Churches. According to this definition, the concept “mission” includes the mission work and the evangelisation of the church as well as its diaconal work.

All these debates and many more converged into an extensive discourse in the Dutch Reformed Church on its identity and calling. This discourse is strongly influenced by the missional church movement which emerged at the end of the previous century in the USA with the work of the *Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN)* and other similar projects.¹⁰ This discourse developed to such an extent in the Dutch Reformed Church that its General Synod adopted a motion in 2013 to amend its Church Order by adding a new section 2 in which its identity and calling is described in terms of the *missio Dei*. This resolution now provides an officially accepted theological framework for the discussion on the nature, the vision and mode of the church’s diaconate which emerged at the end of the 20th century. To conclude this section, these three aspects will be briefly mentioned.

Firstly, diaconate, or *diaconia*, originates within the Triune God. Volf describes the Trinity as a community of perfect love. This formula brings two of God’s key attributes in direct relationship with each other, community and love. Wolterstorff adds a third key attribute, justice. Together, these three dimensions of the Triune God form a framework for *diaconia* or, one can say, determine the nature of *diaconia*.

Furthermore, God calls a church together and sends them into this world as His co-workers. Herein lies the unique identity of the church’s diaconate. *Diaconia* is not yet another ministry of the church – it is an integral part of *missio Dei*.

Secondly, missional theology helps the church to understand that the vision of its diaconate is primarily the restoration of God’s kingdom. Therefore, the two most basic activities of the diaconate are the proclaiming of the reign of God and the healing of this world.

Thirdly, it is therefore necessary to continuously assess diaconal practices in terms of this vision. The question remains: How do current diaconal practices contribute to the restoration of God’s reign in this world? One way to look at it is to see the different types of *diaconia* or diaconal practices as different modes of diaconate. Recent studies in *diaconia* identified a variety of diaconal practices or modi of *diaconia*, for instance prophetic *diaconia*, liberation *diaconia*, justice *diaconia*, ecology *diaconia*, social development and Christian social services.

Challenges Facing the Diaconate of the Church

In this last section, some of the challenges facing the diaconate in general and specifically that of the Dutch Reformed Church will be briefly discussed. A first challenge is the further development of a theology of missional diaconate. In the previous section, the contribution of the missional church movement and the developing missional theology towards a new understanding of the identity and vision of the church’s diaconate was touched upon. The notion of being co-workers in the mission of the Triune God (*missio Dei*) has inevitable implications for the church’s professional social services but also for the diaconal work in congregations. One implication for instance is how to reconcile the potential tension between adhering to the requirements of the social welfare system and the social services professions on the one hand and the calling to serve as co-workers in the coming of the Kingdom on the other. A “new diaconal professionalism”¹¹ is indeed necessary.

A second challenge, which links to the first, is the church-state relationship. The close relationship, or partnership, results in a situation where the church’s social services become dependent on government subsidies, in many instances. The church’s social services also become so part and parcel of the government’s

¹⁰ Within the family of Dutch Reformed Churches, a network *Vennootskap van Gestuurde Gemeentes* (Partnership of sent churches) was already formed in the late 90s of the previous century.

¹¹ Hofmann, Beate, “New Diaconal Professionalism – Theology, Spirituality, Values and Practice” in *Diaconia. Journal for the Study of Christian Social Practice*, 8(2) (2017), pp. 138-151.

agenda that a “mission drift”¹² sometimes occurs. The challenge is to find a position where the church’s social services can function within the social services system without compromising its identity and ethos.¹³

The rift between the congregations and the church’s professional social services poses a third challenge. Arguing from the vantage point of the *missio Dei*, it is clear that these two ministries are not separate, or even oppositional ministries, but rather different modes of the one mission of the church. Hopefully, the development of a clear theology of missional diaconate will help to bridge this rift. Nevertheless, it is imperative for church social services professional to understand this theology.

A critical aspect of being missional is to engage with the world and herein lies a fourth challenge for the church’s diaconate. Research within the Dutch Reformed Church shows that the diaconal approach of many congregations is that of short-term projects (charity projects). A missional diaconate however calls for a deep commitment to one’s own context and subsequently a longer-term approach. In practice, this means the churches require the ability to crossing borders and to deal with “otherness” respectfully.¹⁴

Conclusion

This article presents but one case study: a Southern African church’s diaconal development since the beginning of the 20th century. As was already mentioned in this article, many other churches and faith communities are involved in social services delivery and social development in Southern Africa. In fact, the high level of involvement of churches in social services delivery and social development is a unique characteristic of the broad social welfare system.

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¹² Eurich, J, “Diaconia under mission drift. Problems with its theological legitimation and its welfare state partnership” in *Diakonia. Journal for the Study of Christian Social Practice*, 3(1) (2012), pp. 58-65.

¹³ The National Religious Association for Social Development (NRASD) was formed in 1997 with this goal. Since then, there have been many high-level talks between the church and politics, but no significant progress has been made to date.

¹⁴ The “Seeking Conviviality” project of the Lutheran World Federation is a good example of seeking a deep commitment to one’s context.

27. DIACONIA IN WEST AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY

Confidence Worlanyo Bansah¹ and Edem Dzun²

Introduction

The context of this paper is West Africa. In the past, the trend of Christian social witnessing in this part of the world was primarily through the building of educational, health and agricultural facilities. This reflects the ideology of training people for ministry, promoting the culture of reading the Bible and fulfilling the social ministry of the gospel by providing basic necessities of life like food and healthcare for the poor and needy in the community. But given the current level of threats posed by diseases, war, climate change, poverty, human trafficking, child labour/prostitution, substance abuse, and other culturally undesirable nuances or practices like human sacrifice, there is the need to adopt new ways of engaging in diaconic work to enhance development, human security/safety, and peaceful-coexistence in the West African region.

Christianity came to West Africa with the arrival of Portuguese sailors and accompanying priests at the Gold Coast, now Ghana in 1471.³ Following that, missionaries were dispatched from other European countries like Germany and Switzerland to West Africa for the purposes of mission and evangelism at different times leading to the spread of Christianity.

Today, approximately one in every four Christians live in sub-Saharan Africa, thereby making it the home to 23.6% of the world's Christian population according to the Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population (2010) by the Pew Research Centre's Forum on Religion and Public Life.⁴

In this paper, we shall examine examples and concepts of Diaconia in the context of the social and economic realities of development in West African Christianity, particularly in light of past and present paradigms and trajectories. In doing so, we shall analyse the future of Diaconia within the framework of multiple cultural, religious and political identities of West Africa.

The Church and Diaconic Work in West Africa

The African continent in general is heterogeneous, comprised of many diverse cultures. Within each African country are numerous people groups with different ways of life. Each of these people groups is a tightly knit community whose members express a strong sense of commitment and responsibility toward one another. While this strong bond that exists in community has its attendant challenges, such as the sometimes-violent conflicts that arise both within and between the people groups, it is also true that Africans thrive on interdependence and interconnectedness. A careful examination of most people groups in West Africa, for

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³ John K. Agbeti, *West African Church History: Christian Missions and Church Foundations: 1482-1919* (Leiden: Brill, 1986); Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983).

⁴ Pew Research Centre's Forum, "Religion & Public Life," Available at: <https://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-exec/>.

example, will reveal people who have a constant desire for community and place a high value upon human connection. This constant “ministry” of each member’s ever-present support in the lives of other members has existed among the people of Africa for many generations, although in the past, people would not have considered it “ministry”; it was simply their way of life.

Diaconia, as understood biblically, affirms and enhances the community living of a people. Today, Diaconic work in West Africa impels churches and para-church organisations to work together to find ways to confront the challenges of poverty, disease, hunger, lack of water sanitation and hygiene and how to preserve human dignity in general. *Diaconia* is a biblically mandated lifestyle in which Jesus Christ is the best example of how we should relate to one another, particularly in difficult situations. In this sense, Diaconic ministry is an act of worship, one in which we give ourselves to the understanding of the challenges faced by many in the world and then enter into those challenges in an effort to renew hope in those who have lost it. Amy Sherman, in her book *Kingdom Calling*, vividly explains “For Paul, church was not meant to be a body of people concerned only with their own fellowship. The church was never to extract itself from the cares of the larger community, to form a ‘holy huddle.’ No. The church – the *ecclesia*, the assembly at the gate – is to give itself for the life and flourishing of the community. The church, by definition, is missional.”⁵ Sherman continues, “There is supposed to be a collection of the *tsaddiqim*-people of deep personal piety and intense passion for the kingdom of God. The church is a fellowship of those committed to stewarding their prosperity for the common good, of people who think creatively and strategically about how to deploy their talents to advance foretastes of the kingdom.”⁶ Even though Sherman wrote within the context of vocational stewardship, her idea of church not only captures those who make up the church, but also presents a crucial responsibility of the church.

Diaconic work within churches in the West African sub-region can be seen through its work to provide a holistic response to the needs of people. Most churches are involved in community engagement efforts because of the belief that the church cannot divorce itself from its community, and because of the understanding that it is unbiblical for sections of communities to have comfort while many others go without this comfort.

Diaconic work by the church in West Africa includes the construction of schools and the training of teachers because the church recognises the importance of education in improving the human condition. For many generations, there has been a rejection of the idea that the provision of education is the sole responsibility of governments. Even if this were the case, the fact that governments alone are not able to meet all the educational needs of various communities would have impelled the church to act. The church recognises education as a catalyst to improve lives and help societies function and thrive. Hence, church-owned schools and institutions of higher learning continue to spring up in West Africa. Similarly, church-owned teacher-training colleges professionally train and equip people to become effective school teachers. It is important to note that churches work in conjunction with governments to ensure that high standards are maintained in the teaching and learning process in the church’s institutions of higher learning. For decades now in the West African region, church schools and institutions of higher learning have produced countless numbers of people who today continue to make the case for vocational stewardship in West Africa and beyond.

Similarly, the work of the church in West Africa extends to its contribution to improving health outcomes of its immediate community and beyond. Again, there are church-run hospitals that are a welcome addition to the rather limited number of health facilities in most places in the West African region. Church-owned hospitals in West Africa are not-for-profit institutions and as such are able to more effectively respond to socioeconomic issues prevalent in communities. These hospitals provide affordable healthcare and education

⁵ Amy L. Sherman, *Kingdom Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), p. 63.

⁶ Sherman, *Kingdom Calling* p. 63.

regarding the prevention of diseases. There is a recognition that people's aspirations are intrinsically linked to their good health.

In West Africa, like the Diaconia ministry of Jesus and his disciples/the Early Church, the church's Diaconic ministry is a compassionate and holistic one, meaning that the churches are involved or interested not only in the spiritual wellbeing of their communities but also in their physical and mental health as well. Consequently, churches make an elaborate effort to confront poverty and hunger. Many churches have engaged in agriculture, viewed as a social "safety net," which continues to be important in reducing poverty and ensuring food security. Crops cultivated on church farms are either sold at heavily subsidised prices or given away for free to those who cannot afford to pay anything. Food insecurity is a significant problem and has a particularly insidious impact on the human condition. In West Africa, the consequences of malnutrition in children are widespread and devastating, including behavioural problems, chronic diseases and delayed development. Food insecurity is a social problem which makes maintaining good health impossible; for this reason, churches' efforts to combat it is welcome in the community and considered a Christ-like response to the sick and the poor.

In most rural regions and some cities of West Africa, unsafe drinking water and poor sanitation are a problem that cannot be overemphasised. Poor sanitation is also the consequence of poor hygiene practices which lead to preventable diseases and even unnecessary deaths. Water is the means by which we hydrate ourselves in order to stay healthy, and the lack of it poses a public health concern. Churches in West Africa have long been involved in improving sanitation and providing clean drinking water in their communities. Churches, in concert with other partners, continue to build boreholes and dig wells where there are none, or where water supply sources are unprotected and contaminated. Sadly, as in the case of food insecurity, children suffer the most devastation (including death) in communities where there are no sources of safe drinking water. The lack of water reduces good sanitation, as communities are unable to separate human waste from human contact, a situation that can very easily result in epidemics or even pandemics. In West Africa, the church's water projects have ultimately become a source of health and life to many. In the Bible, the importance of water is apparent from Genesis through Revelations. For people of faith, Jesus himself is the Living Water. In the Gospel of John, water and blood flowed from Jesus' wounds when his side was pierced with a spear at the crucifixion. The church's work in the world is to extend this living water to those who want it. Church water projects in West Africa contribute what they can to provide water, which ultimately sustains life.

Jerram Barrs presents us with a reminder of the "regulative principle of worship" in his book *Learning Evangelism from Jesus*. The "regulative principle," Barrs, notes, "means that in our church life we have sought to follow the explicit teaching of Scripture wherever such teaching is present. Our worship is to be governed by the teaching of God's Word about worship and by the worship practices that we find described in Scripture. In a like manner, our patterns of church leadership are to be shaped by the command of Scripture and by the pattern of leadership we see in the New Testament church. It is my deep conviction that our evangelism both in theory and practice ought also to be shaped by the teaching of Scripture and the example that Scripture sets before us."⁷

Barrs provides guidance for Biblical evangelism. Clearly, based on the "regulative principle," *Diaconia* is an act of Christian worship that should be deeply rooted in Christian evangelism. *Diaconia* is a Biblical and practical act of love which is to be extended to those in challenging situations that they may flourish to the glory of God. *Diaconia* emphasises God's Kingdom of mercy and love on earth and directs people of faith to bear the worth of Jesus' likeness on earth. *Diaconia* is the Gospel of good news and the gift of God's righteous people to God's Kingdom on earth. It is this gift that the church of God in West Africa is working diligently to spread in God's Kingdom on earth.

⁷ Jerram Barrs, *Learning Evangelism from Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009), p. 17.

The Future of the Church and Diaconic Work in West Africa

Primarily, the future of the West African church and its ministry in Diaconia rests on righteous leaders who have a transformative perspective of what church leadership should look like in the 21st century. Church leadership was never supposed to be limited to ordained men and women concerned only with the spiritual needs of their flock. Biblical church leadership was always about righteous people making themselves available to the whole human being to the glory of God. For churches in West Africa to thrive in such a way, its leaders must understand that the challenges that threaten our communities cannot be countered simply by some theological or spiritual revelation. The church needs leaders who are highly skilled in other areas such as education, management, administration, communication, medicine, agriculture, finance, business, architecture, engineering etc. In other words, there has to be a radical change in the way we think about leadership in the church. Righteousness is achieved when people of faith, trained in specific areas, put their skills at the service of those who need them the most. It is a grave error to limit ministry in the church to pulpit ministry, where our only concern is the spiritual development of our people. Church leaders in West Africa must understand the importance of working relentlessly toward achieving equity, sustainability and economic flourishing of the community. This leadership example can be seen in many of Jesus' actions in Scripture. The feeding of the five thousand is a vivid example of leadership in which the whole human is cared for. Therefore, church leadership in West Africa should also be about identifying people with skills and talents and encouraging them to deploy those skills and talents to meet the challenges faced by communities.

The church in West Africa will thrive only if leaders have a clear understanding of their calling and primary responsibility, which is to share the good news of the living God in the world. This news is transformational. It transforms lives and restores hope in the midst of hopelessness. Leaders who understand and honour their calling will be intentional in their efforts to see their communities experience healing in a manner that is holistic.

The Church in West Africa, most importantly, needs "righteous" leaders who will honour Jesus' words and actions by imitating him and spreading wholeness, hope, comfort and security in our communities. Biblical righteousness is discussed in depth by Amy Sherman in *Kingdom Calling*. In that discussion, Sherman draws our attention to the teaching on the same subject by the American pastor and theologian, Tim Keller. Keller noted that, "Biblical righteousness is inevitably social, because it is about relationships. When most modern people see the word "righteousness" in the Bible, they tend to think of it in terms of private morality, such as sexual chastity or diligence in prayer and Bible study. But in the bible *tzadeqah* refers to day-to-day living in which a person conducts *all* relationships in family and society with fairness, generosity and equity."⁸ When church leaders in West Africa ensure that their ministries penetrate every single aspect of social life, then they respond to Jesus' call to bring joy and peace to the world.

Thinking more broadly, it is our position that the future of Diaconic work in West Africa must seek to achieve the key principles of the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goal 16 on peace, justice, stewardship of creation and human dignity. We think that the relationship between governance/politics and religion is crucially relevant for the socio-economic development of West Africa. This means that Christian Diaconic service must take over public responsibility to bring development to people and communities indiscriminately.

With the prevalence of violent conflicts like those caused by Boko Haram in Nigeria and persistent abuse of people's fundamental human rights by armed groups and public law enforcement institutions like the police and the military in West Africa, we think that Christian Diaconic work should address these. It should employ targeted advocacy, lobbying, conflict resolution, social/racial justice, gender justice and other systemic intervention projects like refugee settlements and dealing with trauma as well as bereavement counselling in times of crisis.

⁸ Sherman, *Kingdom Calling*, p. 47.

In addition, we think that there is the need for systematic capacity building for women in West Africa. As a result, we believe that any Diaconia and Diaconic work which does not seek to eliminate gender disparities and discrimination against women in West Africa's labour market won't actually scratch where it itches because women form the greater majority of the work force, according to the International Labour Organisation (ILO).⁹ For example, ILO figures show that 74% of women in contrast to 61% of men are far more likely to be employed in lower-paying and informal jobs in West Africa.¹⁰ This no doubt makes women and 'girls' in West Africa excessively prone to unreasonable exploitation, very low job security and uncontrolled poverty. Furthermore, women are mostly excluded from support programs/projects by most governments in West Africa.

Also, innovations are rapidly taking place in West Africa where the youth are finding new and innovative ways for religious and political participation and demanding better society/life and good governance through traditional means and, more importantly, through social media. Thus, relatedly, what counts as good social transformation and good governance is still being considered by many people, especially the youth in postcolonial Western Africa.

In light of the foregoing, we strongly recommend that students training for Christian ministry in West Africa be introduced to the different areas of Diaconic work and management in order to have the skills for social ministry of the Church beyond the traditional areas of education, health and agriculture. This will potentially create the capacity for effective and outcome-oriented Diaconic work in future in West Africa.

It is therefore important that new areas of Diaconic or social witness such as governance/politics, infrastructure, technology, media, banking, sanitation/environment, human rights, prison reform and rehabilitation of inmates, security and peacebuilding be explored in any future Christian social witness and Diaconia in West Africa.

In doing so, the practical social witness of the Church in West Africa can become more community-oriented social work that would enhance the lives of the people to a greater degree of social transformation and longer life expectancy.

Conclusion

This paper engages concepts of Diaconia in Western African settings. It argues that Christian Diaconia has played and continues to play a critical role in the lives of people in West Africa. But this focused and continues to focus largely on education, health and agriculture. This makes it impossible for the churches' social ministry to cover and affect certain critical areas of people's lives and the society for holistic human and socio-economic development. This existential paradox underlies the emerging and current level of the threat posed by diseases, war, climate change, poverty, human trafficking, child labour/prostitution, substance abuse, and the like to society.

As a result, we argue, going forward, for Christian Diaconia to continue to flourish and make greater and existential impact in West Africa, there is a need for a paradigm shift in how we engage socially in order to respond to current challenges posed by the ideological trends such as extremism and the radicalisation of religious persuasions confronting the West African region.

This work was conducted using interviews and desk-based research and our findings show that largely the one-sided spiritualisation of development is a setback to Diaconic work in West Africa. Despite this, we also established that Diaconia is not only social development but it also involves to a greater degree the spiritual development and the wellbeing of people including mental health, homelessness and care for the elderly and vulnerable in society.

⁹ International Labour Organization, Available at: <https://www.ilo.org/global/lang-en/index.htm>.

¹⁰ International Labour Organization, Available at: <https://www.ilo.org/global/lang-en/index.htm>.

Considering our findings, we are of the view that our social constructs and witness should be promoted or tailored in such a way to contextually embrace ideas and principles of democracy/good governance, human rights, social/racial justice, gender justice, climate justice, infrastructural development, technological and media enhancement, sanitation improvement, effective prison reforms and rehabilitation of inmates, security and peacebuilding for social and economic empowerment of the people of West Africa.

Hence, the churches and Christian Diaconic practitioners are being called into question, just as politicians and governments within these changing landscapes of Diaconia in West Africa, to consider re-evaluating their agenda, projects, approaches, and strategies of engaging the public sphere so as to continue to exert more impact on wider society.

We observe that there are political, social, historical, religious, cultural, and economical barriers to Christian Diaconia in West Africa. They can stifle Diaconic work in West Africa and beyond, given the fact that a range of empirical issues and themes arising from the aforementioned barriers can potentially influence religious traditions across the region. This is not limited to Christianity but also includes other religions like African Indigenous Religions and Islam. There is therefore the need for future research on this subject to interrogate the link between Christianity and social engagement in West Africa and the West African Diaspora by extension.

In conclusion, we affirm that the life and ministry of Jesus is a vivid and remarkable example of his acts of Diaconia. This reveals to us that Diaconia is a biblical mandate. And so, those who render themselves incapable of Diaconia are effectively contradicting Jesus' position on the subject. This is because he heals the sick, he restores life to the dead, he restores sight to the blind and he casts the devil out of the possessed. He forgives sins, and freely engages publicans and sinners in conversation. With compassion, he preached the gospel to the multitude. Jesus' ministry was holistic. He cared for the whole person. And so, true and impactful Diaconia must seek to achieve this in West Africa today.

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28. EXAMPLES AND CONCEPTS OF DIACONIA IN WEST AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY

Emmanuel Kwesi Anim¹

Introduction

The word *diaconia* (also spelt *diakonia*), may be understood as “the service which the individual Christian as well as the Church as a corporate unit is called to render to every needy person in all kinds of suffering and alienation [...] It may be broad enough to encompass the active concern of God for the relief of the suffering, for meeting the needs of individuals, and for establishing a life of justice and dignity for all His creatures.”²

Diaconia, therefore, finds its deepest meaning and expression in the very existence of the Church, as “one community on earth which both worships Jesus Christ and services man in His name.”³ Thus, the Church becomes a diaconia community which has the mandate to serve the poor and oppressed in society. The term “deacon” or “diaconate” may be traced to the same root, with emphasis on service. In recent scholarship, diaconia has been defined as a “go-between or bridge-builder.” The latter has reference to the mission of the church as “being a messenger or even an ambassador” who receives their directions and significance from God who sent them.⁴ The concept of the “go-between” takes its theological significance from John 20:21b, “As the Father has sent me, I also send you.” The task here also involves a mandate to heal and reconcile broken relationships.⁵

The work of “bridge-builder” as a deacon is to be “the ear and the mouth of the bishop.”⁶ It is the responsibility of the deacon to bring the needs and plight of the poor and marginalised in society to the attention of the Church. It is this action or service which brings the Church and society together in common fellowship, to experience the love of God through Christ. In this way, the concept of bridge-builder provides access from one place to the other. This, in effect, is the essence of the Incarnation, where God made himself accessible to us through Christ (John 1:1-14).

The concept of diaconia in the Church is often traced to the Book of Acts, Chapter 6, when the early apostles addressed the pressing matter of caring for poor widows in their rapidly growing church community. Isabel Phiri carries us back even further by illuminating that the principle of diaconia was also evident in the life of Jesus Christ. Jesus inaugurated his ministry in Nazareth with a manifesto to serve the poor and needy (Luke 4:16-21). He understood his mission as bringing hope, dignity, and abundant life to all who follow Him (John 10:10). This passage in John teaches that “faith and human rights are not mutually exclusive – indeed

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² The Role of the Diakonia of the Church in Contemporary Society: A Report to the World Conference on Church and Society 1966 – “Christians in the Technical and Society Revolutions of Our Time,” (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1966), p. 16.

³ *The Role of the Diakonia*, p. 16.

⁴ Kari Jordheim, “Bridge-Building and Go-Between: The Role of Deacon in Church and Society,” in Dietrich, Stephanie *et al* (eds). *Diakonia as Christian Social Practice: An Introduction*. (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2014), p. 198.

⁵ Jordheim, “Bridge-Building and Go-between,” p. 199.

⁶ Jordheim, “Bridge-Building and Go-between,” p. 199.

quite the opposite.”⁷ Jesus taught that the poor and hungry should not be abandoned to their misery (Mt. 14:13-21).

Perhaps the most forceful of Jesus’ teachings on the indispensable need for believers to prioritise diaconia is captured in the narrative of Matthew 25:31-46. In this passage, diaconia was held as the yardstick by which God would judge His people. Everyone will be held accountable for their attitudes, actions, and inactions toward the downtrodden: “When I was hungry, you did not feed me, when I was in prison you did not visit me, and when I was naked, you did not clothe me” (Mt. 25:42-44). This narrative not only reveals God’s preferential option for the underclass, but also reveals the tendency of believers to miss that which is of importance to God: assisting those in need. Diaconia therefore becomes a missiological imperative for the very existence of the Church. The parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 emphasises the same. In both cases, the poor are “anonymous”; they are unnamed but in need.

Theological and Missiological Perspectives of Diakonia

The subject of whether diaconia is a missiological imperative has received considerable attention at numerous evangelistic platforms for many years. In the past, some saw the primary mandate of the church as evangelism, and therefore, social action or diaconia was downplayed.

For example, in 1966, the World Congress on Evangelization held in Berlin, Germany, emphasised a traditional evangelical concept of mission, with its primary goal of conversion to Christ through the proclamation of the gospel. Billy Graham maintained that “if the Church went back to its main task of proclaiming the gospel and people converted to Christ, it would have a far greater impact on the social, moral and psychological needs of men than it could have achieved through anything else it could possibly do.”⁸

However, in that same year, evangelical delegates from seventy-one countries met for the Congress on the World Mission of the Church in Wheaton, Illinois, in the USA. The congress ended with the declaration that “We [evangelicals] are guilty of an unscriptural isolation from the world that too often keeps us from honestly facing and coping with its concerns” and the “failure [of the Church] to apply scriptural principles to such problems as racism, war, population explosion, poverty, family disintegration, social revolution, and communism.”⁹

A defining moment for this holistic mandate was at the International Congress on World Evangelization in Lausanne in 1974, as it affirmed that social action was an integral part of Christian mission. The Lausanne Congress affirmed that:

God is both the Creator and the Judge of all men. We therefore should share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men from every kind of oppression [...] We express penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concerns as mutually exclusive.¹⁰

Following the Lausanne Congress, support for broader mission efforts grew among evangelicals, particularly in the Majority World. In the United Kingdom, the International Consultation on Simple Lifestyle in 1980 affirmed a commitment to justice within an evangelical concept of mission.¹¹

⁷ Isabel Apawo Phiri, “An Overview on the Imperative of Diakonia for the Church,” presented at the 11th All Africa Conference of Churches Assembly in Kigali, Rwanda, on 5th July 2018.

⁸ Billy Graham, “Why the Berlin Congress” *Christianity Today* 11 (11 November 1966), p. 133.

⁹ “The Wheaton Declaration” *Evangelical Mission Quarterly*. 2 (Summer 1966), pp. 231-244.

¹⁰ John Stott, *Making Christ Known: Historic Mission Documents from the Lausanne Movement, 1974-1989* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996), p. 24.

¹¹ Ron Sider (ed), *Lifestyle in the Eighties: An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Lifestyle* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982).

With its emphasis on justice and advocacy for the poor and marginalised, biblical diaconia aims at renewing society. Micah Global, established in September 1999,¹² has been at the forefront of this project through the concept and principles of “Integral Mission.” The biblical basis for its ministry is from the prophet Micah: “He has shown you, O mortal what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).

Micah Global, also known as the Micah Network, runs a series of consultations and workshops around the world, particularly in the Majority World, to raise awareness and challenge the Church to wake up to the plight of the poor and marginalised and to seek justice on their behalf. The International Director of Micah Global, Sherry Haw, has this to say: “To seek to serve others, we need to listen, learn and understand where people are coming from and seek to walk with them in order to enable them to taste and see the Gospel. However, the busyness of our lives limits the time we have for people, the very people God has called us to walk with.”¹³ Haw’s lament rightly informs us that our task of diaconia is not only to do things *for* the needy but to do such *with* them. In this regard, diaconia embraces fellowship and solidarity.

With its emphasis on the renewal of individuals and societies, diakonia includes global development, building resilient communities, and creation care. “Diaconia is always contextual. It arises as a response to the needs we encounter and is therefore expressed in different ways depending on the situation in question [...] We say that diaconia expresses Christian faith through love, care and solidarity with our fellow human beings and with the whole of creation.”¹⁴ Diaconia therefore may be defined as the “responsible service of the gospel by deeds and by words performed by Christians in response to the needs of people.”¹⁵

In his book, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*, Bryant Myers argues for the need to bring people together and build bridges of understanding and communication as we seek to provide care. Drawing on the works of the British theologian and missiologist, Lesslie Newbigin, Myers critiques the Western model of Christian charity that follows an Enlightenment and modern worldview in which the spiritual is separated from the secular. He observes: “Sadly, the Church has also succumbed to this modern worldview, while the state and other human institutions assume responsibility for what happens in everyday life. Modernity’s separation of the physical and spiritual realms is part of the explanation for how we have come to understand Christian witness, and specifically evangelism, as being unrelated to community development.”¹⁶

Myers’ thesis is that an effective ministry of social action, particularly in respect to development, must have a biblical worldview that does not distinguish the spiritual from the physical, and our faith must practically apply to the circumstances of the people we serve. The end result of this is transformational development, which both honours God and brings dignity to the people.

The aforementioned “diaconia as creation care” is currently at the top of many Christian agendas. The *Brot für die Welt* (Bread for the World), in collaboration with the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), ecumenical bodies, and academic institutions (such as the University of Berlin) have embarked on a series of consultations and conferences¹⁷ not only to raise awareness of theologies of sustainable development and creation care but to develop relevant academic materials for teaching and learning about this process.

¹² For further information on the activities of Micah Global or the Micah Network, see <https://www.micahnetwork.org>.

¹³ Sheryl Haw, “An Important Question – Micah News Inform 2020,” email correspondence, received January 31, 2020.

¹⁴ “A Bishop’s Letter About Diaconia,” The Church of Sweden, The Bishop’s Conference (Uppsala, 2015), p.11 (pdf).

¹⁵ World Council of Churches, January 2, 2002. Accessed at: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/justice-diaconia-and-responsibility-for-creation/diakonia>.

¹⁶ Bryant Myers *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999), p. 6.

¹⁷ See for example, the *Wuppertal Call*, “Kairos for Creation – Confessing Hope for the Heath,” 16-19 June 2019, Wuppertal, Germany.

Similar to this is the ministry of A Rocha International, which emphasises the interface of the Gospel and creation care. A Rocha, meaning, “the rock,” was founded in Portugal in 1983, and embraces an international network of environmental organisations with a Christian ethos. In Ghana, A Rocha has focused on the environmental hazards of water pollution, deforestation, and illegal mining. We see the need for this when we look at the Atewa Range Forest Reserve which spans more than 23,300 hectares at Ayem Abuakwa in the Eastern Region of Ghana. The biodiverse Atewa Forest is home to more than 227 species of birds, fifty mammals, thirty-two amphibians, 650 plants and about 7000 species of butterflies.¹⁸ The forest reserve is also the source of three major rivers: the Ayensu and Densu Rivers (which flow south into the Atlantic) and the Birim River, which flows into the Pra River. All these rivers serve as sources of life for many communities and farmers. The Densu River, for example, provides sixty per cent of Accra’s drinking water.

The area is facing a variety of problems. The Atewa Forest has been the site of illegal logging, and, because it is rich in bauxite, many fear the forest will soon be exploited as part of a trade agreement with the Chinese.¹⁹ On the riverbeds, the mineral deposits such as gold and diamonds have attracted unprecedented illegal mining operations, often facilitated by Chinese immigrants into the country.²⁰ The consequences of such malpractices are yet to be fully ascertained.

This raises the question, with so many complex problems and uncountable needs all around the world, can the Church in West Africa be an effective force of diaconia? The answer is yes, because social activism has been part of its fabric for many years. We turn to look more closely at the Church in Ghana.

Models of Diaconia in Early Protestant Missions in West Africa

Modern Protestant Christian mission in Africa was inspired by the “three-self” ideal of self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation. It was held that indigenous churches, planted by Western missionaries, would eventually be handed over to local Christians who would lead within the local context and secure financial and material resources without recourse to foreign support. This, in effect, meant that the churches and the communities from which the churches emerged would be self-reliant. The missionary’s duty was akin to a scaffolding on the building. Once the building was completed, the scaffolding was to be taken away.

The three-self model was first postulated by Henry Venn (1796-1873), an Anglican clergyman who served as honorary secretary of the Church Missionary Society (1841-1873), and Rufus Anderson (1796-1880), foreign secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions and son of an American Congregational minister.

Henry Venn was an English evangelical minister and one of the founding members of the so-called Clapham Sect, an evangelical group within the Church of England that consistently advocated for the abolition of the slave trade in British parliament. It should not then come as a surprise that Henry Venn was deeply committed to that cause.

Despite some hiccups, this three-self model has, in fact, been successful in Ghana, and the country has even embraced a fourth, which David Bosch called “self-theologizing.”²¹ The point here is that diaconia involves empowering local communities to participate in the redemptive act of mankind through Christ.

¹⁸ Daryl Bonsu, “Our Environment, Our Stewardship” Unpublished Paper (Abokobi, Ghana: Christian Council Retreat, 24 January, 2020).

¹⁹ Alfred Oteng-Yeboah, “Ghana’s pact with Chinese for bauxite mining threatens to ravage a biodiverse forest,” Aug. 21, 2019. Available at: <https://qz.com/africa/1692311/ghanas-bauxite-mining-pact-with-china-threatens-atewa-forest/>.

²⁰ Daryl Bonsu, “Our Environment, Our Stewardship” Unpublished Paper (Abokobi, Ghana: Christian Council Retreat, 24 January, 2020).

²¹ David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991), p. 462.

In Ghana, as in many West African countries, Western missionaries established a host of educational institutions (from primary to secondary schools) and a number of technical and vocational institutes, all in an effort to educate and train the converts as well as the communities. This was done with the view to empower people to take charge of their own destinies. Today, in Ghana, the four-self model has worked. The schools all operate indigenously, and the nation's Christian leaders are discovering insights and applications of the Scripture that Western missionaries had missed. Thus, they are also self-theologising.

In hindsight, it was in the schools that new converts learned to read and write. This brought understanding and appreciation of the Scriptures. Many were taught improved methods of agriculture, and some were given seed money to expand their farms. The most well-known secondary schools in Ghana were all established by Western missionaries (but are now run by Ghanaians). In the city of Cape Coast, in Ghana's Central Region, these schools include Mfantipim Senior High School [1876] and Wesley Girls Senior High School [1836] (Methodist Church); the Adisadel College [1910] (Anglican), St Augustine's Senior High School [1930] and Holy Child Senior High School [1946] (Roman Catholic). In Accra, the Presbyterian Church established the Presbyterian Boys' Senior High School in 1938 (which is noted for science education), and, in the Eastern Region, it established the Aburi Girls' Senior High School in 1946. In addition to its school in Cape Coast, the Roman Catholic church has established a number of secondary schools across the country.

Two schools which cater for those with special needs must also be mentioned. The Methodist Church established the Wa School for the Blind in Wa in the Upper West Region. Its purpose is "To prepare and equip children with special needs from the kindergarten to post junior secondary school with the requisite academic, socio-economic and moral training necessary for self-reliance." The school, which has over 250 children, is the only such institution serving all the three northern regions of the country.²²

The second school for special needs is the Akropong School for the Blind, which was established in 1945 by the Presbyterian Church. It includes a primary and junior high school and has different departments for vocational, music, and adult rehabilitation.

In this, we see that local leadership has sustained the social outreaches. This is evident in the Methodist Church, which requires a general directorate of social services because of its multi-faceted community interventions.

In collaboration with the chiefs and people of Wenchi, in Ghana's Bono Region, the Methodist Church Ghana established the Wenchi Hospital in 1951 and later the Ankaase Hospital near Kumasi in the Ashanti Region in 1984. The Methodist Church Ghana has about twenty-five other health centres across the country.

This church has numerous agricultural projects, encourages rural development, and practices environmental care. The Social Services Directorate also has a unit which addresses gender and family life, and it offers various relief services. For example, it has dug boreholes (for clean, potable water) and it has provided food and clothing to numerous rural communities.

The Roman Catholic Church may be credited as having the most mission hospitals and clinics in Ghana. Notable among these are the St. Joseph's Hospital in Koforidua, and the St. Dominic Hospital at Akwatia, both of which are in the Eastern Region. The St. Dominic Hospital was founded in 1960 by the Dominican Sisters of Steyer, Germany, who ran the facility from its founding to 2010, when they returned to their home country. The hospital is equipped with an eye clinic.

The Presbyterian Church of Ghana also has a number of hospitals and other health centres across the country. Notable among them is the Agogo Hospital which also has an eye clinic. This is located in Ghana's Ashanti Region.

²² See, <https://mobile.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchives/WaSchool-for-the-Blind-in-crisis-388363>. Accessed 5 February, 2020.

The African Initiated Churches and Diaconia

John Peel has rightly observed that “Christianity has been both a cause and a catalyst of social change in Africa.”²³ It is without a doubt that the rise of the so-called “African-Initiated Churches” (AICs) was principally to seek the welfare and prosperity of the people. Harold Turner, in his classification of the various African Independent Churches, explained that some of these churches arose as a response to an influenza epidemic that ravaged certain parts of Africa after the First World War, and the prophets offered healing and other remedies.²⁴

To be sure, some of the AICs were advocates of African independence from colonial rule, but their primary focus was – and remains – responding to human need in times of crisis. The mission of the AICs is to appeal for divine intervention in the affairs of human beings who are suffering under the spell of the evil one. The prophets pray and seek for deliverance on behalf of the supplicants. Others also seek divine protection for people’s families and prosperity for their businesses.

The Example of The Church of Pentecost and Diaconia

In Ghana, many Pentecostal and Charismatic churches are broadening their ministries to include a rich variety of diaconia. I will focus here on The Church of Pentecost, which is the largest Pentecostal and Protestant church in Ghana.

In 1980, The Church of Pentecost established the Pentecost Social Services (PENSOS) to improve the living conditions of its members and to facilitate the Church’s contribution to the socio-economic development of the nation. Since its inception, this department has undertaken a wide array of national and international initiatives in diaconia.

Education: Presently, The Church of Pentecost has eighty-four basic schools, three vocational schools, and two senior high schools across the country. The vocational schools specialise in fashion design, hairdressing, carpentry, and masonry work.

The Pentecost University College was established in 2003, with the vision of offering students academic excellence and empowering them to serve their generation and posterity with integrity and the fear of God. PUC currently has about 3,000 students from across Ghana and other parts of West Africa, particularly Nigeria.

The Pentecost Educational Fund, which provides a window of hope and opportunity for brilliant but needy students to further their university education, was expanded over the past academic year to benefit more than 400 students, allowing them to access PUC. The scholarship scheme also covers church members who gain admission to the public universities.

Medical Care: The Church of Pentecost has two hospitals and seven clinics across the country. The Pentecost Hospital in Madina, Accra, is one of the leading health facilities for maternal and childcare.²⁵

Hospitality: In 2014, the church opened the Pentecost Convention Centre (PCC) at Gomoa Fetteh in the Central Region as a facility for conferences and to serve as a Christian hospitality centre. The Centre has nearly 3000 beds, and it has four auditoriums that seat from 200 to 5000 people. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Church of Pentecost released the PCC to the Government of Ghana, free of charge, as an isolation centre for the treatment of those infected with the corona virus.

²³ John D.Y. Peel. *Aladura: A Religious Movement Among the Yoruba* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 1.

²⁴ Harold W. Turner. *Religious Innovations in Africa: Collected Essays on New Religious Movements* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1979).

²⁵ Pentecost Social Services – 2017 End of Year Report, The Church of Pentecost General Head Quarters, 2017 Executive Summary Reports Compiled for the 43ed Session of the General Council Meetings, 2-5 May, 2018 at the Pentecostal Convention Centre, Gomoa Fetteh.

Micro-Credit: The Church of Pentecost has established nearly forty micro-credit schemes across the country. The objective is to financially empower people so that they can develop viable and productive businesses.

Partnerships: The CoP has collaborated with the Mental Health Authority, the Mental Care Home, the Ghana Heart Foundation, Country-Side Children's Welfare Home, the Ghana Health Foundation, and the Physically Challenged Action Foundation. Ongoing interventions include donations to hospitals, prisons, psychiatric facilities, orphanages, people affected by natural disasters, and paying the premiums of the aged and other needy people so that they can benefit from the National Health Insurance Scheme. The church also supports the Ghana Aids Commission, the Bible Society of Ghana, the Scripture Union, and other para-church organisations.

National Peace & Security: Since 2018, The Church of Pentecost has seconded five of its fulltime ministers to serve in the Ghana Armed Forces and the Prisons Service of Ghana. In terms of advocacy, the church plays a significant role in the National Peace Council (NPC), in which the Immediate-Past Chairman, Apostle Prof. Opoku Onyinah, has served as a member since 2016. The NPC is an independent statutory body established in 2011 by an act of Parliament of the Republic of Ghana to prevent, manage, and resolve conflict and to build sustainable peace.²⁶

Environment: On September 8, 2019, the CoP launched a nationwide campaign on sanitation and environmental care, and the church is working with the government and other private businesses to address the country's enormous sanitation problem.

People with Disabilities: The church is working to ensure that all of its facilities will be easily accessible to those with disabilities.

Examples of Diaconia in Other Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches

The act of diaconia is not limited to the Church of Pentecost alone. It has been argued that the Pentecostal movement has matured to a large extent and its social outreach has also expanded significantly. This development has radically altered the religious landscape in much of the developing world. In Ghana, the International Central Gospel Church (ICGC), led by Pastor Mensa Otabil is another notable example, whilst attention could also be drawn to the Redeemed Christian Church of God, established in 1952 by Josiah Olufemi Akindayomi in Nigeria and now led by Pastor Enoch Adeboye. Dena Freeman rightly observes that Pentecostalism generally does not "separate religion from development, and for the most part does not set up development wings. [...] It does, however, bring with it a radically new conception of development and broadcasts it to its followers with the tremendous energy of 'what God wants for Africa.'"²⁷ However, there are a few Pentecostal churches such as the Church of Pentecost and the ICGC in Ghana and the RCCG in Nigeria which tend to have more organised and coordinated social services within its ranks.

The ICGC was established in 1984 in Ghana.²⁸ From its initial membership of about 20 people who met in a classroom in Accra, the church has expanded into hundreds of branches across the country and overseas into Europe and North America. The main branch, the Christ Temple in Accra, has some five thousand worshippers each Sunday.

²⁶ See, <https://www.mint.gov.gh/national-peace-council/>.

²⁷ Dena Freeman, 'The Pentecostal Ethic and the Spirit of Development', Dena Freeman (ed), *Pentecostalism and Development; Churches, NGOs and Social Change in Africa* (London; New York; Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 2.

²⁸ See Paul Gifford, *African Christianity – Its Public Role* (London: Hurst & Company, 1998), pp. 80-84; also Emmanuel Anim, "Who wants to be a Millionaire? An Analysis of Prosperity Teaching in the Charismatic Ministries (Churches) in Ghana and Its Wider Impact," PhD Dissertation, All Nations Christian College, Easneye Ware, Hertfordshire, Chapter 6.

The ICGC has become one of the leading churches in Ghana in terms of support for health services. In the past ten years, Christ Temple has given regular monthly financial support to the Children's Cancer Unit at the Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital in Accra.²⁹ It is believed that the ICGC's regular support led to a significant reduction in the percentage of children forced to abandon treatment for the lack of financial support from 48% in 2010 to less than 9% in 2017.³⁰

As part of its 35th Anniversary celebration last year (2019), ICGC donated electro-convulsive therapy (ECT) machines to the Accra, Ankaful and Pantang Mental Health Hospitals, worth many thousands of dollars. A donation of 3500 pints of blood to the National Blood Service was part of the same anniversary celebration.³¹

The social services wing, the "Central Aid" was established in 1988 as a human-oriented development agency. Its social interventions are many and varied. For example, it offers regular support to the cardio-thoracic unit of the Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital and supports the physically disabled, the blind, and those suffering from breast cancer. It has also provided very generous scholarships to brilliant but needy students to pursue education in secondary, technical, and vocational institutions. This gesture is without prejudice regarding gender, religion, ethnicity, disability or denomination.

The Redeemed Christian Church (RCCG) of God in Nigeria offers us one of the best examples of diaconia among Pentecostals in West Africa. The RCCG is committed to diaconia and, through its charity wing such as "His Love Foundation", the church, in partnership with several institutions in and outside of Nigeria, provides support for individuals and communities in six main areas of health, hunger alleviation, education, social enterprise, support for prison service and rehabilitation.³²

We have thus far not witnessed a coordinated and effective effort or collaboration among Pentecostal churches with regards to social witness or acts of diaconia at the ecumenical level in Ghana. However, some earlier attempts have been made but this often comes as a result of the need for political interventions, when a certain government's policies are deemed to be unfavourable to the church and civil society. The Christian Council of Ghana, which embraces all the mainline Protestant denominations such as the Methodist, Presbyterian, AME Zion, Anglican, Evangelical Lutheran Church, Salvation Army, Ghana Baptist Convention, Evangelical Church of Ghana and the Orthodox Church, Ghana, has been instrumental in collaborative work in addressing issues of human rights, refugees and ecological integrity and sustainability.³³ In this regard, there is a lot that Pentecostal churches and its umbrella body, the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches (GPCC) could learn from the Christian Council of Ghana, for it is within the context of ecumenical solidarity that the churches strength in matters of social witness and evangelism can best be manifested.

²⁹ "ICGC Christ Temple donates ₵200,000 to Korle-Bu Children's Cancer Unit," January 26, 2020. Accessed at: <https://www.myjoyonline.com/news/health/icgc-christ-temple-donates-a₵200000-to-korle-bu-childrens-cancer-unit-aeaeaeaeaeae/>.

³⁰ Mabel Faith Tannor, "ICGC donates Electro-Convulsive Therapy (ECT) machines to Accra, Pantang and Ankaful hospitals," June 19, 2019. Accessed at: <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/ghana-news-icgc-donates-electro-convulsive-therapy-ect-machines-to-pantang-and-ankaful-hospitals.html>.

³¹ Bernard Bengan, "ICGC donates therapeutic machines to MHA," June 19, 2019. Accessed at: <http://www.ghanaiantimes.com.gh/icgc-donates-therapeutic-machines-to-mha/>.

³² See for example, "RCCG reiterates commitment to humanity through charity organization", <https://m.guardian.ng/sunday-magazine/rccg-reiterates-commitment-to-humanity-through-charity-organisations/>, accessed, 6/5/2020.

³³ For a study of the composition and work of the Christian Council of Ghana, see, James Anquandah. *Agenda Extraordinaire – 80 Years of the Christian Council of Ghana, 1920-2009* (Accra: Asempra Publishers, 2009).

Conclusion

Worldwide, the Church is realising more and more that diaconia is at the core of its mission, that the spiritual and the secular belong together, and that ministry must be holistic. In Ghana, the Church has a long history of social involvement, and this began with the mainline, mission-established churches, and as these churches transitioned to Ghanaian leadership, the new leaders sustained the focus on diaconia.

These social engagements now span the Christian spectrum in Ghana, and I have given special attention to The Church of Pentecost in Ghana, which is Pentecostal.

Diaconia is therefore receiving increasing attention in African Christianity, particularly at a time where many feel that government efforts are inadequate, and people are falling through the cracks of social safety nets. The Church is therefore rediscovering that its responsibility goes beyond mere evangelism to extending care to the very people whom it seeks to save.

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29. EXAMPLES AND CONCEPTS OF DIACONIA IN EAST AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY

Edison Muhindo Kalengyo¹

Introduction

East Africa, originally comprised of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, has been expanded to include Rwanda, Burundi and Southern Sudan. The examples and concepts of Diaconia shared in this brief article are drawn from Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Additionally, while the word Diaconia is used by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania, the dominant terminology is that of ‘social service’ or ‘service to the community’ to refer to the Church’s concern for the poor or marginalised in society. I should hasten to add at this point that Diaconic ministry in East African Christianity is still underdeveloped and, in some instances, non-existent save for services offered by foreign relief agencies and local NGOs. This is largely the case in Southern Sudan and Burundi due to the prolonged civil wars that have plagued these countries for many years. This has left many of the citizens of these two countries internally displaced and others living in refugee camps outside the country as is the case of many Southern Sudan refugees living in camps in Northern Uganda.

Diaconia: Examples and Concepts

While the examples and concepts outlined below are not to be taken as normative and ideal, they are by and large representative of what one would find in most of the East African region. I start with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, Northern Diocese.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT), Northern Diocese²

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania is one of the Lutheran churches in the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). It is the third largest church in the LWF after Ethiopia and the Church of Sweden. The Evangelical Lutheran in Tanzania has 26 Dioceses of which the Northern Diocese is one. Each of these dioceses has a Department of Diaconia. The size of the diaconal departments vary in size (in terms of the services they offer) across dioceses of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania.

With regard to concept, the department of diaconia in the ELCT, Northern Diocese provides social and charitable services to people in need and those marginalised by society. Through the diaconic ministry, ELCT Northern Diocese is able to reach out to the needy in the communities. Such persons are often neglected by society because of their personalities, situations and conditions. Such individuals or groups are often sorrowful, isolated and suffering. Some, especially with severe disabilities, may be hidden in homes without adequate care. There are those who suffer hunger and live in conditions of abject poverty while others are inflicted with various diseases with no access to medical care. The belief in curses still pervades the minds of

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² The information that follows is drawn from unpublished reports and documents from the Department of Diaconia in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania Northern diocese. They were made available to me by Mr. Arthur N. E. Shoo, General Secretary, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania Northern Diocese – Moshi, Tanzania.

people in these communities. Those thought to be under a curse are often isolated. Such people benefit immensely from the spiritual nurture and counselling programmes of the diaconal department.

Furthermore, the diaconic ministry in the ELCT, Northern Diocese purposes to create awareness and concern within families and communities, helping them to consider the marginalised persons and groups as fellow human beings created and bearing the image of God. Hence, they deserve to be accorded all human rights, care and services like other human beings and ultimately to enjoy the love of God the Father who came into the world in Jesus Christ for all (Luke 4:18; Isa. 61:1-2).

Statistics for Outreach Programmes in 2018/2019

S/N	GROUP	NUMBER	TYPES OF SUPPORT
1	Children with disabilities	2345	Medicine, Nutrition, Physiotherapy and Training
2	Orphans	8867	School fees and other school necessities
3	Elderly People	8160	Medicine, shelters, clothes and food
4	Widows	11580	Training in small projects, small project loans and houses
5	Sick	3183	Medicine, shelter, clothes and food

The diaconic work in the ELCT Northern Diocese is coordinated and carried out at four main levels namely:

1. Parishes (diaconical committee)
2. District (District Coordinator)
3. Diaconial Institutions (Neema Convent, FARAJA etc)
4. Diocesan Diaconial Secretary (Director).

The programmes of the diaconic ministry are carried out in four diaconical institutions, namely:

Neema Deaconess: Currently has 72 deaconesses who work in different church projects like secondary schools where they serve as tutors and matrons; others serve as Hotel Managers, Orphanage attendants; accountants for parishes and church centres; while others attend to abandoned and HIV affected orphans and children in a children's village and give them a future.

Faraja Diaconic Centre: This is also called a home of the brotherhood where deacons are brought and offered diaconic training and guided into the brotherhood. In 2017, 32 deacons having received diaconic training were commissioned to serve in various institutions like hospitals, orphanages, parishes, schools and farms.

Building a Caring Community (BCC): This is a service supporting children and youth with intellectual disabilities in the Northern Diocese. At the moment, BCC has 8 daycare centres in Municipal parishes where children receive education, therapy, socialisation and two balanced meals per day. BCC uses a community-based rehabilitation model, where all clients are able to access services in their home community. For clients who cannot travel to the centres on a daily basis, BCC's team of Outreach Workers provide regular home visits to monitor the health and nutrition of clients, offer support and guidance to the caregivers.

General diaconic activities: These activities are directly supervised by the Secretary of the Diaconia department in the diocese. Some of these activities include: provision of wheelchairs to people with mobility issues; houses to widows, orphans and the elderly; setting up of small income generating projects to improve household incomes of the vulnerable people, to in turn improve their livelihoods. Such projects include rearing of goats, poultry and pigs. These are often given to disabled people to improve their livelihoods. In cases of drought, the Diocese has also responded to drought-stricken victims by providing food.

The above structure of diaconic ministry in the ELCT Northern Diocese proves one point: that diaconic ministry is part and parcel of the nature and mission of the ELCT Northern Diocese.

Sources of Support for Diaconic Ministry in the ELCT Northern Diocese

The ELCT Northern Diocese mobilises resources to support her diaconic work from the following sources:

1. Special offering by the parishioners when the need arises
2. Charitable works
3. Voluntary donations
4. Foreign Co-Partners (e.g. the Church of Sweden, Mosaic organisation).

The ELCT Northern Diocese is motivated in her diaconic ministry by love, care and concern for God's people created in His own image. The belief and conviction that everyone created in God's image deserves to be treated with dignity.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) Uganda³

This is one case where the term "Diaconia" is not used and yet the concept and practice truly reflect diaconic ministry embodied in the phrase "Relief services". According to the 2019 annual programme report, "Catholic Relief services (CRS), founded in 1943, is the overseas relief and development agency of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) [...] and has been working in Uganda since 1965 in partnership with the local Catholic Church and Caritas to reach the most vulnerable people". CRS Uganda runs projects such as: health, child wellbeing, agricultural livelihoods and markets; emergency response and recovery; and microfinance. CRS concerns itself with the poor and vulnerable persons as clarified in part by the following mission statement:

[...] We are motivated by the Gospel of Jesus Christ to cherish, preserve and uphold the sacredness and dignity of all human life, foster charity and justice, and responding to major emergencies, fighting disease and poverty, and nurturing peaceful and just societies [...]

CRS Uganda has a "vision of a world in which all people – with a preferential option for the poor, vulnerable and marginalized – have opportunities to fulfil their God-given human potential". To this end, CRS Uganda responds to the humanitarian needs of the poorest and most marginalised and vulnerable people; assisting them to survive and thrive when faced with crisis. CRS Uganda's comprehensive approach includes urgent, lifesaving assistance and recovery programmes.

Under its "Emergency response and recovery" programme, CRS Uganda is to be highly commended for its excellent work among the refugee community in Uganda arising from endless civil wars in South Sudan and the Eastern Region of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The work of service has also addressed the needs of the host communities to these refugees (especially in West Nile sub-region of Uganda) in a very balanced way to guard against any tendencies of hostility that could arise from the host communities towards the refugees. The work has been undergirded by the principals of "solidarity, subsidiarity, human dignity and an option for the poor. Bidibidi, Kyangwali and Kiryandongo refugee settlements have benefited immensely from the services of CRS Uganda. As is the case of all refugees anywhere in the world, the immediate needs of refugees include shelter, access to basic sanitation, schools and means of livelihood.

³ The information presented in this example is largely drawn from the 2019 programme annual report of Catholic Relief Services Uganda graciously given to me on request by Ms Flavia Milly Lanyero, Communication Manager, Catholic Relief Service, Uganda – Kampala, Uganda.

The table below serves to summarise some of the activities and achievements of CRS Uganda among these refugee settlements and host communities.

Indicator	FY19 Target	FY19 Achievements	Percentage
Bidibidi			
Shelter			
Number of households with access to shelter with CRS support	930	493	53.01%
Infrastructure / schools	7	5	71.4%
Number of households with access to basic sanitation services	799	799	100%
Hoima / Kyangwali			
Number of households with access to basic sanitation and shelter	92	11	12%

CRS Uganda has also ably addressed the issue of livelihoods among refugees and their host communities. According to the 2019 CRS annual programme report, in June 2018, CRS began a livelihoods project aimed at addressing the livelihood needs of 1,420 direct beneficiaries (heads of households receiving at least one livelihood support). Participating households are made of 70% refugees and 30% host community in Zone 1 of the Bidibidi Refugee Settlement. The overall goal is to ensure that crisis-affected families are equipped with key livelihood skills. The strategic objective is to guarantee that refugees and host community residents of Bidibidi Refugee Settlement have the livelihood skills and agricultural inputs to improve their wellbeing. The results of these efforts are undeniable. Refugee and host community households have become more resilient through access to increased revenues, resources and safety. The table below summarises the achievements in this regard.

Indicator	FY19 Target	F19 Achievements	Percentage
Livelihoods and resilience			
Number of farmers in the agriculture system who have applied improved management practices or technologies with CRS support	6,020	6,020	100%
Number of individuals benefiting from group-based saving and lending initiatives (e.g. SACCOs) through CRS support	4,600	4,715	102.50%

Through its Resilient Livelihood programmes, CRS Uganda has been able to address issues of poverty with a view to end it. This, CRS Uganda has achieved this by helping farmers access the tools and resources that enable them to earn living incomes, cultivate flourishing landscapes and build resilient communities. It all starts at the recovery stage, where CRS serves smallholder farm families in establishing a stable income so they can begin to plan their escape from poverty.

There is a lot CRS Uganda is doing to address the needs of the poor, marginalised and crisis-affected persons in the Ugandan communities. I have not had space to mention them all here. The robust wide-ranging diaconic work of CRS Uganda is commendable and there for all to see and appreciate. It is worth mentioning that nearly all the activities of CRS Uganda are funded by agencies outside Uganda.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) Kenya

Catholic Relief services (CRS) Kenya is a sister organisation of CRS Uganda with similar international origin and connections. They are guided by the same principles, although operating in different contexts. The primary concern of CRS Kenya is the wellbeing and dignity of all of God's people with a focus on the marginalised and disadvantaged in the society.

CRS Kenya has provided relief services, particularly to those infected and affected with HIV / AIDS. A substantial portion of CRS's grant was "focused on caring for people living with HIV and mitigating the impact of HIV and AIDS on affected communities. CRS was responsible for technical leadership in palliative care, basic care and support, care for orphans and vulnerable children, health systems strengthening, abstinence and being-faithful programming, and prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS".⁴ CRS Kenya helps children living with HIV to adhere to their ARVs, to stay strong and to stay in school. This, in turn, enables children to achieve their dreams in spite of the ravages of HIV / AIDS. Additionally, CRS Kenya provides much-needed psychological counselling to children living with HIV and their families which helps them when encountering emotional and cultural challenges in their communities. CRS has been able to provide this kind of support to 250 000 children in Kenya. Some children who have lost both their parents are left with no support system. Orphans and vulnerable children have been supported in schools and to achieve an education and others have been settled into extended families. Such families are crucial for the emotional and physical wellbeing of orphans living with HIV through the provision of loving family support. Extended relatives have been helpful in this as well. These families serve as safe spaces where children feel safe and loved.⁵

The East African region is prone to prolonged droughts that affect large areas of Southern Sudan, Kenya and Somalia. These drought conditions leave millions in chronic hunger. Children are most affected by these drought conditions and are often malnourished and needing nutritional support. CRS Kenya has regularly provided this support through the provision of "emergency food aid, water and vocational training for the most vulnerable people, including those who have been displaced from their homes".⁶ It is no secret that nearly half of Kenyans live in poverty. This state of affairs is aggravated by the severe arid conditions in the Northern part of Kenya where 74-97% of Kenyans live below the poverty level. This leaves a large proportion of the population in the region unable to produce themselves with sufficient food, leading to a gross deficiency in nutritious food to maintain healthy lives. Due to weather conditions being erratic, there is also insufficient water supply. For example, the severe drought in 2011 left more than 10 million people in East Africa close to starvation. Severe drought again gripped the nation of Kenya in 2017, followed by devastating floods, displacing 332 000 people and killing 183 more in the first half of 2018. To help Kenyans overcome these challenges, CRS Kenya empowers local partners across sectors to build community resilience and prosperity through practical, evidence-based programs.⁷

Household and Community Transformation (HCT)

Household and Community Transformation (HCT) is the community development arm of the Church of Uganda (COU) – one of the forty Anglican Provinces of the worldwide Anglican Communion. HCT aims to make target households self-reliant and able to propel further development in their communities. HCT focus areas include: Community Empowerment and Sustainable Livelihoods, Climate Change and Environmental Protection, Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Response, Natural Resource Management and

⁴ <https://www.crs.org/stories/catholic-relief-services-and-jhpiegos-work-kenya>. Accessed 03/02/2020.

⁵ <https://twitter.com/i/events/1143576051618070528> Accessed 03/02/2020.

⁶ <https://www.crs.org/our-work-overseas/where-we-work/kenya> Accessed 03/02/2020.

⁷ <https://www.crs.org/our-work-overseas/where-we-work/kenya> Accessed 03/02/2020.

Institutional Strengthening and Capacity building.⁸ HTC through its programmes and activities, reaches out to vulnerable and marginalised communities in Uganda to ensure a dignified life for all. HTC offers support to impoverished communities that enables them to set up projects that help to improve food security and household incomes and hence better their conditions of living – life with dignity. The information in the table below is drawn from HTC Annual Reports for 2017 and 2018.

S/N	GROUP / PLACE	NUMBER	TYPES OF SUPPORT
1	Atiak Subcounty	600 farming households	Small livestock projects in enterprises of poultry, goat keeping, apiary, and piggery integrated with crop production
2	South Sudanese Refugees in Rhino Camp (Emergency Response & disaster risk reduction)	60,000 individuals (children and adults) in 37 Villages of Rhino Camp	Relief food; clothes, shoes and beddings
3	Mucwini and Lokung Subcounties in Kitgum	8farmers groups targeting 240 individuals	Supply of Soya, Sunflower, and bean seeds. Outcome: improved food and income security
4	Bbira Vocational Training Institute under HCT	180 Orphans and vulnerable children (formerly internally displaced)	Skills training in automotive / motor vehicle mechanics, building construction, catering and hotel management, tailoring and fashion design, hair dressing and cosmetology, woodwork technology, electrical installation and plumbing. Outcome: with these skills, some got jobs and others started their own businesses to improve their livelihoods.
5	Kitgum, Northern Uganda, and Lango Dioceses	135 Orphans and Vulnerable Children (formerly internally displaced)	Having completed the relevant skills training programme, were issued with tool kits so they could start their own businesses and become self-reliant.
6	Bukalasi Subcounty in Bududa district	593 individuals (153 females and 440 males)	HCT under its Emergency Response gave the following support to the landslide victims in Bukalasi, Bududa District in 2018: an assortment of food items and drinking water; non-food items (900 basins, 1800 cups and 1800 buckets).

It has not been possible to catalogue all the programme activities of HCT and interventions here. Like CRS Uganda, all the programme activities and interventions of HCT are wholly donor-funded.

Needs and Challenges Facing Diaconia in East African Christianity

The needs and challenges facing Diaconia in East African Christianity seem obvious and are there for all to see. I share some of these below.

⁸ Unpublished Annual Report 2017: p. 1.

Firstly, the biggest challenge in my view is the evident lack of a theological understanding of Diaconia. The churches have not yet taken time to reflect and understand diaconia as a dimension integral to the nature and mission of the church and rather than as an optional extra. Secondly, nearly across the board, churches are lacking explicit framework documents that spell out theological and biblical perspectives on the understanding of diaconia. Following from these two challenges, thirdly, there is a lack of theological resources and trained personnel which would help move the diaconal ministry in churches forward and in other agencies who would promote the diaconal ministry.

What can be done to address these challenges? My response is simple: training, training and more training. Training in diaconal ministry in Theological seminaries will produce capacity for the local churches and agencies. The relevance of diaconia must be integrated in our theological and ministerial formation curricula. There is an urgent need for theological resources. It is to be noted that building capacity in and through theological institutions and seminaries will help produce more theological resources. Once local churches appreciate and understand diaconia as integral to the nature and mission of the church, they will mobilise resources locally to meet the needs of the less privileged or those marginalised in their communities. They will no longer entirely rely on resources from the West (i.e. external donors).

Conclusion

There is still a lot to be done in developing diaconic ministry in East African Christianity to make it part and parcel of the nature and mission of the Church. Apart from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania whose diaconic ministry is supported by an institutional structure at all levels of the church, the social and developmental services being offered in other regions lack an indigenous institutional structure that is owned by the local churches with local contributions. What is offered by the majority of the churches are interventions that are entirely funded by external donors. Furthermore, in some countries like Burundi, South Sudan and Rwanda, there is even no semblance of diakonic ministry other than the services offered by the external relief agencies and local Non-Governmental Organisations. There is therefore an urgent need for the churches in the East African region to re-think diaconic ministry as that which defines the nature and mission of the church and not simply an optional extra. Diaconic work will need to be prioritised by the churches and considered as something which can help create a link between what churches are and what they do.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Unpublished documents relating to Diaconic ministry – Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, Northern Diocese.

Unpublished Catholic Relief Service (CRS) Uganda Programme Annual Report 2019.

Unpublished reports for the Directorate of Household and Community Transformation annual reports: 2017; 2018.

Websites:

<https://www.crs.org/our-work-overseas/where-we-work/kenya> [Accessed 03/02/2020]

<https://www.crs.org/stories/catholic-relief-services-and-jhpiegos-work-kenya> [Accessed 03/02/2020]

<https://twitter.com/i/events/1143576051618070528> [Accessed 03/02/2020]

30. DIAKONIA IN AN ASIAN CONTEXT

Victor Aguilan¹

The various ministries of the Churches in Asia are carried out in a particular context. This can be characterised as a distinct region by the following traits:²

- Asia has a plurality and diversity of races, peoples, cultures, social institutions, religions, and ideologies.
- Most of the countries have had experience with colonialism.
- Most of the countries are in the process of nation-building, development, and modernisation.
- The peoples of this region want to achieve authentic self-identity and cultural integrity in the context of the modern world.
- Asia is home of some of the world's great living religions, and these have shaped the culture and consciousness of most Asians, thus representing alternative ways of life and experience of reality.
- Asian peoples are searching for a form of social order beyond the current options. This looked for order would enable them and the rest of humankind to live together in dignity in a global world.
- The Christian community is a minority.

Christians in Asia remain a minority constituting only 9% of the population. However, Christianity here is growing at more than twice the rate of general growth. The centres of Christianity have significantly shifted away from the West to Asia, Africa, and the other parts of the Global South.

Out of the seven characteristics listed above, the most important common fact concerning Asian nations is that (with the exceptions of Singapore, Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, and Malaysia) a significant number of the population is impoverished or desperately poor. They are suffering all the consequences of poverty, such as hunger, poor health, illiteracy, serious iniquitous social stratification, and intense competitive struggle for survival.³

Moreover, the impoverishment in Asia has been aggravated by processes of globalisation and neo-liberalism.⁴ The following groups continue to be marginalised, oppressed and exploited:⁵

1. The displaced workers, who are victims of factory closures and various downsizing programs taking place across industries in response to the requirements of survival and competition;

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² "Critical Asian Principle" in *Seagst Handbook* (ed) ATESEA (Philippines: The Association for Theological Education in South East Asia and The South East Asia Graduate School of Theology, 2002-2003).

³ "Asia is the largest and most populous continent on earth and is notable for its fast-growing economy. However, it is also the continent in which over 40 percent of the 766 million people living on less than \$1.90 a day reside, making it the second poorest continent after Africa." Mahua Mitra, "8 Important Facts About the Causes of Poverty in Asia" <https://borgenproject.org/causes-of-poverty-in-asia/> (accessed January 5, 2020).

⁴ WCC, *Alternative Globalization Addressing Peoples and Earth (Agape): A Background Document* (World Council of Churches (WCC), 2005). See also Renato Constantino, *Invisible Enemy: Globalization & Maldevelopment* (Quezon City: Foundation for Nationalist Studies, 1997). H.J. Chang, *Globalization, Economic Development and the Role of the State* (Zed Books, 2003).; R. van Drimmelen, D.P. Niles, and World Council of Churches, *Faith in a Global Economy: A Primer for Christians* (WCC Publications, 1998).

⁵ WCC. See also R.E. Ofreneo, *Globalization and the Filipino Working Masses* (Foundation for Nationalist Studies, 1996).

2. The small income earners (small family businesses, farmers, fisherfolk, etc) whose real income or purchasing power has been eroded by price increases;
3. The growing army of the unemployed and underemployed;
4. The informal sector in the urban centre (urban poor);
5. The landless rural poor;
6. The indigenous people and cultural minorities;
7. The migrant workers who remain vulnerable;
8. The female workers who have to attend to the requirements of work, home, and family;
9. The youth and students whose future is bleak because of unemployment and the deteriorating natural environment.

These are the situations that Churches in Asia must help rectify to fulfil their mission.

Asian Churches as Servant Churches

Asian Churches understand that their mission includes diakonia. There is no dichotomy between evangelism (the proclamation) and social action (diaconia).⁶ Such an argument is defended by Melba P. Maggay who describes the church's mission as "witnessing to God's kingdom".⁷ For her, these two aspects of the church mission are distinct, but not separate. Witnessing to the kingdom of God "requires more than preachers; it demands the whole Body of Christ to be visibly present in all areas of human life. In doing so, the Gospel is wholly preached, and men and women are enabled to adequately respond to the prophetic demands of the Gospel."⁸ For Melba, the very substance of the Gospel has a "social character" and social action is "an intrinsic part of the Gospel."⁹

Dr. Lourdino Yuzon, another Filipino theologian, sees mission as incarnating the proclamation to the context for it to be relevant. "This touches on the issue of communicating the Gospel incarnationally. That is, Good News we proclaim should be no less than an incarnated Gospel. By this is meant that as Christ Himself became a human being, so the Good News must be immersed in concrete realities. The Gospel must interact with life situations. The truth of the Gospel must not only be analyzed and reflected upon, but fulfilled and actualized in concrete human situations. Proclaiming the Good News is not simply a sharing of information, but the communication of the Gospel that bisects and relates dynamically to persons in the totality of the human situation in which he/she is located."¹⁰

The mission of Christ's Body is to proclaim the Gospel in Word. But Christ's Body does not stop there. What follows is a corporate response of the Church to the Gospel. The Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement defines diakonia as "the responsible service of the gospel by deeds and by words performed by Christians in response to the needs of people."¹¹ The Church cannot be the Church without diakonia. Diaconal ministry involves service. Thus, the mission of the People of God is diakonia. *Diakonos* is a Greek term used in the New Testament to describe ministries of service. It occurs as a verb or a noun a hundred times in the New Testament. It is the source of the English words: "deacon" and "diaconal". For example, Jesus said of himself that he did not come to be served but to serve (*diakoneo*, Mark 10:45). Paul referred to himself and his fellow apostles as God's ministers (*diakonos*, 2 Cor. 6:4). The role or office of deacon was developed in the early church primarily to minister to the material (earthly) needs of the members of the body of Christ.

⁶ R. Dowsett et al., *Evangelism and Diakonia in Context* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2015).

⁷ Melba Maggay, *Transforming Society* (Oxford: Regnum/Lynx Press, 1994), p. 16.

⁸ Maggay, *Transforming Society* p. 16.

⁹ Maggay, *Transforming Society* p. 11.

¹⁰ Lourdino Yuzon, "Towards a New Understanding of Evangelism," *The Asia Journal of Theology* 1(1) (1987), p. 120.

¹¹ Teresa Joan White, "Diakonia" in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (eds) Nicholas Lossky et al. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002), pp. 305–10.

Asian Churches like the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) understand what it means to be a servant Church. This was clearly articulated in the UCCP *Statement on Social Concern*. It said the Church

[...] cannot hold itself aloof from the world in which it lives. Even as the Lord of the church came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, so He calls His disciples to be His servant-people (John 13:14-17). They are called to witness and to serve Christ in the world (Acts 1:8; Mt. 20:26-28). It is through its members that the church confronts the world at all points of daily life (2 Cor. 5:17-20). Even as Christ came that men might have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10), so Christians are to bear witness to this and have been called from the world into a fellowship of unity and peace with forgiving love by their concern and compassion for the world (Mt. 25:31-46; Luke 10:23-27).¹²

This statement was approved in 1960 and continues to be relevant today in Asia. The Churches in Asia are servant churches as was her master Jesus Christ, who came not to be served but to serve. A diaconal church, would offer a “Christ-like leadership” that loves the poor, marginalised and needy, and challenges the rich, the powerful and the privileged, a leadership role that would embrace change and enable people to have the courage to do justice and to love each other just as Christ has loved us.

Biblico-Theological Themes in Asian Diaconal Ministry

The Asian perspective on diakonia is rooted in several theological themes or warrants. I limit the discussion to four biblico-theological themes – Christology, the nature of the Church, *imago dei*, and the Kingdom of God.

Jesus Christ as Norm of All Ethical Decisions and Models of Diaconia

The most basic ground for the Church as servant Church is its faith in Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church, of life and of history. It is rooted in the Gospel that God loves all humanity, including humanity’s world, and is concerned about human life in society. The earliest document of the UCCP, the Basis of Union, declares “our common faith and message: Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, our Lord and Saviour.”¹³ Jesus Christ provides the norm for all ethical decisions. Jesus Christ in Asia is the one whom we encounter in the midst of suffering and in the struggle for justice.¹⁴

In Indonesia, the *Huria Kristen Batak Protestan* (HKBP) has a similar Christological warrant in serving the poor, vulnerable and the weak. According to Dr. Aritonang, the HKBP declares that Jesus Christ “is the Lord who redeems human beings. He cares for human suffering in all nations and at all times, and he is faithful forever (Mt. 28:18; Heb. 9:14; Eph. 1:20-21).” [...]and] the church is the community of those who believe in Jesus Christ, who are called, gathered, sanctified and preserved by God through the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Peter 2:9; 1 Cor. 3). As people who are sanctified, God sends the church to proclaim the Good

¹² General Assembly, “Statement of Social Concern (May 19-24, 1960),” in *UCCP Statements And Resolutions (1948-1990)* (ed) Lydia Niguidula (Quezon City: United Church of Christ in the Philippines, 1990).

¹³ “Basis of Union: The Uniting General Assembly, 25-27 May 1948,” in *UCCP Statements and Resolutions (1948-1990)* (ed) Lydia Niguidula (Quezon City: Education and Nurture Desk, United Church of Christ in the Philippines, 1990).

¹⁴ Victor R. Aguilan, “Encountering Jesus in the Midst of Struggle,” in *Christologies, Cultures, and Religions: Portraits of Christ in the Philippines* (eds) Pascal D. Bazzell and Aldrin Penamora (Manila: OMF Literature and Asia Theological Association, 2016).

News and to spread out the Kingdom of God, as blessing and Good News for all nations around the globe (Rev 1:6; Eph. 3:21).¹⁵

Rev. Oinike Harefa shared that her church, *Banua Niha Keriso Protestan* (BNKP) “since its establishment in 1936 has claimed that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a spirit that enabled the transformation of Nias community out of poverty, illiteracy, backwardness and isolation in accordance with the mandate of Jesus Christ in Luke 4: 18-19. Since the beginning of the formation of the BNKP organization, correctly understood that the gospel not only provides spiritual salvation, but must also be able to improve the socio-economic situation of the Nias community itself.”¹⁶ Christology is the foundation of Asian Churches’ diaconic ministry as they struggle for justice and peace.

The Church as the Body of Christ Serving the World

Another biblico-theological basis of diakonia is the nature of the Church as Christ’s body. Ecclesiology is closely intertwined with Christology. Jürgen Moltmann describes this relationship between the church and Christ: “Every statement about the church will be a statement about Christ. Every statement about Christ also implies a statement about the church.”¹⁷ The biblical image of the Church as the body of Christ acknowledges Jesus Christ as the Head of the Church.¹⁸ Each member is connected to the Head directly, and thus all members enjoy fellowship with each other through their relationship to Him. The image of the Church as one Body of Christ signifies unity and faithfulness to Christ.

This is articulated clearly by Dr. Aritonang. He writes that “the church as consummation of the Christ’s body is called to serve the world, not to be served (Mk. 10:45). This ministry means to require the church to fight against all foolishness, backwardness, weakness, illness and injustice in community as Christ Jesus did (Mt. 23; Lk. 4:18-19).”¹⁹

The Church as the body of Christ is commissioned to continue Christ’s ministry until his return. The Church is “entrusted with Jesus’ own ministry.”²⁰ This is highlighted in one article in the commentaries on the UCCP Statement of Faith, which argues:

First, the ministry is Christ’s own ministry. The ministry does not belong to the Church neither is it determined by the Church. It belongs to Christ. The Church as such has no ministry in and of itself. Its ministry is a derivative ministry: it is derived from and issues exclusively out of the ministry of Jesus Christ. The Church as a result occupies that exclusive place in history as the body through which Christ’s ministry is extended into the world and into history until the end of time [...] Second, the body through Christ’s ministry is entrusted in *the whole Church*. The ministry is not entrusted to individuals in and by themselves, certainly not to certain sectors of the Church only, even more certainly not to the clergy only – example, the bishops, pastors and other religious workers. The ministry of Jesus is entrusted to the whole Church, to the whole people of God.²¹

¹⁵ “HKBP, “*Garis-Garis Besar Kebijakan Pembinaan Dan Pengembangan Huria Kristen Batak Protestan*” (HKBP, 1989), 12. Quoted from Aritonang, Enig dissertation “An Ethical Challenge of Globalization’s Impact on the Poor to Batak Protestant Christian Church.

¹⁶ Rev. Oinike Harefa, email 19th November 2019.

¹⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1977), p. 6.

¹⁸ Romans 12:1-21; I Corinthians 12:1-31; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Ephesians 4:1-16.

¹⁹ Quoted from Aritonang, Enig, “*An Ethical Challenge of Globalization’s Impact on the Poor to Batak Protestant Christian Church Huria Kristen Batak Protestan* (unpublished dissertation, Silliman University, Dumaguete, Philippines 2018) p. 166.

²⁰ UCCP Statement of Faith, rev. 1993.

²¹ Patrocínio Apura and Salvador Eduarte, “Significance of the Church,” in *Like a Mustard Seed: Commentaries on the Uccp Statement of Faith* (ed) Feliciano Carino (Quezon City: UCCP, 1987), pp. 28-29.

The ministry of the Church is Christ's own ministry. It is done by both lay and clergy. The Church is not limited to the institution, but includes the members as the people of God and disciples of Jesus Christ. Diaconal ministry has personal and corporate dimensions. It is the ministry of each member of the Church. It is also the ministry of the community of believers, the Church as an institution.

Every Person Created in the Image of God (Imago Dei): Diaconia as Defence of Human Dignity

Another theme that authorises the diakonic ministry is the doctrine of *imago dei*. Persons are created in the image of God. We are to serve and love our fellow humans because they are created in the image of our God. The image of God creates value in the human person.²² The worth of a human being is God-given. And each human being has the same or equal worth. The image of God makes humanity fully human. The Church should advance the concern for the dignity and well-being of people. Moreover, the diaconal ministry in Asia cannot be divorced from human rights advocacy.²³ To minister to the material needs and welfare of humans implies the full enjoyment of human rights. Hence any violation of human rights is a denial of human dignity and is a form of violence. Human life is to be regarded not only with dignity but also with sanctity. The concept of human dignity and of the sacredness of human life implies that human beings are above the market, the state, and ideologies.

This view was also expressed by Reverend Sujithar Sivanayagam of the Methodist Church of Sri Lanka. He said "Diaconia must affirm the dignity of the people it seeks to serve. In a world where people are treated as commodities and are also mistreated on account of their identities such as gender, race, caste, age, physical and mental disabilities, and economic and cultural locations, it must build persons and communities in ways that would help them to experience God's gift of life. In other words, diaconia must not only heal and restore but also defend and nurture."²⁴

Furthermore, the promotion of human rights is urgently needed in Asian countries because of the dangers of authoritarianism. This was expressed by Kam Weng Ng: "Asian Christians are keenly aware that religion in general and Christianity in particular provides moral resources for social critique. The challenge is for Christians to develop social institutions in civil society that will promote a culture of human rights that is resilient and resistant to encroachment by authoritarian governments seeking to restrict human rights."²⁵

The image of God in human beings also implies that human beings are created in the image of God for community, and not simply as isolated individuals; they are to enjoy and fulfil their human rights in community with other people. Community makes humanity responsible for the welfare of others, especially the poor, deprived and oppressed. In addition, this community is an inclusive community. Diaconia is never exclusive to Christians. The Church as a servant church is an inclusive community ministering and serving Christians and people of other faiths. Asian Churches acknowledge that human rights are for everybody regardless of sex, gender, age, religion, and nationality.

²² Patrocínio Apura and Salvador Eduarte, "Significance of the Church," pp. 19-20.

²³ Frances S. Adeney, "Human Rights and Responsibilities: Christian Perspectives" in *Christianity and Human Rights: Influences & Issues* (ed) Arvind Sharma (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007).

²⁴ Sujithar Sivanayagam, "Mission and Diaconia in the Sri Lankan Context," in "*Mission Still Possible?*" *Global Perspectives on Mission Theology and Mission Practice* (eds) J. Motte and A. Parlindungan (Germany: Foedus-Verlag, 2017).

²⁵ Kam Weng Ng, "Human Rights and Asian Values," in *Christianity and Human Rights: Influences & Issues* (ed) Arvind Sharma (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), p. 161.

The Hope for the Kingdom of God: Sources of Liberation and Transformation

The final theological theme common to Asian Churches in authorising their diaconal ministry is the hope in the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God signifies the presence of God's rule in the lives of people. This theme is connected with the goal of liberation and transformation, from death to life, from impoverishment to prosperity and from violence to shalom. This transformative character of the Kingdom of God is expressed in the UCCP Statement of Faith which affirms:

[...] that God is at work to make each person a new being in Christ and the whole world is God's Kingdom in which love, justice and peace prevail. That the Kingdom of God is present where faith in Jesus Christ is shared, where healing is given to the sick, where food is given to the hungry, where light is given to the blind, and where liberty is given to the captive and oppressed.²⁶

The Kingdom of God is both a future event and a present reality in the world when God exercises divine sovereignty characterised by love, justice and peace.

Asian Churches affirm that the coming of God's Kingdom ushers the transformation of humanity both personal and social, individual and societal. "God is at work to make each person a new being in Christ."²⁷ Transformation is the work of God. Although it is God who brings the Kingdom, human beings are invited to participate in the process. Thus, our diaconal ministry in Asia includes the struggle for peace and justice in the communities.

Forms of Diaconia

Churches in Asia face multifaceted challenges and diverse contexts. What forms of diaconia do we need in Asia today? I have the following suggestions:

First: the church can engage in humanitarian-welfare form of diaconia

Asia is one of the most disaster-prone areas in the world, with frequently occurring natural disasters including tropical storms, flooding, landslides, earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions, all affecting millions of people. Churches in Asia have been at the forefront in providing timely and immediate interventions to alleviate the precarious conditions of the poor caused by natural or human-made calamities. The primary goal of humanitarian-welfare diaconia is to save lives. The analogy here is a life-guard intervening to save the one who is drowning. The concrete actions of this form of solidarity would include relief efforts, medical missions, orphanages, halfway house or shelter for battered women, abused children and unmarried women, rehabilitation centres for substance addiction, and other forms of charitable works.

Second: The church can engage in diaconia in the form of development work

Development work is when Christians go beyond meeting the immediate needs of the poor. This happens when inquiries are made into the causes of hunger, disease, ignorance, homelessness, etc., and attempts are made to do something about those causes. It is at this level that it is seen that if people are hungry, ignorant, sick and the like, the reason in the majority of cases is that they have lower incomes and so lack the material means to combat their ills. Attempts are made to increase the income of the poor through livelihood projects, job-creation schemes, improve agricultural methodology, greater productivity, consumer and producer cooperatives. The philosophy of action is often stated thus: "if a man is hungry, don't just give him fish; rather, teach him how to catch fish."

²⁶ Statement of Faith, rev. 1992.

²⁷ Statement of Faith, rev. 1992.

Third: The church can engage in diaconal work in the form of advocacy work.

Christians have realised the limitations of development work. It soon becomes clear that the economic upliftment of the poor will not automatically occur with mere provisions for improving their livelihood. Further inquiries will lead to the problem of social injustice. There are laws and policies which exclude the poor from their fair share in the fruits of society's development. For instance, taxation is regressive, land-owning is a monopoly of the rich, etc. Here, the churches initiate conscientisation activities, human rights campaigns, environmental protection, climate change mitigation, etc. Oftentimes, the churches take the lead in proposing the enactment of new public policies; but sometimes in partnership with sectoral or community organisations. Churches would support Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) or service institutions to mobilise people for action.

Fourth: The church can engage in diakonia in the form of transformation

When Churches fully support the formation of community and sectoral organisations in the pursuit of justice, peace and transforming social structures, there can be transformation. They work with secular movements and groups involved in genuine land reforms, peace and human rights advocacy, environmental protections, community-based health programs, and social movements. This implies their being aligned with landless rural poor movements, worker organisations, labour unions, urban poor organisations, indigenous people organisations and other sectoral groups struggling for social justice and liberation. In addition, they encourage their church members to join these groups and other civic groups, sectoral groups, labour unions and cause-oriented organisations. Diakonia is thus concerned with justice and peace for all human beings and for all creation. This encompasses actions which address the root causes of injustice often embedded in oppressive social structures.²⁸

Fifth: The church can engage in diakonia in the form of interreligious cooperation

In the Philippines, Islamic and Christian religious leaders have contributed significantly to peacebuilding through the Bishops-ULAMA Forum (BUF) later renamed Bishops-Ulama Conference (BUC).²⁹ The BUC focused on the spiritual and cultural dimensions of peace-making. The impact of BUF in the peace effort and reconciliation in Mindanao was significant because the BUF offered a cultural and spiritual image of religious leaders of different religions meeting and in dialogue. In Indonesia, pastors and lay people from the Simalungun Protestant Christian Church (GKPS), the Christian Protestant Church in Indonesia (GKPI) and The Indonesian Christian Church (HKI) have been meeting to discuss issues related to peace and interfaith relations.³⁰ The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) has sponsored interfaith dialogue and cooperation with Muslims and Buddhists on various issues such as HIV and AIDS advocacy, ecological issues, and human rights. The most recent was held at the CCA headquarters from 27th – 31st January 2020. Twenty-five participants representing different faith-based organisations (FBOs) and religions across Asia as well as

²⁸ Isabel Apawo Phiri and Kim Dongsung, "Called to Be a Diaconal Community through a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace," *The Ecumenical Review* 66 (3) (2014).

²⁹ Hilario. Gomez Jr., *The Moro Rebellion and the Search for Peace: A Study on Christian-Muslim Relations in the Philippines* (Zambonga: Silsila, 2001); Antonio Ledesma, "Interreligious Dialogue for Peace," *America National Catholic Weekly* (2003).

³⁰ <https://www.lutheranworld.org/news/asian-church-leaders-call-greater-interfaith-cooperation> [Accessed Dec 2, 2019]. The Asia Church Leadership Conference (ACLC) has concluded in Indonesia with a call to all churches to work more closely together with other faith communities to promote urgent issues such as gender justice, environmental protection and care for the poor and needy.

networks of people living with HIV and AIDS (PLHIV) attended the consultation.³¹ These engagements offered concrete examples and models of dialogue, co-existence, and cooperation.

Conclusion

The diaconic ministry of Churches in Asian context is biblically and theologically rooted. Asian understanding of diaconia is warranted by fidelity to Christ, a sound understanding of the nature of the Church, an anthropological view based on *imago dei*, and the hope for the coming of the Kingdom of God. Thus, it is holistic. Diaconia is integral with proclamation, nurture and worship.

In addition, the diaconal activities of Asian Churches are diverse and multifaceted and have to be able to respond to the distinct context of Asia. Five forms of diaconal ministry are mentioned that are common in Asia, namely: humanitarian-welfare, development, advocacy, transformative and interreligious cooperation. Churches must appropriate the most fitting and relevant forms of service to the community. But it is not limited to these five. There are emerging and pioneering diaconal engagements that we have yet to identify.

Guide Questions

1. What are the two-fold tasks of the Church? How should we relate diakonia with the other ministries of the Church, such as worship, nurture, matura or proclamation (evangelism)?
2. What are the key theological themes of the Asian churches' participation in diaconal ministry?

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³¹ <http://cca.org.hk/home/news-and-events/asian-interfaith-actions-proposed-at-interfaith-consultation-on-strengthening-hiv-and-aids-advocacy-in-asia/>.

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31. DIACONIA AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN CHINA

Theresa Carino¹

This paper will focus on diaconia as practiced in China post 1978, when China began a paradigmatic shift in its development trajectory and international relations. It will focus on the work of the Amity Foundation,² established in 1985 under the leadership of Bishop K. H. Ting and widely perceived as a “social development arm” of the Chinese churches. Speaking at the 10th anniversary of Amity in 1995, Bishop Ting noted that there were three conditions that would sustain Amity’s work in a socialist context:

1. the growing social involvement of Chinese Christians as an expression of their faith and witness;
2. the continuing desire of Christians overseas to engage in the ecumenical sharing of resources with the church and the people of China;
3. the continued liberalisation of religious policies by the Chinese government.

Amity’s Dual Role as NGO and FBO

Amity’s nature as both an NGO and an organisation with a faith background puts it in a very unique position in China. Its creation as an NGO in 1985 enabled it to:

a) *Print bibles* – The Amity Printing Company was established in 1987 as a joint venture with the United Bible Societies. Initial production aimed at meeting domestic demand but today, Amity runs the largest bible-printing company in the world, with more than half of its bibles sent to Africa.

b) *Recruit overseas English teachers* to teach in teacher training colleges in remote areas. Over three decades, the popular Amity Teachers Program has brought to China over 1,000 church-supported English teachers from Europe and North America, contributing to life-changing inter-cultural exchanges.

c) *Practice integrated development work* in less developed provinces and introduce new concepts of sustainable and participatory development.

Amity’s leadership and staff were all Chinese except for the liaison office in Hong Kong. Not all of Amity’s staff are Christians but they all adhere to the core values of “compassion, commitment and competence” and see social service as expressions of “God’s love in action”. Amity thus provides a common platform for both believers and non-believers to work together for the public good. Target areas were always very poor, in great need and populated by ethnic minorities who were among the most marginalised in society.

Partnership with Government Agencies

As all social welfare services were state-run until the 1990s, it was necessary and important for Amity to partner with government agencies. In fact, much of Amity’s early “pioneering projects” in impoverished areas contributed to building capacity for local governments in health care and education. Social work, as a profession, only became a mainstream concept in the 1990s with the gradual devolution of social welfare services to NGOs.

After 1993, when Amity’s work shifted to much poorer western provinces, the focus was on poverty alleviation. Integrated rural development projects encompassed building infrastructure such as roads and water systems but also reforestation, renewable energy, micro-finance and primary healthcare. Work

¹ Dr. Theresa Carino is senior policy advisor to Amity Foundation in Nanjing, China, former head of Amity Hongkong Office.

² <https://www.amityfoundation.org/>.

gradually expanded to include HIV-AIDS prevention, social enterprises for the disabled, free legal aid to migrant workers, and education for their children. By the 21st century, Amity's work included urban services for autistic children, the disabled and the elderly.

Advocacy, Creating Political Space and Engaging in the Public Sphere

Professionalism and advocacy have been strong elements in Amity's work. Through its close identification with the China Christian Council (CCC), which became a member of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1991, it had access to an international network of ecumenical partners advocating shared values. These included a participatory approach towards development and a consultative style of governance, with close attention paid to gender equality and environmental protection. In the 1980s and 90s, these were relatively new and empowering concepts for farmers, women and local officials from poverty-stricken countries. The concept of "sustainable development" was introduced in the 1990s, with rural projects oriented to raising the self-reliance and professional capacity of local communities and governments and placing greater emphasis on capacity building of technical personnel, farmers and women.

Over the last three decades, there has been a notable shift from simply providing services toward advocacy work, Chinese style. That is, through the creation of viable, sustainable models to be emulated. By removing the stigma attached to HIV-AIDS carriers through community-based HIV-AIDS education, or promoting the use of renewable energy to conserve the environment, this approach has contributed to changing the mindsets of government officials and the public.

Those officials who worked closely with Amity began to assimilate and adopt a participatory style of governance, using a bottom-up rather than a top-down approach. Farmers were consulted over needs and priorities. Women were trained in microfinance projects which empowered them and raised their social status. Some were eventually elected to village-based committees and given a voice in decision-making as an integral aspect of the project implementation. In many villages where Amity has worked, women's leadership has been enhanced.

Public perceptions and official acknowledgement of the positive contributions of faith-based organisations (FBOs) like Amity have helped to create more political space for religious groups. Until 2003, churches were not allowed to operate beyond the "private sphere". In contrast, Amity's NGO status meant that it operated very much in the public sphere. It enabled Amity to accumulate experience that has become a valuable resource for Chinese Christians who are growing in their ability and desire to engage in diaconia.

The Ecumenical Sharing of Resources and its Impact

From the very start, Amity enjoyed an extensive global network of ecumenical partners through its links with the WCC and the ACT Alliance, of which it is a founding member. Guided by the "Three Self Principles" of the Chinese church: Self-Management, Self-Propagation and Self-Financing, overseas partners were committed to practicing a post-colonial model of partnership incorporating solidarity, mutual respect and mutual consultation. The "ecumenical sharing of resources" implied that all partners came to the table as equals regardless of the size of their contributions in diverse areas such as finance, expertise, labour or service.

Amity's founders firmly believed that diaconia was an integral part of the church's mission and not just an instrument for evangelisation. Foreign personnel serving in China through Amity were advised not to proselytise. They were encouraged to attend local churches but evangelising would be a task reserved for Chinese Christians themselves.

The links with foreign faith-based organisations was tolerated, and even encouraged, by the Chinese government as they brought in badly needed "development" expertise and foreign currency. Having access to overseas funding gave Amity leverage to decide on the types of projects it would undertake, where and

with whom it would partner locally. Successful pioneering projects earned Amity a good reputation and gained respect and acceptance for Christianity. All local Chinese partners were fully aware of Amity's Christian identity and links. The commitment of staff, their professionalism, transparency and dedication impressed local officials and led to long-term partnerships that not only benefitted large numbers of marginalised people but also transformed attitudes among local government officials towards Christianity and development.

The Liberalisation of Religious Policy and Diaconia

The liberalisation of China's policy towards religion is still an ongoing process marked by pendulum swings between reform and control. There are variations in policy and ideological interpretations in different provinces, regions and cities.

Throughout the last three decades, Chinese churches have engaged in diaconia on a small scale often responding to local needs, such as providing free meals on Sundays, running small clinics or mobile medical missions to supplement rural health care, and operating elder care facilities for retired pastors. Some provincial Church Councils collaborated with Amity in larger scale agricultural projects, HIV-AIDs-related work and primary health care training. In 2003, the China Christian Council officially established a Social Welfare Department following a significant shift in government policy to hasten the devolution of welfare services from state to the non-governmental sector. 2008 marked another milestone when religious groups were acknowledged to have played a significant role in the nation-wide response to the devastating Sichuan earthquake that killed thousands. Chinese churches donated more than 100 million CNY for humanitarian relief indicating their growing resources and ready response to disasters. Today, churches are involved in a growing range of social services, including the building and running of hospitals. The understanding of diaconia as an essential element rather than just an offshoot of Christian mission has gained strength.

Traditionally, most Chinese churches tended to be more focused on evangelism and church building. Today, there are more churches, both Protestant and Catholic, registered and unregistered, that have been undertaking social services and involved in emergency relief work during natural disasters. Small Chinese church groups have been seen as among the first responders when the 2015 earthquake struck Nepal. Churches are also beginning to be involved in climate change mitigation by advocating the recycling of reusable products.

Until 2019, "Diaconia" was not part of the curriculum in Chinese seminaries. Consequently, the *practice* of diaconia is very often unaccompanied by theological reflections that can help churches integrate diaconia into their own understanding of mission and what it means to "be church". Chinese Christian leaders who have undergone training in Diaconal Theology and Management abroad have found that transforming theory into practice is not at all easy. This is one reason why Amity began a diaconia training course for pastors and Christian social practitioners in 2018, with the cooperation of the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary (NJUTS). The interest and response exceeded expectations and in 2019, NJUTS initiated, for the first time, an undergraduate course on Diaconia.

Over the last two years, Amity's courses at its "Summer Academy for Diaconia" have emphasised that diaconia is integral to what it means "to be church". For Chinese Christians, it is important that social practice is rooted in sound biblical foundations. The idea of the "diaconal church" which integrates worship, proclamation and diaconia has resonated strongly with Chinese Christians. As a member of the ACT Alliance and closely associated with the ecumenical movement, Amity has identified the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030 as a viable framework for social practice and theological reflection. These goals can provide a common platform for FBOs to work together with others in China, and ecumenically at the global level.

Through their social practice, the theological perspectives of Chinese Christians are beginning to shift towards a broader understanding of the importance of church-society relationships. Reflections from

participants at Amity's diaconal training course provide a glimpse of the direction in which theological thinking is moving:

Biblical Reflections on SDGs 2030" provided a brand new perspective to understand the Bible. We used to understand the mission of Jesus in the perspective of Christology or Soteriology. Diakonia offered a perspective from the ones that are served, with its focus on the ones who suffer. We can feel their suffering in their context at that time from this point of view. We are connected with them across 2000 years by humanity and empathy. Therefore, when we reflect on today's life, we also find people who are suffering in our neighborhood. Diakonia means serving them by sharing *their* perspectives. *(Abstract from a group report given at the Amity Summer Academy on Diaconia 2019)

Challenges to Diaconal Work

Besides theological reflections, the practical aspects of diaconia require competent knowledge of local laws and policies that support FBO's in their social practice. Amity's practical experience in project design and management, negotiating with authorities, sourcing funds for projects, and so on, constitute a valuable pool of knowledge for diaconal practice. Transformative diaconia has to incorporate competencies and attitudes appropriate to the services provided. Apart from responding to immediate needs, Amity has increasingly incorporated advocacy for the rights and dignity of people who are excluded or marginalised because of poverty, illness, disability and gender. There is growing acceptance that diaconia in practice must be person-centred, holistic and community-oriented. Certainly, churches and FBOs can do much more in reducing poverty and eliminating discrimination against vulnerable groups. However, bridging the gap between advocacy and implementation can pose an enormous challenge for religions.

FBOs are often better equipped in providing humble, service-oriented care given the innate dedication of the care givers who draw inspiration from their biblical and faith understanding. However, as higher professional social work standards and requirements are being established in today's China, it could become harder for smaller FBOs to sustain their work by simply relying on volunteers who may lack adequate training. Thus, there is an enormous need for capacity building. This is an area where Amity's experience and best practices of over three decades can be more widely shared.

Besides professionalism, the legal framework and operational space for FBOs constitute a key challenge. Religious affairs have separate laws and therefore not all FBOs can enjoy the same rights as secular NGOs and academe. Scholars can speak more freely about innovative concepts and values, including human rights. Significantly, in 2012, six ministries jointly issued the "Opinions about Encouraging and Regulating Charity Work Done by Religious Communities". This landmark regulation provided religious communities stronger legal support for participating in social service and opened up more areas of engagement for churches.

Catholic and Protestant organisations such as Amity have grabbed the opportunity to do more. In 2016, Amity co-organised an international conference with the Institute of World Religions (of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences) on "The Role of Religions, Values and Ethics in Sustainable Development". There were more than 250 participants, from 15 countries representing different religions, the academe, NGOs and government. This would not have been possible 20 years ago.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to provide a snapshot of how diaconia is being practiced in China, especially by the Amity Foundation and its partner churches. They have come a long way over the last 35 years. The political space has expanded significantly even if there are periods of constriction and control. Christian churches are learning that to make an impact, diaconia is best practiced in cooperation with "others". To respond to some of the enormous social problems emerging in China, including the growing wealth gap, the ravages of climate

change on people's lives, the rise in different kinds of health epidemics and the fragmentation of traditional society (just to name a few), Chinese Christians have to work with other religions, and other civil society sectors in order to overcome these challenges.

The interaction between churches and academia is vital. Chinese scholars of religion, through research and publications, have contributed immensely to enlarging the space for religion. Strengthening collaboration between academia and FBOs can help promote the positive role of Christianity, which unfortunately is still regarded as a foreign religion and a channel of western influence and political interference. In the years to come, Chinese Protestant churches can be expected to become more outward looking, multiplying their efforts to join the diaconal practices of the global ecumenical fellowship.

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32. DIACONIA ACROSS BORDERS: INTERFAITH COOPERATION – A CASE STUDY OF SHANGHAI YMCA & YWCA IN CHINA¹

Jianrong Wu,² Zhaozhen Ma³ and Ruomin Liu⁴

The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA)⁵ and Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA)⁶ in Shanghai/China formally resumed their operation in 1984 with careful preparations after the Chinese government issued documents allowing the country to restart social work. In Mainland China, YMCA and YWCA are in perfect cooperation; there are two organisations, but one body, hereinafter referred to in this article as YMCA. Shanghai YMCA chose to “take the initiative” and walked out of their traditional headquarters at 123 South Xizang Road in Shanghai. In the spring of China's reform and opening up, China entered a period of social development transformation. Promoted by the state policy to encourage social groups to participate in social service activities, that citizens would enjoy better social life, social organisations grew. In this period of transformation, Shanghai YMCA responded to the needs of social development. Starting from a Steamed Bun Restaurant, Shanghai YMCA now has grown into a reputable organisation with nearly 20 branches, demonstrating “God indeed is love” in its interfaith everyday practice. It aims to “stick to the love of Christ, practice the love of Christ, demonstrate the love of Christ” as a contemporary social service organisation with a Christian background. This significant leap is not only rare in Mainland China, but also in other local YMCAs and YWCAs around the globe.

For various reasons, it is not easy for religious organisations, especially Christians, to get involved in social services in Mainland China.⁷ Therefore, the achievements of Shanghai YMCA are particularly remarkable, and often serve as a benchmark for other organisations, especially in Mainland China and other developing countries that do not have a Christian background.

In the first part of this essay, the authors will briefly review the general development process and pattern of Shanghai YMCA. In Part II, we will elaborate on how Shanghai YMCA Foundation can jointly carry out interfaith community services with other religious groups.

Part I

“There is no longer Jew or Greek” (Gal 3.28) – the establishment of Shanghai Huaai Charity Foundation

As an international social service organisation, Shanghai YMCA has long been committed to promoting the development of social charity. In the past 15 years, the total amount of self-raised funds for Shanghai YMCA is nearly 10 million yuan, which has been used in social charity services, especially offering help to the elderly and other vulnerable groups. This impact has been unanimously acclaimed by the government, society and academia. Besides gaining excellent reputation, Shanghai YMCA has accumulated certain social resources and cultural capital. As a social service organisation which has experienced a hundred years of change,

¹ This is an abbreviated version of a 45 pages articles of the three authors on the history and approach of YMCA/ YWCA in Shanghai from 2019.

² Jianrong WU, General Secretary, Shanghai YMCA.

³ Zhaozhen, MA, Vice-General Secretary, Shanghai YMCA.

⁴ Dr. Ruomin Liu, Head of Studies, Missionsakademie of Hamburg University.

⁵ <https://www.ymca.org.hk/en>.

⁶ See: <https://www.ywca.org.hk/page.aspx?corpname=ywca&i=90>.

⁷ The social works in Mainland China are under the management of the Ministry of Civil Affairs of China. The Church and the organisations of the churches are under the management of the United Front Work Department.

Shanghai YMCA has innovated ideas to make more effective use of the existing social resources and give full play to concerted efforts through the operation of a non-public fund in its response to the call of the government to mobilise more non-governmental funds for social public welfare and charity.

The Foundation covers the following range of services: developing public cultural undertakings; holding public welfare organisation training; supporting vulnerable groups; promoting the development of volunteer movement; carrying out charity projects; doing research on charity, etc.

The biggest advantage of the Foundation is that it has capacity to further broaden its service offerings, serve more people, and carry out interfaith cooperation. In recent years, the projects carried out by the Foundation include: Care for Children with Autism, Care for Vulnerable Children (including orphaned and disabled children, migrant workers' children, children with cerebral palsy), Cultivation of College Student Volunteer Leaders, Medical Support to the Destitute, Inner Mongolia Environmental Protection and Sand Fixation, Integration and Recognition of Outlander Students and Adolescents, Winter Quilt Program, "Race with Aging" – Courses on Elderly Care and Disease Prevention, and a series of public welfare projects such as Rehabilitation of Mental Disease. These programmes also cover services for people of all ages, from infants to the elderly, while partners and recipients also include Protestants, Catholics, non-believers, Buddhists, Muslims and other groups.

The projects supported by the Foundation are not merely for the social service activities initiated or participated by Shanghai YMCA. In recent years, the Foundation has also taken the initiative in calling for bids, with part of the funds each year supporting three to five projects and inviting other organisations to participate in bidding. This not only increases the popularity and social impact of Shanghai YMCA in the field of public service, but also helps Shanghai YMCA to make more friends with like-minded partners, expanding new concepts of service and integrating innovation into charity projects.

After more than 30 years of development, Shanghai YMCA is a song of ascents, full of vision, confidence and aspiration. The organisation praises God in awe and trust, and glorifies Him. In the process of carrying out social public services, Shanghai YMCA keeps challenging itself and continues to spread God's love.

Part II

"For the One Who Is Not Against Us, Is For Us." (Mark 9:39) – YMCA Interfaith Cooperation

In order to promote social services, Shanghai YMCA launched Shanghai Huaai Charity Foundation (hereinafter referred to as the Foundation) in September 2014. This is also the first Charity Foundation in Shanghai initiated by a religious organisation. Before this, the charitable projects of various religious organisations were generally concentrated on their followers. During years of social services, Shanghai YMCA has noticed that the Foundation could be an important carrier for social services. Through the model of the Foundation, we can break through the original religious boundaries and expand service projects to areas beyond the scope of the organisation itself and its followers. Therefore, this initiative can be regarded as having an exemplary leadership role. Moreover, Shanghai YMCA Huaai Charity Foundation is at the forefront among similar organisations. This is due to Shanghai YMCA's innovation and persistence during the development process.

In this section, the authors will describe two influential projects which have been carried out by Shanghai YMCA as examples to analyse, namely the project of "Inner Mongolia Environmental Protection and Sand Fixation", and the community project of "Sending Blessings to Home".

The first of these projects was initiated by Shanghai YMCA in 2016. It plans to plant 300 mu sand⁸ fixing plants every year in Alxa League, Inner Mongolia – one of the largest source regions for sandstorms in Asia

⁸ The Mu Us Desert is a huge desert in Central China. The need for sand stabilisation to reduce sand storms is a major ecological issue in the region, see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mu_Us_Desert.

in the hope that this slows down desertification. In 2017, the Shanghai Buddhist Association joined in this project, gradually expanding the tree planting areas, and together, the organisations results exceeded expectations.

The second project started in 2017. On the eve of Spring Festival, Shanghai YMCA cooperated with the Shanghai Buddhist Association and invited Buddhist monks and volunteers who are good at calligraphy and painting to Luoshan Civilian Club, to jointly write the auspicious Chinese character “福” (meaning blessing) and spring couplets for the senior citizens living in Luoshan Nursing Home and the community residents.

*“In humility count others more significant than yourselves. (Philippians 2:3)” –
seeking priority areas for cooperation*

While promoting social services, Shanghai YMCA has always been maintaining an “open mind”, “cooperative attitude” and “progressive outlook”. Shanghai YMCA’s Huaai Charity Foundation follows suit. Although it has Christian background, Shanghai YMCA never rests on its laurels and does not use “religion” as a barrier to distinguish themselves or others. On the contrary, Shanghai YMCA carries out social services in a humble and cooperative manner.

The Inner Mongolia Environmental Protection and Sand Fixation project also has a popular name – “big release”. The word “life release” actually comes from Buddhism, which refers to the act of releasing the captured and ready to be slaughtered creatures back to nature. From the perspective of Buddhist belief, “life release” is a compassionate behaviour that can accumulate virtues for the person, who conducts this act of release. For many religious organisations with Buddhist backgrounds, the amount of money spent on buying fish and other released animals is huge every year. However, such “life release” does not necessary achieve good results – many released animals will die anytime during the long process of purchase, temporary stay, transportation and release. Improper places for “life release” may cause environmental damage such as “species invasion”, and there are also some people willing to capture the newly released animals near the release places for the second time. All of this has greatly reduced the significance of the action of “release”.

Aware of this situation, Shanghai YMCA invited Shanghai Buddhist Association to participate in the “Environmental Protection and Sand Fixation” project. Environmental protection is an important part of practicing faith for all religions. Through the cultivation of Haloxylon⁹ and other sand-fixing plants, the land which had been on the verge of desertification is now rejuvenated with life and vitality, and provides more animals and plants with their natural habitat. This is different from the traditional “release”, but its practical significance is far greater. In the words of the Shanghai YMCA staff responsible for the project, this is the professional version of traditional “life release”, the so-called “big release”.

Although this is only the usage of a word, it reflects the humble attitude of Shanghai YMCA actively seeking cooperation, and also providing a platform for interfaith cooperation. In terms of achievements, this cross-border cooperation has led to leaps and bounds in the development of Shanghai YMCA projects – the total planting area in the past five years edges closer to 3000 mu, which doubles the original plan.

The project of “Sending Blessings to Home” also embodies the open and inclusive characteristics of Shanghai YMCA. “Write Chinese Character 福” and “Paste Spring Festival Couplets” are representative activities in China to ring in the lunar new year, and are also very popular with community residents, especially the elderly. Shanghai YMCA, regardless of the difference of beliefs, actively cooperated with Shanghai Buddhism and invited the volunteer monks to come to their community centre, adding a festive and auspicious atmosphere to the whole activity. Through traditional art and sincere blessings, the two sides run through the concept of “love transmission and transmission of love”, demonstrating that positive image to the

⁹ The saxaul, black saxaul, or Haloxylon ammodendron is the only plant which can grow in sandy deserts., See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haloxylon_ammmodendron.

public where “different religions work together with concerted efforts for public welfare, and love transmits positive energy”.¹⁰

At present, many famous religious organisations in Shanghai have followed the example of Shanghai YMCA to register their own Charity Foundations. As religious organisations, they may not have the same beliefs and doctrines; however, as charitable organisations, Shanghai YMCA insists on always prioritising social welfare and the well-being of the people, attracting more partners with humility and openness, expanding the service scope, improving the service effects, and therefore, reaping better social repercussions.

“All things should be done decently and in order. (1 Cor. 14:40)” – good institutional guarantees

One of the most important reasons why Shanghai YMCA can be recognised by the public is that it has a good regulation system as a guarantee.

Taking the traditional “releasing” activity as an example, in the case of huge capital expenditure, it is difficult to grasp the quantity of animals which need to be bought, the purchase channel and the financial costs. The final positive significance of the “release” is also hard to measure, and it is even more difficult to supervise the whole event. This is another obstacle that many Buddhist and Taoist organisations have encountered in the public welfare activity of “releasing”.

However, in the “Inner Mongolia Environmental Protection and Sand Fixation” project led by Shanghai YMCA, we pay close attention to the use of every dollar, earmarking it for a specific purpose. Funds were allocated in batches according to the progress of the project and phased assessment results. Despite the fact that the project site is more than 2000 kilometres away from Shanghai, through regular dispatch of staff to supervise on-site, strict invoice management, and with the use of Internet Technology, the implementation of the project and the use of money have been fully supervised.

Shanghai YMCA staff has always adhered to this awareness: the money of the YMCA Foundation does not belong to the organisation itself, but belongs to the caring people who make the donation, and also comes from the gift of God. Therefore, the organisation is highly open and transparent in all aspects, from the design and approval of the project in the beginning to the specific implementation and to the final conclusion of the project. The funds are also used with awe.

Only in this way can the partners and caring people be assured of results, and the recipients really be helped.

“Share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, cover him. (Isa. 58:7)” – sensitivity to the needs of vulnerable groups and the community

Another important factor explaining why Shanghai YMCA can gain the support and cooperation from organisations from different religious backgrounds, lies in the fact that Shanghai YMCA can seek out the vulnerable groups in society and give precise help to them.

Another Buddhist organisation in Shanghai receives thousands of down jackets, quilts and other winter supplies donated by caring enterprises and individuals every autumn and winter. Yet how to distribute them, and get them to those who need them most, is often a struggle. This is especially true in Shanghai, where the overall standard of living is already high. At this point, they enlisted the help of Shanghai YMCA.

After receiving this invitation, Shanghai YMCA staff carefully combed through the resources and made a detailed list: the local poor farmers and herdsmen in Alxa League, Inner Mongolia; the impoverished people contacted by Shanghai YMCA in Dujiangyan service point; the children in the mountainous areas of Kangding, Sichuan Province; a Catholic orphanage in Hebei Province; the poor believers in rural churches in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, etc. These groups were distributed all over the country, including both Christians and non-Christians. Finally, Shanghai YMCA managed to allocate the donations of supplies reasonably

¹⁰ From an internal YMCA Shanghai Paper.

according to their actual needs, so as to maximise the effectiveness of these loving winter supplies and win the trust of partners.

Sensitive to the needs of the disadvantaged and the community, Shanghai YMCA has become a bridge between those who help and those who receive help, demonstrating the concept of “taking the heart of Christ as the heart” and delivering love to “one of the smallest of brothers”.

“Light a lamp on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.” (Mt. 5:15) – grow up with partners

In the process of carrying out services, Shanghai YMCA influences and infects partners and recipients with its own good behaviour, and grows with them.

In addition to buying haloxylon seedlings and hiring local herders to plant them, a number of meaningful activities have been carried out in the “Inner Mongolia Environmental Protection and Sand Fixation” project. Volunteers from Shanghai and other places visited Alxa¹¹ to share experiences of youth moral cultivation programmes and environmental awareness education with local students and children through games, so as to establish right values and environmental protection concepts through education and fun. In addition, Shanghai YMCA has been actively guiding local farmers and herdsmen to adopt the haloxylon trees and use them to grow other valuable crops such as mushrooms to increase their income sources.

Not only the farmers and herdsmen, but also the local project execution units in Alxa have understood the implementation methods of public welfare projects through this process, and have become more standardised in their use of funds, accumulating richer experiences to underpin other public welfare projects in the future. For the volunteers involved in these projects, it is also extremely valuable and provides a rare learning experience.

In addition, other organisations cooperating with Shanghai YMCA also learned from these experiences and methods, such as the promotion of a cooperative project, resource allocation, and project supervision, jointly improving their own professionalism and service level during the cooperation.

The Bible says: “for the one who is not against us is for us.” Shanghai YMCA through the model of setting up Foundation takes a step further: “for the one who is not against us, we will work with him or her to help more people.” A leading government official in Shanghai once put it this way: “many large foundations of religious groups use a lot of resources to do one thing. But the Shanghai YMCA can do a lot of good things with very few resources, and everything is practical and brings benefits to the people.”

For Shanghai YMCA, faith is not an obstacle but an opportunity for public welfare organisations of different religious backgrounds to cooperate closely with each other, based on the common concept of “love others, love society and love nature” in their faith. They put into practice that one plus one can often equal more than two and this can serve society.

The social service and public welfare projects carried out by Shanghai YMCA in this city not only benefit from the innovative concept of “social organisations to participate in social services” put forward by city managers, but also from the unremitting efforts made by the organisation itself to constantly seek opportunities in this process of developing social services, to explore the internal driving force of its own development and external services. During the past three decades, it has not been smooth sailing for Shanghai YMCA. Internal and external challenges have of course led to both ups and downs.

However, the staff always adhere to the tenet of “not to be served but to serve”, “you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” as well as the principle of “serve the society, benefit the people”, using the invisible cross to show the great love of God. Shanghai YMCA has become an example and model of “glorifying the God and benefiting the people” for all the organisations of Christian background in Shanghai and even in China.

¹¹ A region in Inner Mongolia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alxa_League.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Yiliang Qian, Ed. *The Letters to the Social Workers of YMCA in Shanghai*, Shanghai: Fudan University, 2018.

Zhiwei Zhang. *Struggle between Christianity and Secularity. A Study of YMCA in Shanghai 1900-1922*, Taipei: National Taiwan University, 2010.

33. DIAKONIA IN INDIAN CHRISTIANITY

Sushant Agrawal and Joycia Thorat¹

Introduction

Diakonia has been an integral part of Indian Christianity for several centuries. Although not referred to or known by this terminology, consciously or unconsciously (planned and unplanned) Christian social action has been present for many years. This is also why Christianity brought along social changes and transformation to the Indian subcontinent since its initial arrival there in the year 52 A.D.²

However, we need to be careful not to be uncritical about the involvement of Christian churches in social witness and diakonia in India. This is because there have also been periods and cases identified in both the past and the present in which Christianity has neglected courageous Christian social witness and has not lived up to its diaconal vocation. Thus, we need to listen and observe both the positive examples of Christian social witness as well as the betrayal of proper Christian diakonia by the shortcomings of the church and its faithful. Parameswaram goes as far as to state: “The Church did not do justice to Jesus’ divine greatness. The universal personality of Christ was cribbed, cabined and confined within the narrow walls of rigorously dogmatic and strictly regimented body of the Church.”³

A sober and self-critical assessment and explanation of the role of Christian churches in India will have to take into account both the positive examples of outstanding and courageous Christian social witness of Christian individuals as well as institutions as well as the failures, the shortcomings and the lack of credibility of Christianity. Unfortunately, the latter has always been a part of the history of Christianity in India, particularly due to Christianity’s involvement in imperialism and colonial exploitation, the aggression of denying that spirituality is a universal potential, and the Christian self-righteousness of promoting it as the only way. There have been manifold cases in which this holds true, as stated by Soman Das: “The Bible is used profusely to uphold justice work. It is also misused and abused to justify, caste, race, fundamentalism, gender discrimination, and anti-poor. In India it’s used even today to support and sustain casteism, communalism, fundamentalism, gender and patriarchy.”⁴ This is where churches and church-related agencies need to stand up in protest and raise their voices for renewing a genuine commitment to the essential task of church to be engaged for diakonia and solidarity with the poor.

An Overview of the History of Christianity in India

The arrival of Christianity in India dates back almost 2000 years, with the arrival of St. Thomas, an Apostle of Christ, who was martyred in Mylapore, Chennai. The first President of Independent India in 1955 said, “St. Thomas came to India when many of the countries of Europe had not yet become Christians, and so those Indians who trace their Christianity to him have a longer history and higher ancestry than that of many of European countries and it’s really a matter of pride for us that it so happened.”⁵

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² C.V. Cheriyan. *A History of Christianity in Kerala from the Mission of St. Thomas to the arrival of Vasco Da Gama (A.D. 52-1498)* Kerala: Kerala Historical Society, 1973.

³ P. Parameswaram. *Expression of Christianity: With a Focus on India*, Chennai: Vivekananda Kendra Prakashan, 2007.

⁴ *Mission Redefined*, CASA at 60, Soman Das, 2007.

⁵ Speech by Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the then President of India at the *St. Thomas Day* celebration in New Delhi on 18th December 1955.

It must be noted that this individuality and uniqueness of Thomas Christianity in India lasted until Christianity came into contact with the Portuguese missionaries from Europe, their initial contact spearheaded by Vasco Da Gama in 1498.

The growth of the concept of 'social justice' was promoted by Christianity and the Church in the world, including India and parts of South Asia, due to the presence of women's movement.⁶ The second arrival of Christianity in India had a profound impact on the role of women in India, mainly through newly provided access for girls to attend school. As in many societies, in India, women do not enjoy equal rights with men. As Christianity proceeded to spread over the Indian subcontinent, the Church's women groups began exercising solidarity and strength in numbers in support for women's issues. This renewed the realisation of the contribution that women can make to social justice – the missionaries of Serampore promoted the need for the education of all women. Thus, the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) of India is over 100 years old and has contributed immensely to the field of social justice.

There are several examples of how missionary movements joined together with indigenous cultural movements in promoting better access to health and education for women. There were many doctors, educationalists, nurses, etc. who integrated social justice into communities using indigenous cultural movements, for instance:

- Mary Varghese, who founded CMC Leprosy Centre in India;
- B.V. Subhamma, who initiated the Ashram Movement in India;
- Mary K. Roy, who fought for property rights of orthodox women;
- Annie Besant, who fought against the practice of Sati and child marriage; and
- Pandita Ramabai (1818-1922), who championed women's rights and pioneered the women's movement.

Today, women have realised that coming together through inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogues will strengthen the cause of their empowerment. Indian women since have been at the forefront in environmental struggles, especially preserving forest rights. The Chipko Movement is the best example of collective women's leadership for social justice.

Expression and Dimensions of Diakonia

In the *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, Theresa Joan White defines Diakonia as "the responsible service of the gospel by deeds and by words, performed by Christians in response to the needs of the people".⁷ It is referred to as holistic development, as integral mission, as transformative development, as grassroots ecumenism, as mission from the margins, social service, social action, amongst other definitions. In all these phrases, it is implied that the service of the Church cannot and should not be limited to the Christian community alone.

In today's context, Diakonia is understood as an instrument upholding agency of people from the margins and promoting the pilgrimage of justice and peace, a spiritual journey to set the mundane world in order. This comprehensive understanding of diakonia has become very much part of the ecumenical movement and its new discovery of the terminology of Diaconia (see the 2009 LWF document *Mission in Context*).⁸

⁶ Aruna Gnanadason *Feminist Hermeneutics – "we will pour our ointment in the feet of the Church – The ecumenical movement and the ordination of women"* Keynote Speech. 2001, pp. 59-78.

⁷ Teresa Joan White, the revised edition of *The Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (World Council of Churches and Wm. Eerdmans, 2002).

⁸ Kjell Nordstokke (ed), *Diakonia in Context*, Geneva, Lutheran World Federation (2009).

Theological Aspects of Diakonia

For our Indian situation, an understanding of Diaconia is crucial. This starts with an understanding of the church as a communion, providing chances for everybody to participate in the richness of life and thus realises the full potential of everybody, seeing them in God's image and full of dignity. Oscar Romero says, "There is no dichotomy between humans and God's image. Whoever tortures a human being, whoever abuses a human being, whoever outrages a human being abuses Gods' image".⁹

What is stated in the book of Acts still is important for us today: "All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods they gave to anyone as he/she had need." (Acts. 2:44-47).

Thus, poverty is not merely an evangelistic problem but also a social, moral and religious problem. A tiny part of the world population monopolises the wealth of creation for itself. Predatory consumerism is depleting the goods of creation; the faces of the poor and excluded are the suffering faces of Christ. Diaconia is about reconstruction and restoration of true communion.

This has consequences also for the ways in which the church in itself is realising a truly inclusive communion. Diakonia is complete only if women and other marginal groups including the disabled, scheduled castes and tribes, LGBTQ+, migrants, climate refugees are made central to the Church and society. The women's theologians' movement has taught us also to see Jesus as a feminist: Jesus' feminism countered all unequal power structures – patriarchy, casteism, religious hierarchies, all structures and systems which perpetuate exclusion, poverty and denies dignity of life.

Gabriele Dietrich in an interview quoting M.M. Thomas said, "For transforming communities from all their casteism, patriarchy and communalism it is necessary to address structural sin. Spirituality for combat is required. We as church in our Diakonial ministry should emphasize the church as a suffering servant opposed to the conquering king of colonial history".¹⁰ She believed "there is a connection between Resurrection and Uprising", the need to be with people and affirm life.

CASA as Indian Indigenous Diakonia

Since its inception in 1947, CASA,¹¹ the *Church's Auxiliary for Social Action*, has been working as a pioneer relief and development organisation across the country. Initially, CASA started its journey by providing relief to the people who were migrants and refugees due to the partition between India and Pakistan. It continued to work for relief and rehabilitation for the victims of small to large scale disasters in the country. Later, CASA was involved in regular development interventions and has extended its work to the areas of promoting Sustainable Livelihood interventions, Governance, DRR and Climate Change, Peace and Reconciliation and Humanitarian Aid. CASA has always kept itself relevant to context and has changed its organisational and program strategies as per the changing political-economic scenarios. This process of keeping itself relevant to changing contexts makes CASA a dynamic organisation. CASA has experimented with innovation and derived learning across its interventions. The relief interventions started with a charitable approach, and are today facilitated with understandings of humanitarian response integrated with humanitarian accountability standards and larger coordination and policy interventions locally, regionally and internationally. Localisation is the current crux for humanitarian action.

Development interventions of CASA also have shifted from access to basic needs to addressing issues and rights-based interventions. To be sustainable, CASA insists upon active participation of the community in

⁹ Oscar A. Romero, *The Violence of Love* 11 November 2013 (Douglasville, GA: 2013).

¹⁰ Gabriele Dietrich, "On the Need to End Capitalism and Build a Society of Sharing" In *Interfaith Relations after One Hundred Years* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2010), p. 229.

¹¹ <https://casa-india.org/>.

development processes so that they are enabled to take the ownership of their own development. In this journey of learning, the issues of sustainability remain a centre point, as CASA tries to sustain its interventions through strengthening sustainability with active participation of the community.

In the course of their work, the churches have been increasingly working together in an ecumenical relationship. This cooperation has resulted in, among other things, a sharing of material resources, personnel and experiences. There has also been a significant change in the former paternalistic nature of the relationship between the giving and receiving churches and related agencies, which now all operate as equal partners. This is true of the Protestant and Orthodox Churches in India, their auxiliary in the field of Humanitarian Aid and Transformational Development – CASA, and all their ecumenical partners from outside the country. This partnership is built and further strengthened around the common purpose of working towards achieving an egalitarian society at a global level where people enjoy social justice, live with dignity and mutual respect for each other, participate in all important decisions affecting their lives, and dwell in harmony with nature.

The CASA Roundtable mechanism came into existence in 1981 to finance the core development and humanitarian aid programs of CASA on a long-term basis, to obviate the necessity of CASA seeking funding support from ecumenical agencies annually. It has been a useful instrument allowing the organisation to pursue commonly perceived goals and missions of empowering the poor towards freedom from poverty and injustice. This mechanism has truly contributed in building up the staff and institutional capacities of CASA to deal with local and global issues linked to poverty. CASA has matured as an organisation with the ability to contribute in different global forums, which are engaged in dealing with the reasons of poverty and are actively involved in advocacy.

The Round Table mechanism has helped to preserve the theological concepts of *Diakonia* (service) and *Koinonia* (fellowship).¹² It does so by:

- Prioritising work and relations with marginalised communities by developing new models of partnership in which “we share not only what we have but also above all who we are and represent”;¹³
- Maintaining partnership principles of equality, respect, mutual understanding, interpretation and cooperation; replacing any relationship descriptions as “giver and receiver”;
- Positioning partnership to be primarily guided by serious biblical and theological reflection and moved by deep spiritual commitment by northern and southern partners;
- Engaging in exchange of information, analysis and reflection, leading to mutual learning and understanding, identification of common concerns, vision and mission, formulation of policies and setting of priorities;
- Committing to stewardship involving transparency, accountability, trust and responsibility to each other.

The Round Table has provided continuity and stability for CASA as it has undertaken numerous projects and programs with different systems, models, structures, objectives and goals with its support.

The metamorphosis of CASA – the paradigm shift from a needs- and issues-based approach towards a rights-based approach – was a long journey. CASA affirms its roots in the Christian philosophy of love, justice and peace. Yet, it remains a secular and professional civil society organisation reaching out to serve the poorest of the poor and marginalised sections of Indian society, irrespective of caste, religion, politics, gender, etc. CASA is not just an NGO but a faith-based organisation aiming to serve God’s creation.

Practical Vedanta of Swami Vivekananda is the basis of social action. Gandhi’s non-violence which emerged from the Sermon on the Mount was his fundamental basis to bringing about socio-economic and political transformation. The work of ecumenical movement realises the dynamic interface of ethics and

¹² From Inter-Church Aid to Jubilee Diakonia & Solidarity Documentation (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2002).

¹³ CASA Round Table Document (New Delhi: CASA, 2011).

theology, karma and dharma, action and reflection. Our pluralistic approach to culture gives us the opportunity to access other texts.

The Dalits, Adivasis, LGBTQ+, people with disabilities, people living with HIV, the elderly, migrants, climate refugees etc. need and receive a special focus in our Diakonia today. Authentic freedom as mission redefined in current Indian reality as per the Indian Constitution in the current political turmoil is our ultimate goal of Diakonia.

Redefining Diakonia

Its understanding of Diakonia makes CASA strongly believe that the present deteriorating socio-economic conditions can be changed by people themselves through the recognition and legitimisation of their potential, capacities, knowledge, experience, and their indigenous resources.

CASA upholds that the present human suffering is due to unjust sharing of resources and control and manipulation by a handful of elites, and this has been perpetuated by the structures and systems of society.

Development is not economic growth but equitable distribution, enhancement of people's capabilities and widening of their choices. It gives top priority to the elimination of poverty and integration of women into development, self-reliance and determination, and protection of rights of disadvantaged community.

CASA recognises that development is not a neutral process and a rights-based approach is the best way to deal with it. CASA also recognises the concept of indivisibility of human rights which establishes that the socio-economic rights must be given the same weight as civil and political rights. This also puts values and ethics at the heart of development principle.

Redefining current concepts of Diakonia is important as the Global South has come of age and must take the lead to help others, for improved understanding of the global community in terms of development and justice issues. CASA as a specialised ministry has the capacity to build churches around the globe on its mission and can help with a variety of issues such as disaster risk reduction, local capacity for peace, gender, climate change etc. This expertise can be shared with the larger global ecumenical communities.

There are ten major areas in which the approach of CASA to social service and diakonia becomes particularly visible:

Capacity building

Paulo Freire, the Latin American teacher who revolutionised capacitating methodology said, "Every human being no matter how 'ignorant' or submerged in the 'culture of silence', he or she is capable of looking critically at the world in a biological encounter with others. Provided with tools for such encounters, the individuals can gradually perceive persons and social reality as well their contradiction in it, become conscious of his/her own perception of that reality and deal with it critically".¹⁴

Therefore, CASA puts a strong emphasis on social capacity building for marginalised groups. This includes retaining existing capacity, improving the utilisation of that capacity, and retrieving capacity which has been eroded or destroyed. It does not take place simply through training/additional staff but requires that skilled people be used effectively, retained within organisations that need their skills, and motivated to perform their tasks (Capacity Development Framework, CASA).

Democratic governance

The poor and the marginalised cannot be considered as objects by a minority group of influential individuals who decide for them how the majority of the marginalised should participate within governance. They need to be empowered to take part in processes of governance themselves.

¹⁴ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1968).

Therefore, trainings are undertaken continuously for active members of Gram Sabha to contest elections, and be a part of Gram Panchayats, which may enable them to challenge corrupt practices in the village governance systems. Engagement with governance ensures that government programmes are reaching the community, and also provides them with the opportunity to ensure if budgets are appropriately utilised.

Women empowerment and gender champions

Women make up half of humanity and are the mothers of the other half. Thus, gender is critical to CASA's work. Communities can be developed and progress can be achieved only through the involvement of women.

All efforts in CASA are directed towards empowering women to develop and transform the community. CASA accepts the importance of including men as gender champions for real change needs to be through the lens of gender, needs to include gender budgeting and consider the rights of women as human rights are ensured when designing, implementing and monitoring the program. For CASA, both quality and quantity of female participation is important to ensure gender empowerment.

Youth leadership building

India is a youthful nation in that more than 50% of its population is under 35 years of age – which is a strength for India and for CASA. CASA, in the rural community programs, is heavily investing in youth leadership – it has given a major fillip to its rights-based approach but has also created a space for those who never had a say in political and socio-economic narratives – e.g. Chhattisgarh.

CASA believes that enhancing young women's participation in development is essential not only for achieving social justice, but also for reducing poverty – they are central to sustainable development and are a major force to reckon with in areas such as health, wage labour, agriculture and natural resource management, etc. Keeping this in mind, CASA has decided to ensure that women represent 50% of the youth leadership.

Engaging in climate justice struggle and disaster risk reduction (DRR)

CASA has incorporated DRR in all its programmes to minimise the impact of climate change and try to avoid disastrous situations. Efforts are made and then tested to ensure programmes are in line with DRR. It is understood that all the efforts made through development, advocacy and humanitarian efforts will be of no use if we do not consciously incorporate DRR into our programmes.

Building and nurturing rural resource centres

The Rural Resource Centres (RRC) established over the years is the best reflection of CASA's focused strategy of governance and a new vision of rural development at the micro level. The six RRCs, which are located in Vyaner Gram Manch (Kanker), Dhopghat (Bilaspur), Karhan (Bilaspur), Lalmati (Bilaspur), Shramik Swaraj Sansthan (Sarguja) and Pardhi Panchayat (Kanker) were built and are being managed by communities using their own resources. These also help communities, mainly farmers, access knowledge, interactive learning, and linkage to networks – among farmers, women, youth and with NGOs and government.

Sustainable livelihood

The purpose of CASA's intervention with communities is to ensure right to life and livelihood with dignity. Through production and marketing, the communities are able to sustain themselves. Although the production is housed in small buildings, they do door-to-door marketing. This enables the groups to have social interactions on many socio, economic and political issues and mobilise people against the issues. These low-cost livelihood initiatives help movements to sustain and to take up rights-based activities.

Climate school for farmers

The Climate Schools for Farmers are using a participatory approach to translate meteorological information into accessible language for farmers. An extension approach where farmers acts as trainers, researchers, and planners in utilising weather/climate information and forecasts in farming operations, planning agricultural activities and developing coping strategies.

Participator micro-planning

Micro-planning has emerged as an effective and crucial instrument to push development agendas, particularly in the regions where socio-economic gains have eluded the poor and marginalised. It is essentially a spatial development plan which aims at strengthening and utilising all kinds of available resources – natural, human and others – to their optimum use. It seeks to ensure the equal distribution of gains and benefits of growth among regions and social groups within the region.

We will find that right from the beginning of micro-planning, the policy makers laid emphasis on promoting a better standard of living for the people by efficient exploitation of resources of the country, increasing production and offering opportunities to all.

Local capacities for peace

The local capacities for peace programmes are crucial in today's context for the kind of intervention CASA is engaged in with the community. In order to maintain harmony in the community when questioning unjust systems as well as to bring peace in the disturbed community, LCP is the best tool. LCP helps to balance our programs. Staff, communities and stakeholders are taught the significance of LCP, given appropriate trainings and tools as a part of some of our programs.

Conclusion

In today's polarised world, Diakonia, which needs to be indigenous (based on localisation), inclusive, intersectional, intergenerational and integrated, while at the same time remaining targeted, is critical to make the world a place enjoyable for all with justice, peace, dignity and harmony. CASA has been striving with its grassroots engagement for such a meaningful Diakonia and holistic life for all.

Suggestions for Further Reading

See for the history of CASA: <https://casa-india.org/our-story/>.

34. DIACONIA AND CONVIVALITY IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Janka Adameová¹ and Tsovinar Ghazaryan²

Introduction

This chapter will reflect on the concept of conviviality, which is a core concept for diakonia in interdiac³ and its programmes. The second part of the article will discuss how the concept influences and is used by the interdiac partner organisation, the Armenian Round Table (ART), its workers and the people they work with for change.

The International Academy for Diaconia and Social Action (interdiac) was founded in 2008, and since then has grown as a learning and living community in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia.⁴ The relevance of ‘conviviality’ as a core concept for diakonia first appeared in critical discussions among local diaconal actors in Central and Eastern Europe, concerning current developments and the position of the diaconal church.

This fast-changing and regional social, economic and political context is very much shaped by tensions and conflict situations of different kinds and on several levels, from the personal to the institutional and from the community to the societal. The roots of both open and hidden conflicts often lie in a lack of understanding and reflection on diversity, in terms of identity, culture, religion, language, ability, race and nation.

At the same time, our interdiac partners underlined the fact that communities in many Eastern European countries had been living with diversity for generations. Regularly coming to the top of the agenda was the presence of different minorities within the boundaries of each country. Furthermore, inside national territories, religion seems to play a role in national and regional identities, which creates difficulties for some in everyday life and for the churches. This gives an impulse to ecumenical and inter-faith working.

Diaconal organisations and churches are a part of these changes and are addressing the reality that the systems, which are very much shaped by historical experience and memory, also reflect certain societal and cultural patterns. Alongside the responses to social phenomena through diaconal action, they also have to deal with questions of identity in very complex environments and with the fact that religion, identity and nationality crosscut in ways which raise questions in many contexts.

This leads to the questions: How can we live together? and What can diaconal actors bring to promoting peace and people living respectfully together?

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³ Interdiac is the International Academy for Diaconia and Social Action in Central and Eastern Europe, see: <https://www.interdiac.eu/>.

⁴ For more information see: <https://www.interdiac.eu>.

Conviviality belongs to interdiac's self-understanding and its approach to learning, working and everyday life. Interdiac understands conviviality as the "art and practice of living together" and that it is grounded in everyday life in church and society.⁵

The word 'conviviality' derives from the Spanish word *convivencia* and relates to the experience when Moslems, Catholics and Jews lived together in relative peace on the Iberian Peninsula. The more recent use of the word was by Ivan Illich in an oft-quoted book, *Tools for Conviviality*. Illich was a Croatian-Austrian with Jewish and Catholic parents, who became priest of an immigrant parish in New York. Eventually, he moved to Puerto Rico, then Mexico, where he founded a training and research institute. The aim was to train people coming from the Global North, in particular, the USA, going to work in Latin America to work with sensitivity and not to impose their values and development concepts. He used the word conviviality to mean the autonomous and creative relationship between people, people and their environments and with technology. He considered conviviality to be freedom realised in personal interdependence and, as such, an intrinsic ethical value. Therefore, conviviality is an inherently relational concept, which also emphasises "being" rather than "having".⁶

The Implementation of 'Seeking Conviviality' through Interdiac

Interdiac seeks conviviality, defined as "the art and practice of living together" and works for the social and economic conditions that underpin conviviality. The interdiac network provides space and resources for learning, development and research, which is grounded in the regional context and specific concerns of all the partners.

Interdiac considers itself to be a learning community for Christian social action and living conviviality underpinned by the vision: "interdiac works for justice, dignity and conviviality".⁷

One important cornerstone of interdiac is to build on the concept of conviviality. This requires the embodiment of dignity and the enactment of compassion and justice, personally and politically.

In interdiac, the vocation is to be a learning community, developed on a diaconic model. This is reflected through the Biblical witness of the Prophet Micah, who asserts that what God requires is that we should act justly, with compassion and that we should walk humbly with God in our life. That means walking humbly in compassionate action and in the struggle for justice.

This implies that all the people involved in interdiac are involved in the learning process of walking with God, and in compassionate action and action for justice. Walking together is the basis of our learning community. Whether a person is a participant in a learning programme, a teacher, a workplace supervisor or a local resident, all have resources and insights, and all are learners. We do not have one group who delivers ready-made 'answers' for another group! This idea perfectly fits our vision of a learning community.

Interdiac focuses on learning as a two-way reciprocal process, where the professional practitioners, in cooperation with those they work, seek to develop innovative and effective professional practices to fight marginalisation and social exclusion, to support mutual aid and provide social care. At the same time, presence and practice with marginalised and vulnerable people contributes to the integrated development of practitioners themselves. Through its work, interdiac generates and supports a learning community where people from many countries are welcome to share their experiences and the insights received in their engagement with "forgotten people". The learning community supports processes of learning together towards influencing realities in different local and national contexts and improving practice together with marginalised people and communities. Interdiac bases its work on interlinking learning, networking, research

⁵ Tony Addy, "*Seeking Conviviality, the art and practice of living together – a new core concept for Diaconia*" (Český Těšín: interdiac, 2017).

⁶ Ivan Illich, "*Tools for Conviviality*". (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

⁷ For more information, see <https://www.interdiac.eu>.

and development. These interlinked aspects inform the learning programmes which the Academy organises. Several of these learning programmes put conviviality in the heart of the interdiac learning approach.

Key Points for the Improvement of the Professional Practice of Social (Diaconal) Workers

Out of the deep insights and reflection from the participants in their living and working contexts, several ideas have been elaborated for the improvement of the professional practice of social (diaconal) workers, and for a renewed view of the role of diaconal bodies and social organisations in their work with people towards convivial life together in peace with justice. There are no easy answers and no recipe book is offered. On the contrary, learning is the invitation to search for ways to restore broken relationships, overcome fears and create safe and peaceful environments where each person “regardless of differences” can be accepted and respected. Alongside this, well-being rooted in justice, human rights and based on compassion and mutuality will be supportive for the flourishing of common life and of every member of the community and society.

Next, we want to highlight some points for diaconal workers and organisations to consider, based on our experience:

- not rushing to quick solutions and remembering the complex nature of social exclusion. This also means abandoning short-term specific outcome-driven projects in favour of long-term presence and engagement with people, aiming at evolving changes which will be rooted in the lives of people and communities;
- working with the narrative that people tell about their situation and giving them the space to imagine and work for a different future where a different narrative can be told. This will be a clear indicator of empowerment and the influence of the presence and work of the organisation in the locality;
- examining who are the power holders or gatekeepers in the local situation and striving for the interdependent joint work of equals;
- always looking for ways to preserve the dignity of people and never instrumentalising them;
- taking a critical attitude to and reflecting on the rules or codes of social systems and for social practice. This might be implemented on the level of several agencies with the aim of giving feedback to the decision-making bodies, as a voice and concern from the professionals and the participants;
- looking for the ways to change the way social and diaconal organisations and their workers are “present” with people in their living contexts;
- being aware of the constant changes in the present situation, assessing in complex ways the impact of these changes on each locality, seeing how diaconal organisations and churches can be responsive to the needs of people as they arise and to work with the people on these issues.

The Key Shift Needed in Diaconal Organisations; from Supporter to Facilitator

In summary, working with people on such a new vision towards common living in mutual respect should be seen as a strategic step towards building safe environments where ways of living together can be explored anew. There needs to be a shift in social and diaconal work organisations, where appropriate, away from being a ‘supporter’ and ‘provider’ towards being a ‘facilitator’ and ‘enabler’. Additionally, the organisation and its workers would create a sense of ownership of any actions, contribute to building personal identity and enable people to find their personal vocation and sense of belonging so that the locality becomes more liveable. In this case, the organisation would be transformative in more ways than one, as, consequently, it can make an impact not just on individual persons, but more widely on the local environment, thus encouraging people to overcome fears in the positive anticipation of discovering the fullness of life together.

“Convivencia” runs throughout the process of renewal of the churches and diakonia and opens up reflection on the meaning and importance of the diaconal church.

In 2020, interdiac has introduced the first publication of the series *Towards a Diaconal Church*, which describes the living community church in Harkujärve village, close to Tallinn.⁸ The open Lutheran church is a safe place for daily growing, giving and receiving together, learning and developing a shared life that benefits all participants. To share the lives, dreams, bread and wine is the leitmotif of the community church, which is welcoming to all while keeping its own identity. Meeting the “other” is increasing the momentum to learn and grow together. The vision behind this series is to vivify a new model of diakonia which is close to everyday life of the people and, at the same time, is the beating heart of the church.

Seeking Conviviality in Practice – the Armenia Round Table

To illustrate how ‘seeking conviviality’ works in practice, we focus attention on one ecumenical organisation, the Armenia Inter-Church Charitable Round Table Foundation (ART).⁹ For ART, conviviality relates to inclusion and participation. Participation is within the nature of the organisation. ART serves as a platform for exchange and dialogue between various actors such as Armenian Churches, communities, clergy, government, faith-based organisations, and local and international organisations. ART activities in the fields of community development, capacity building, emergency response and conflict transformation are designed using a participatory approach to ensure that our work is relevant to the needs of people and that we understand their perceptions and attitudes towards those needs and that we act together to create solutions.

ART operates against a challenging background within the specific development context of Armenia. The work of ART is determined by the environment of high rates of poverty, unemployment and emigration, unequal territorial development, a polarised society and protracted conflict. How do we seek conviviality in this context? What shall the vision and approach of diakonia be? How shall we connect to the life worlds of people and make a change? ART believes that by engaging with communities and sharing our resources, we develop common knowledge and experience which supports the collective value of solidarity.

ART’s aim is to build on social capital and strengthen the capacity for resilience so that people regain control over their lives and engage more actively in ensuring that their rights and choices are respected. We reflect together with professionals, social workers and clergy on their own ‘service model’ and that of ART in connection with ‘life-world’ experiences of the people, families, communities we serve. Conviviality is viewed as a process, an interactive way of organising social, economic and cultural life.

While confronted with the challenges of social inequalities and divisions, ART works to strengthen community spirit and the values of collective solidarity, respectful interactions with and attitudes towards people on the margins and vulnerable people. Diaconal workers in ART prioritise people who are vulnerable, excluded and marginalised. In a holistic way of work, ART develops and values its relationship with people. It implies that ART identifies needs and understands experiences, priorities, strengths, vulnerabilities and outcomes in relation to activities both with the people with whom it is concerned and the partners. In ART’s work, there is a focus on collaboration with local actors, social workers, faith leaders and civil society organisations, who all have in-depth knowledge and understanding of the communities with which they work. Faith leaders have an outstanding position in the formation of and sustaining value systems and they have access and entry to families that are hard to reach by ordinary social and secular workers. They enjoy the trust of the people, especially in small and remote communities, and have access to local resources and networks. They can reach out to informal community leaders and groups that stick to harmful stereotypes and enforce social taboos on certain issues (e.g. domestic violence).

Social workers, working in and from church-related centres and other professionals working in social centres, are focused on social inclusion and justice. They actively work to address the needs of people and

⁸ Towards a Diaconal church 1 (Český Těšín: interdiac, 2020).

⁹ For more information, see: <http://www.roundtable-act.am/en/>.

attend especially those who are forgotten and neglected by the society. Social workers' knowledge of needs and their capacity for mitigation and the protection of rights in front of public officials is an important asset. These crucial stakeholder groups also have the power and ability to inform and influence decision-making and actions by authorities and policymakers. Through a variety of practices and approaches in community work, we directly or indirectly shape social change and the re-organisation of common life with a vision for a society where people enjoy equal rights and dignity life.

Improved quality of life and social relations and sustainable and inclusive development is at the heart of ART's work and gives it the core direction for community work. This key priority area focuses on activities that, in a broader sense, reinforce impacts on communities, especially young people and women and, through them, their families. Economic, social, cultural value systems and attitudes and welfare issues are interlinked in the community development approach and in the work of ART-supported social centres. In 20 years of work, ART has supported the establishment and operations of 10 church-related social centres in Armenia. They are located in different regions and the majority of the centres run in the most impoverished areas. These are multi-purpose centres which offer different services and implement activities with people of their own community and from the neighbourhood. Childcare, out-of-school activities, informal education, vocational training, pastoral counselling and social services are essential part of centres' activities and are all measures which contribute to sustainable and inclusive development of communities. Social centres create small communities on their own and become a learning environment with multi-generational and multi-sector approaches. The atmosphere in social centres is welcoming, friendly and non-discriminatory, which gives a feeling of safety to service users. Along with becoming more professional in service delivery, the centres also grow into focal points which generate ideas and alternative patterns of social organisation and civic participation. The centres showcase how self-organisation, offering aid, solidarity and generosity, reciprocal giving and respect improve social relations and living together. The centres become nuclei of community development from which ideas are spread and other communities learn.

A very significant point is that ART and its centres base their work on inclusive and participatory decision-making in the setting up of activities. Service users are included in decision-making which helps to design relevant and realistic activities. A few project examples are chosen to illustrate the process and achievements of work in this area.

An initiative for the "Improvement of well-being of women-led families" is being carried out in Gyumri, the second largest city of Armenia, in the Shirak region. Gyumri has the highest rate of poverty in the country. Migration out of the region is higher than compared with other places and leaving for seasonal work abroad continues to be a means of coping with poverty and limited job prospects in the area. While emigration may assist with achieving financial stability, the absence of a parent usually leads to serious consequences for family unity and for a child's social and psychological well-being. Women have to undertake a double parental role by replacing the missing father at the time of husband's leave, and children who have been suffering from parental absence often display destructive and risky behaviour. The majority of women with whom the ART centre in Gyumri works completed their secondary education and yet were out of paid employment. This made them even more vulnerable in terms of dependence on remittances from husbands and confidence in their own abilities. The stress of not being able to cope with social challenges and with securing a reasonable quality of life for their families negatively affected relations within families and undermined the self-esteem of the women. Over time, these families lost their resources to cope with poverty and social hardships and they grew more marginalised and isolated.

The See-Reflect-Act Model in the Working with Migrant Women

Following the “see-reflect-act” model, ART and the Gyumri social centre reflected on their own motivation and commitment to work with this particular group,¹⁰ identified the needs of the women, set goals, and acted on the issues and practices that supported the exclusion of these women. In our work, we used an exposure approach. We paid home visits, observed and interviewed women, children and other family members under care of the women. This type of exposure gave us very valuable insights and fuller awareness of the situation of women-led families, and laid the groundwork for our initiative. In the preparatory phase, we consulted the women on their needs and their preferences in terms of skills learning and care for their children. We then designed activities relevant to meeting these needs. At all stages of the work, women and their children were asked for their feedback and their response and opinion was integrated in the design of the next stages.

Through pastoral and psychological counselling, the team worked with the women and members of their families to build their resilience, restore self-esteem and strengthen their capacity of coping with anxiety and family-related issues. Awareness-raising meetings were organised to inform and sensitise families on such issues as trafficking, gender-based violence, domestic violence, labour exploitation, sex discrimination, rights protection. These activities were carried out in cooperation with human rights organisations and organisations who specialised in prevention work and supporting women in need and those who are in a difficult life situation. Vocational education was carried out with the women to build up both marketable and soft skills for job interviews and negotiations of work contracts. The choice of the vocational training course was made by women; the team tailored courses according to the individual priority and capacity of trainees. To assist women with employment, management and social workers made referrals to employment agencies and linked graduates of courses with businesses.

A team consisting of a pedagogue, social worker, psychologist, interns from local higher educational institutes and volunteers with different professional backgrounds launched work with children of these women in a day care centre. Counselling on parenting and family issues was also carried out individually. The childcare service supported women in bringing up their children and made time available so that they could work and also have leisure time. Individual counselling with women, children and family members helped lessen tensions and improved family relations. At the time of community events and celebrations, the centre made sure that women participate and become visible. This interaction helped women come out of their closed circle, establish new relations and develop a sense of belonging and togetherness.

During the project’s progress, the workers learnt that some of the separated families reunited and restored relations with their partners and parents-in-law. Women also started peer support and self-help groups on their own and assisted each other with homework and childcare. Another positive change that is likely to continue without our further support is the difference in the role and behaviour of women. Women who did not have a voice in their family or setting, felt “seen” and more confident, with better knowledge of their rights and skills to cope with the stress. For ART, these were very inspiring and valuable outcomes of the work. Experiences of this particular initiative helped ART to develop a model of work which was fine-tuned further as we continued our activities in this direction. Besides, ART shared the knowledge and experience obtained through this practice with other social centres, which encouraged colleagues there to reproduce our approach in their own work. Thus, we multiplied and sustained results of our initiative.

Together with its partners, ART also tests new approaches, methods and social technologies. This way, we create continuous opportunities for diaconal work-oriented knowledge and skill development. One of the best examples of strengthening diaconal work is the advocacy for family wellbeing and gender equality. ART’s work in this direction aims at attitude change and value transformation, challenging gender stereotypes, injustice and harmful behaviour which provoke violence. Each year, priests and social workers are trained and receive practical knowledge and skills for counselling and offering support services to people. The priests

¹⁰ Kjell Nordstokke (ed), *Diakonia in Context* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation. 2009), p. 59.

and social workers carry out awareness-raising activities with school-age children, teenagers, young men, couples before marriage and newlyweds, families on the verge of break-up, divorced and separated people; in-depth counselling and work is carried out both with victims and perpetrators of violence.

By raising awareness on gender issues and family well-being and through consultancy services, we aim to support modes of living that are based on respect and equality. The thinking behind such initiatives is that in developed, sustainable and peaceful communities, a family moves forward with more confidence and takes additional steps for its wellbeing, and that strong and healthy family is one of the cornerstones of a peaceful coexistence.

ART started a non-formal education programme on conflict transformation in order to reflect on the discourse of peaceful coexistence and transforming conflicts in non-violent way and how to deal more effectively with tensions, internal and external conflicts. ART defines conflict transformation as means for the reduction of hostilities and preventing the outbreak of violence, whilst at the same time addressing the underlying problems (such as poverty, unemployment, hate and discrimination) which give rise to conflict. ART attempts to strengthen grassroots and church-related organisations so that they are able to address dividers and connectors, build relations and transform conflicts in their communities in non-violent way. Conflict is seen in a broader sense and covers conflicts within the community, in the neighbourhood, families and schools.

A curriculum for a non-formal learning programme was developed with national and international experts and with the participation of young people. Prior to the curriculum development, ART and experts carried out participatory needs assessment with young people in the regions to identify their needs and suggestions for the curriculum activities. A pilot learning programme was carried out to review the draft curriculum according to feedback from trainee groups. The course covers various aspects of non-violent conflict solutions, such as effective communication, active listening and negotiation, conflicts in communities, mapping actors in a conflict and understanding their needs and interests, forms of violence and non-violent means of conflict transformation. The course on conflict transformation is now included in the curriculum of two leading higher educational institutes in Armenia and in the activity list of social centres. It will be gradually replicated in other centres.

Along with the conflict transformation course, young people in rural communities were also assisted with learning the basics of short video production by mobiles phones and storytelling about life, developments, issues and opportunities of their communities. This way of using mobile devices and conveying stories to the digital world created opportunities for creative sharing and convivial exchange. Some of the stories inspired community activism and self-organisation: in some cases, people came together to clean public spaces or carried out outreach activities to support young people and children in rural areas as a direct result of this endeavour.

The work of social centres, the application of participatory approaches in community work, the involvement of people in the design of activities and collecting their feedback to our work, the exchange of shared and lived practices are all among the measures which contribute to convivial culture and a convivial way of living.

Conclusion

In interdiac, we learn and enrich each other from our practice and sharing. We are on the way to learn and practice how to live together by working through all the differences we have encountered through this journey. We have learnt how important authenticity and integrity are for practicing conviviality in our working and learning processes regardless of the 'position' they represent, and many times we recognised changes in the viewpoint and service model of participants in our programmes. This comes through trusting the process of learning from each other, which is predicated on eye-to-eye communication and openness to receive and give

reciprocally and unconditionally, thereby acknowledging a richness of the gifts of each individual who is with us on our journey. It links to diakonia and the diaconal call. We should be open, especially to the Other, to those who are different and have a different biography and background.

Interdiac strives for and seeks to be a living example of convivial community, which recognises each person's contribution to convivial living together. In this journey, people enjoy the process of building strength-based relationships and master the art and practice of living together. Respecting diversity by encountering the other gives a positive momentum to all interdiac programmes.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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35. REFORMULATING DIACONIA IN WESTERN EUROPE: NEW APPROACHES AND THEOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

Erika Meijers and Heather Roy¹

Introduction

Diaconia in Western Europe has a long history. Firmly rooted in Biblical stories on justice and compassion, informed by Roman Catholic traditions of *caritas*, Orthodox traditions of the two altars and Protestant affirmations that the Church cannot be Church without sharing what it receives with those in need, it took hold as a distinct practice in the 19th Century. From the early days of Johann Hinrich Wichern and the Inner Mission of the Evangelical Church in Germany to the City Mission movement and the development of community-based Diaconia, there has been a constant development of the meaning and practices of Diaconia, from the provision of social care, to the fight for social justice and the participation of people who find themselves at the margins of our society. Diaconal actors have repeatedly shown their ability to respond to political, economic and societal changes and have developed their work and theology accordingly.

Diaconia in Europe is structured in various models. There continues to be the Wichern-based large-scale Diaconal institutions found mainly in the north of Europe. There are also churches, such as the Church of Norway, the Church of Finland and the Church of Sweden and the Folk Church in Denmark who continue to have ordained deacons, both male and female, and several churches, including the Protestant Church of the Netherlands, who appoint volunteer deacons working both in and outside Christian communities. The deaconess movement, typified by the Kaiserswerth movement, continues in Europe and elsewhere in the world. The City Mission movement, formed in Glasgow in 1826, leads the way in many countries in Western Europe. They work with the most marginalised in our societies and offer a prophetic voice. Inspired by contextual ecumenical theologies, the urban mission movement has developed a presence in poor neighborhoods of bigger cities, prioritising engagement and advocacy with the residents of these areas and developing methods of empowering community work. Additionally, there are increasing ecumenical organisations and regional diaconal platforms, bringing together several churches and denominations. Other models focus on empowering people who experience marginalisation, exemplified by the Poverty Truth Commission in the United Kingdom. All these different models have developed their specific diaconal theologies and raise questions to churches, social practices and society. However, most of them are faced with the question of how to retain, reformulate and act out a Christian identity in an increasingly multi-cultural and secular Europe. Many organisations no longer require personnel to hold a personal Christian faith and focus more on values for practice that are accessible to all. Therefore, in a situation of ongoing de-churching, new concepts of Diaconia are needed and contextual theology applied.

In this article, we will focus on this need from two different angles. In the first part of this contribution, Heather Roy will describe several examples of new diaconal approaches in Western Europe from the perspective of her work at Eurodiaconia. Afterwards, Erica Meijers will focus on how these new Diaconal approaches challenge theological thinking on Diaconia.

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New Diaconal Approaches in Western Europe

Diaconal work in Western Europe has moved beyond service provision and providing charity to addressing the structural and systemic causes of exclusion, poverty and marginalisation with a focus on reciprocity and inclusion. With the establishment of the European network Eurodiaconia in the mid-nineties, diaconal organisations have had a presence on the European political level, engaging with the European Commission and the European Parliament to influence social and economic policies and access European Union support through grants and other resources. At national, regional and local levels, diaconal actors are not only partners in the delivering of services with local government, but also key actors in civil society campaigning for social justice.

However, against all this positive development, there are also challenges. Increasing pressures on public and ecclesial finances mean that many diaconal organisations can face questions regarding the sustainability of their services and maintaining the level of quality and scope they wish to have. Those who work with volunteers have to adapt to a changing composition of Christian and non-Christian volunteers. The increase of right-wing populism has also had an effect, with questions raised about why some population groups get assistance while others may not and how Diaconia could contribute to social cohesion and counter tendencies which foster xenophobia, racism and exclusion in society. Over a decade of economic austerity in Europe has meant that the advocacy role played by many Diaconal organisations is needed more than ever, but the shrinking civic space in many countries means that partnerships between civil society and government have been reduced. Although many Diaconal organisations are funded through contracts with local, regional or national authorities, there are still many gaps in social welfare systems and, in order to bridge those gaps, organisations have to search for additional funding sources to be able to meet the needs of those who fall through such gaps.

The increasing complexity of social risks and crisis means that Diaconia must adopt a more holistic approach, providing support in several areas rather than just in one aspect of a person's life. This is particularly the case in urban areas where poverty and social exclusion can be widespread and indicative of further needs such as accessible public services, community infrastructure and educational and employment opportunities. Furthermore, the emergence of new models of participation and community building can challenge Diaconal actors to find ways of engaging people in the co-production and design of services and advocacy, ensuring that people are able to speak on their own behalf. Increasingly, the delivery of Diaconal work in Western Europe is moving away from the model of provision to empowerment, based on mutually reinforcing relationships between those previously regarded as recipients. This represents a substantial shift and reflects new thinking around concepts of power that is both political and practical. In Western Europe, the notion of power tends to relate to economic systems with accumulation of wealth equated with the strength of power held and this is re-enforced by neo-liberal economic theories. However, particularly due to the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, the clear environmental challenges being faced, and the increase in both income and rights inequalities, there are increasing questions about power and its use. The advent of new technologies that allow greater engagement in debate and discussion (for better or worse), combined with questions about trust and accountability, have meant that traditional models of power are being challenged and this is also evident in civic space as well as political and financial space. For Diaconia, it has meant re-looking at how diaconal work is structured and implemented, and ultimately, giving away power to others who have often found themselves powerless, as well as engaging in partnerships with new actors in the space.

This new practice has emerged against a number of contextual challenges that have required diaconal actors in Western Europe to adapt the work they have traditionally done to ensure that both personal and structural needs are met. This requires working both with individuals and in political spaces.

Demographic change is one of these contextual challenges. Across the EU-28, the working age population is declining but living much longer. This raises challenges in both the provision of long-term care services and in the sustainability of social protection systems that depend on taxation revenues. Many older people

also express the wish to remain in independent living environments for as long as possible and to receive care in their own homes rather than rely on institutional alternatives. Additionally, loneliness and isolation are increasing among older people which give way to the need for Diaconia to provide greater community-based approaches that combine care with solidarity and company.

New approaches to residential or support accommodation have been developed such as the *Diakoniewerk* house communities ‘Erdbergstraße’ in Vienna, Austria. When opened in January 2008, it was the first old people’s and nursing home based on the model of house communities in Vienna. With the model of the house community, individuality, care and support oriented to the respective needs as well as the orientation of the daily routines “in the normal life” are in the foreground – a quality that was previously not offered to people with intensive care needs in Vienna. There is also a special and unique co-operation with the Evangelisches Gymnasium, a high school located in the same building and joint projects and activities break down generational divides and curate new relationships as well as bring some sense of normalcy to everyday life.

Migration continues to the European Union and alongside the continuing debate around migration policies is the need to support migrants to integrate into their new societies and assist them in accessing the labour market, housing, health care, social assistance, education and training. The award-winning Humanitarian Corridors project initiated in Italy as a partnership between the Tavola Valdese, St. Egidio and the Federation of Italian Protestant Churches has sought to provide a safe, legal and holistic approach to migration from the Middle East. Families and individuals who would benefit from the programme are supported while in refugee camps outside Europe and accompanied to Italy. Once in Italy, they can then apply for asylum on arrival and receive comprehensive integration support, which includes housing, legal aid, work integration support, social integration and language classes.

The model has been adopted in France and in Belgium over the last three years and is currently receiving EU support to look at how the model could be replicated elsewhere. In Belgium, the model has been adapted to be not only ecumenical but inter-faith with the Jewish and Muslim faith communities also being active in the scheme. In all cases, the activities have been self-financed by the engaged organisations, representing a massive financial commitment each year by individual congregations and diaconal organisations. This shows the potential for structured, long term support for new arrivals in Europe and the power of Christian and other faith communities in providing social and practical support to enable people to become autonomous in a new environment. However, the projects also require very strong co-operation with governments as Humanitarian Visas are needed to enable people to come to Europe. Thus, Diaconal organisations require the right relationships with political institutions and demonstrate their legitimacy and commitment to the project.

Urbanisation is another contextual challenge that combines the complexity of social needs with economic and social inequalities. Poverty and social exclusion are evident in many parts of our urban landscapes with poorer communities suffering from a lack of public services such as transport, banking and even commerce. According to Musterd *et al*, 2017, spatial patterns of poverty are very different across European countries: in Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary deprivation rates are much lower in cities than in rural areas, while in Austria, Ireland, the UK and Belgium, the situation is the reverse. Therefore, in Western Europe, there has been a need for Diaconal organisations to engage in new and stronger ways in urban areas – not just to address traditional poverty and exclusion, but also to look at how people live in some sense of mutuality and conviviality. What has also been seen in urban areas is that social deprivation can be a breeding ground for political radicalisation and fundamentalism, driving up racism and xenophobia as people feel ignored and disenfranchised. Diaconal work in the Diocese of Vasteras in Sweden has developed work that engages young men specifically who are seen as being at risk of developing racist and xenophobic attitudes towards new Swedes. Working in partnership with schools and sports clubs, they have been able to reduce the negative opinions of the ‘other’ and build community cohesion. The success of this work has been recognised at a national level in Sweden with representatives of the Church of Sweden being invited into governmental work on radicalisation and fundamentalism. In Germany, the Network of Urban Diaconia looks at how community-based assets can be

released through the people living in those communities and used to improve living situations. This has been an approach also used in Scotland where the Church of Scotland has focused resources in Priority Areas; the local church responds both spiritually and practically to people living in areas of high deprivation and poverty. Social enterprises have been established as a result such as the Grassmarket Community Project (GCP) in Edinburgh which has developed from a small wood workshop for a few homeless men to an award-winning social enterprise that employs many in catering, craft, hospitality and services. GCP also has an innovative model of participation, not focusing on users or employees or trainees but rather on community membership, where decision-making is shared and collective between all those who are active in the work of the GCP. This empowers people to have a sense of ownership rather than seeing themselves as users or a case to be dealt with, reinforcing the contextual approach of relationship building as the first and last steps of any effective diaconal intervention.

The ongoing environmental crisis also challenges Diaconia in Western Europe to consider how to contribute to an increasingly sustainable society. Environmental concerns have not always been part of the thinking on Diaconia in Europe but there is a growing recognition that the natural environment, the social and the economic have to be drawn closer together if there is to be a significant impact on reducing the negative impacts of climate change. This challenges Diaconia to think about how buildings and land is used but also how communities that have been traditionally supported by industries such as coal and steel are supported in the transition to more climate neutral industries. This is perhaps easier in Western Europe than it is in Eastern Europe and a future challenge for Eurodiaconia and Diaconia in general across Europe is how to reconcile these needs which we share theologically but which in practice have very different impacts.

However, for now, in Western Europe, the move towards more sustainable approaches in Diaconia, supporting the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, is apparent. The Diakonhjemmet Foundation in Oslo, Norway, has developed the ‘Diaconal Garden’ project. This project will see the re-development of a vast area of land with both social and environmental principles at its heart. The project is guided by three main aims – creating diversity, ensuring strong environmental actions and ensuring a meeting space between organisations and local people. Environmentally, it is currently anticipated that annual energy consumption will be reduced by 60% and CO₂ emissions by 72% through the use of green energy and re-directing surplus heat from the existing hospital which will contribute to making the entire project self-sufficient with energy for heat and cooling. A new metro station will be built in co-operation with the authorities to reduce the use of cars in the area and provide more accessible facilities for everyone. As in previous examples, this kind of Diaconal urban planning is only possible due to the relationships, not only with the local community or between institutions, but also with the local municipality and wider government. It shows how environmental concerns and improvements can be integrated into the social mission of diaconal work, and re-enforce the relationship between creation and person.

These are not just innovative projects, but are reflective of new diaconal thinking and theology in a new context. This is what we will explore next.

Diaconia as Anamnesis: A New Theological Focus for Diaconia in Western Europe

Diaconal work in Western Europe faces multiple crises: political, social, economic and environmental, as Heather Roy has shown above. She also described how Diaconal workers and organisations are reacting to these crises with new approaches, moving away from the model of provision to empowerment based on mutually reinforcing relationships. How do these models and approaches challenge the Church and Theology in Western Europe?

I will argue that Diaconia is an important source for (re)constructing and (re)formulating the construction of vital Christian identities. Firstly, Diaconia is indispensable for reading the signs of the times and secondly, it can help to develop counter discourses and alternative practices. However, there are obstacles which make

it difficult to profit from Diaconal experiences when it comes to developing and reformulating Christian identity. As a response to these obstacles, I will propose and shortly introduce an eucharistic focus for the theological reflection on new Diaconal challenges.

Reading the Signs of the Times

Diaconal workers and deacons have become experts in the impact of today's crises on daily life. Diaconal organisations are built upon the experiences and knowledge they have gained while working alongside people on a daily basis and in different contexts. They are closely involved in the way societal, economic and political changes form and transform the lives of people, especially for marginalised people. Contextuality, therefore, is a key concept for Diaconia. Although the importance of contextuality is now broadly accepted in theology in Western Europe, especially within Practical Theology, it is usually defined as the awareness that every theology is rooted in a particular practice and has its own *Sitz im Leben*. However, as the Taiwanese theologian Shoki Coe stated in 1973, when he coined contextuality as a theological concept, it means more than just that. Contextuality encompasses the critical analysis of what makes a particular context meaningful in the light of Gods Mission in the World.² Contextuality therefore is about the missional reading of the signs of the times, to acknowledge where God is at work and where He calls us to participate. The engagement of Diaconia with the suffering of people at the margins of our society, is not an exclusive characteristic of Diaconia, but an attempt to follow God's presence with the poor, the oppressed and the suffering. God did not incarnate in an abstract human being, but took the form of a servant (Phil. 2:7). Diaconal theology thus starts with a commitment to those who live at the margins. Ongoing reflection on this commitment is necessary, in a creative interaction with Scripture and Tradition, to improve diaconal presence and to contribute to justice and healing in situations of suffering.

Diaconal knowledge is valuable to the (re)construction of Christian identities in Western Europe, because it helps when reading the signs of the times by providing knowledge which differs from the information offered by the regular media and institutions of our society in two ways. Firstly, it is informed by experiences of suffering, uncovering weaknesses and injustices within our societies and secondly, it is contextual knowledge, committed to justice for and healing of people at the margins.

Developing Alternative Ways

Diaconal work not only gathers experiences from the hidden places, it also develops ways to cope with these experiences. Heather Roy has pointed out how diaconal work in the last few decades has moved beyond service and charity to addressing the structural and systemic causes of exclusion, poverty and marginalisation. Building relations has moved to the very centre of diaconal work, focusing on empowerment, reciprocity and inclusion.

This is anything but easy. Diaconal workers, volunteers and professionals alike, struggle with the daily consequences of privilege and exclusion. They deal with the complexities of giving and receiving and possible alternatives for the division of people into subjects and objects.³ They have seen relations between people go to pieces as a result of sorrow, grief, anger, and confusion, while also experiencing the interdependency of people. They are confronted with the paradox that striving for conviviality means to acknowledge differences

² Cf. Paul Duane Matheny, *Contextual Theology. The drama of our times*. (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2012), p. 70.

³ Rob van Waarde, *Oog in oog: Een missiologische studie naar de betekenis van de exposurebenadering in de stedelijke context*. (Utrecht: Boekencentrum, 2017); also Tony Addy, Herman Ijzerman, Herman Noordegraaf, "A Paradigm Shift for Diaconia? Learning from Urban Mission in the Netherlands", *Diaconia Journal for the Study of Christian Social Practice* 3 (2) (2012), pp. 210-15.

and asymmetries of power.⁴ Their experiences evoke the question of who has the power to define what is of value in our societies and what or who is regarded as worthless. They are compelled to reflect on the correlation between justice and compassion, and the different dimensions of reconciliation. They learn to cope with ongoing processes of failing, tumbling, stumbling and getting up again. Diaconal work is less about getting things done or meeting targets and more about being present and staying faithful, unconditionally. Every next step in Diaconal work starts with establishing a relation and is defined by that relation.⁵

In sum, diaconal work constructs a body of knowledge that is hardly compatible with the dominating discourse of success, efficiency and self-reliance. It is a source for developing Christian counter discourses and alternative practices in the (post)secular neoliberal Western society.

Obstacles

These two diaconal contributions to theology: reading the sign of the times from a perspective of commitment and developing alternative discourse and practices, often stay unheard. This has to do with the way in which Diaconia is organised in Western Europe. As we have described in our introduction, diaconal work is often separated from the communal life of the Church. Even in those countries where volunteer deacons work from within Christian communities, diaconal work usually has independent budgets and separate activities, directed at specific groups outside the Church. The division of labour between ecclesial and diaconal activities and budgets was done for good reasons, mainly to make sure that the support is unconditional. 19th Century examples of indoctrination and powerplay by deacons and representatives of the Church are still haunting diaconal work in Europe. But the crises mentioned above and the marginalisation of Christianity in Western Society call us to rethink this division. Churches focusing on the survival of their communities are in danger of neglecting their mission to serve the world; diaconal organisations concentrating on their role as agencies of social practice are in danger of being absorbed by the laws and regulations of our governments. Nevertheless, lifting organisational barriers between diaconal and church life will not necessarily help to integrate diaconal experiences in Church and Theology since the division of labour is linked to a still deeply ingrained view of Diaconia as an application of faith. What is needed, is a new theological focus for the reflection on Diaconia.

Diaconia as anamnesis

The well Diaconia drinks from, theologically speaking, is the Eucharist. From the first text in the Gospel where the word *diakonia* was used (Mark 1:29-31) to numerous diaconal practices today, there has always been a strong connection between Diaconia and meal sharing. Deacons do not only share stories and experiences; sharing food seems self-evident in diaconal contexts. This is not only true for the distribution of food to poor people or the sharing of food within communities, it is also true for the role of deacons during the Eucharist: they collect the gifts, prepare the Table and hand out the bread.⁶ The World Council of Churches has underlined the intimate relationship between Diaconia and the Eucharist on several occasions, informed by orthodox views on Diaconia as ‘liturgy after the liturgy’.⁷

⁴ Cf. Benedicte Tveter Kivle and Silje Hole Hirsch, “Participation in Research: Counteracting Asymmetric Relations through Integrating Social Processes”, *Diaconia Journal for the Study of Christian Social Practice* 11 (1) June 2020).

⁵ As A. Baart discovered after having analysed the diaconal approaches of two pastors for ten years. Cf. his now classical work Andries Baart. *Een theorie van de presentie*. Utrecht: Lemma, 2011.

⁶ Erica Meijers, “Come and Eat: Table Fellowship as a Fundamental Form of Diakonia”, *Diaconia. Journal for the Study of Christian Social Practice*, Vol. 10(1) (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlag, 2019), pp. 85-111. <https://doi.org/10.13109/diac.2019.10.1.85>.

⁷ For instance in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: Report of the Commission of Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches in Lima* (Peru, 1982); Chris Ferguson and Ofelia Ortega, *La diaconia ecumenica. Reconciliadora*,

Anamnesis, the remembering of the suffering of the Lord, is an act which confesses Jesus' presence among us. Every time that we eat the bread, we reveal his suffering. By this revelation, his suffering continues to cry out to the world. The proclaiming of his death until he returns, is both a prophetic act of protest and an affirmation that the evil that led to his crucifixion has been conquered: Christ is alive. By eating the bread, we participate in Christ, who is not confined to our Church buildings or to His Table. He is present in the streets of gentrifying neighbourhoods, in refugee-camps, prisons, nursing homes and in all those places where evil and suffering are still reigning over the lives of people. After having shared the bread around His Table, we are called to go and meet Him again in our societies.

Relational Approach

New diaconal approaches focus on empowerment based on mutually reinforcing relationships, as we have seen in the contribution of Heather Roy. The building and maintaining of relations and of community is now at the very heart of diaconal work. The Australian scholar, John Collins,⁸ has offered a starting point for a relational understanding of Diaconia. After having extensively researched the use of the Greek word *diakonia* in the early centuries, he concluded that Diaconia cannot be identified with social work, but rather means to interpret and mediate, to build bridges and to witness. Diaconia can take very different forms, depending on the context in which it moves, but it is always connecting the Church to the World and the World to the Church.

Diaconal work, understood as building relations and mediating between the Church and the World, means sharing the bread with those who suffer, revealing their unheard stories and hidden experiences as an act of protest against the invisibility of and silence around experiences at the margins of our societies.

As mediators, deacons and diaconal workers are part of a constant movement. Committed to justice and healing, they collect stories and experiences from the margins of our societies and share them in the Christian community. In liturgical practices around the Table of the Lord as well as in theological reflections on these experiences and practices, stories from the margins of our societies can be both transforming to and transformed by the Christian community. Then, they can lead to new discourses and practices of justice and healing in both Church and society.

Table issues

The emphasis of recent diaconal approaches on reciprocal and inclusive relationships, can learn new insights from a focus on table-fellowship, which expresses *koinonia* as both a gift and a mission for Diaconia. While diaconal experiences constantly remind the Church of God's presence with those who suffer, liturgical practices can shed a new light on diaconal issues like conviviality, asymmetries of power and how to stay faithful to others. A more active exchange between Liturgy and Diaconia can deepen the meaning of *koinonia* with Christ, with each other and with the World.

To reflect on Diaconia from the perspective of the Eucharist means to take Table-issues very seriously. This goes from environmental questions about the food we share (and how it is produced) to political questions of in- and exclusion: who is part of this community and who defines the table-fellowship? It confronts questions of inequality, colour, age and gender, with interfaith relations (how does the Eucharist relate to other tables?) and with health (do we share wine and bread if it can transmit viruses?). It also means that we are constantly reminded to look at injustice and suffering in the light of the Resurrected Christ and the promise of the Kingdom to come.

compasiva, transformadora, profetica, procuradora de justiciar (Quito, Ecuador: Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias, 2006).

⁸ John N. Collins, *Diakonia: Re-Interpreting the Ancient Sources* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

By pointing to the intimate relationship between the Eucharist and Diaconia, I have tried to show how diaconal knowledge and experience is an importance source for and expression of contextualised Christian identities in Western Europe. At the same time, diaconal work can improve the way it reads the sign of the times from a perspective of commitment and can develop alternative discourse and practices, by critically looking at Diaconia from the Eucharist. I, therefore, conclude this contribution with a theological definition of Diaconia, as an invitation to more conversations and reflections: responding to the grace of the incarnation of the Eternal in a vulnerable human being, Diaconia means to stay with Christ in his suffering, in the tense expectation of the coming of his Kingdom.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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36. DIAKONIA IN THE CHURCHES OF CENTRAL AMERICA

Benjamin Cortes¹

Introduction

This article sets out to examine the original structural causes of poverty, migration and structural violence in the Central American sub-region, as well as their effects on the population. This is with the interest to describe what the diakonia of churches and of diaconal organisations for development can do in this context, with the cooperation from Protestant churches and development organisations from Europe and the United States, in relation to stability for peace and sustainable human development.

Central American Ecumenical Diakonia has deepened since 1972 due to catastrophes such as earthquakes and hurricanes in Nicaragua, Honduras and Guatemala, as well as the worsening of poverty and unemployment, the lack of democratisation in regard to sufficient access to education, primary health care, the housing shortage and the necessary agrarian reforms for better use of land and food production. Diakonia in the churches from the very beginning opted to be in support of the poor, the peasant population, indigenous and Afro-Caribbean people and the population from the sub-urban peripheries, which is where most of the Central American population is located.

The Situation in Central America

Central America is made up of seven independent countries, and is located between North America and South America, between the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean.

Central American society is attractive for its creative struggles based on protest songs, poetics with deep roots in modernism, on cooperative economy, inclusive education and on a theology nurtured by prophetic spiritualities. It is also attractive because of its towns and cities located within the watersheds of lakes and rivers and along the cordillera of seventy volcanoes, connected from Sierra Madre to the plateau of the Andes.

With a population of 50,690,000 people inspired by mestiza and indigenous cultures, 35% of this population lives in rural areas, dedicated to subsistence agriculture and small animal husbandry. Peasants produce 45% of the basic food the population needs. In Central America, 60% live in general poverty and 30% in extreme poverty. It's true to say, the current economic system works for only 40% of its population. Therefore, poverty hinders democratisation, peace and sustainable human development. Poverty here, like in any other part of the world, foments inequality and injustice, violence and the dehumanisation of human beings.

Poverty's roots were planted in the Spanish-colonial period in the XVI century and continued on through military regimes, dictatorships, democratic governments, guerrilla movements and social revolutions. During the last 40 years, Peace Treaties and Agreements have been signed to end military confrontations, to construct peace, foment socio-political democratisation and the Central American integration system. With these processes, they have tried to remove the causes of hunger and poverty.

Central America is socially and culturally rich given the different capacities of its people. It is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-religious sub-region. People speak two modern languages and 30 Pre-Hispanic languages. Of these, 49% are Catholic and 36% are Protestants, followed by indigenous religions, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, Muslims, and the non-confessing sectors.² Thirty per cent of

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² Central American Integration System/ CEPAL, 2018.

the population is currently participating in some sort of educational program. Ecological awareness is growing and initiatives to promote participatory democracy are rising.

Central America is currently facing many challenges. Among these, the main challenges are the need to consolidate democracy, citizen participation, inclusive education and social economic entrepreneurship. Others include the Central American integration system, the promotion of direct foreign investment and the transparent use of international cooperation for the creation of jobs, accessible health care and social housing. There is a need to foment an Ecumenical Diakonia which contributes to developing strategies which will help to reduce the causes of poverty, hunger, unemployment, social and structural violence, as well as promote environmental awareness, reconciliation and social peace.

Structural and Cultural Causes of Exclusion, Unemployment, Social Violence, Socio-Economic Poverty and Migration in Central America

Actually, the structural and cultural causes of oppression, poverty, violence and exclusion of the Central American peoples go back to over 500 years of exploitation of their labour and resources by an unjust international exchange system, among other factors. Nevertheless, since 1980, with the explosion of the debt, Structural Adjustment Packages and other neoliberal policies have limited the development processes of these peoples.

Transnational capitalism has promoted an asymmetric economic globalisation, which deepens the socio-economic contradictions; displaces production to regions where minimum salaries are paid; impels the exodus of people dependent on speculative capital and intensified processes of destruction of the planet and its sub-regions' environmental balances.³ Churches have pointed out in their Pastoral Letters, the social contradictions of the debt, structural adjustments, especially in unemployment, poverty, environment and forced migration.

Population Growth and the Diversification of Needs in the Face of Growing Exclusion

The increasing complexity of Central American society and its issues is expressed in its population growth and the diversification of its needs facing an economic system that works for only 40% of the population. This poses the first problem to consider. Population growth, without any growth policies, is deepening the economic, ecological, water, education, health care, clothing, housing, energy and transportation infrastructure crises. Demand everywhere is greater than supply. Countries which have been relatively self-sufficient with regards to basic food security and agro-exports, today are forced to import beans, corn, rice, meat, fruits and vegetables to cover the diet of their people, due to the unequal economic exchange. This also affects and is affected by factors of climate change, the de-construction of the rural world, and transnational capital's monopoly on the control of land and its resources. Transnational companies impose genetically modified products upon the peasants of the region, at the expense of native seeds from the Central American tropics, bringing us today to a greater food dependency. Thus, the peoples are struggling to defend their territories and resources, promoting anti-Monsanto laws, and are radical in the defence of their watersheds, forests, local agricultural and animal resources and basic technologies.

People are rising to defending their land, watersheds and forests, to guarantee their food, drinking water, oxygen, naturopathic medicine and the reconstruction of the rural world for the Central American future. Within this active-peaceful struggle in the face of the phenomenon of mass exclusion, grows an ecological culture. Alternatives for monopoly economies are developed and patterns of balanced consumption and better nutrition for mothers and their children are promoted. Diakonia of the churches expresses itself by

³ IX Foro Social Mundial de Belém, 2009.

accompanying denouncements of socio-economic injustices, the structural violence of governments and transnational companies, unemployment, forced migration, as well as by training local leadership in different issues for community development, socio-economic and gender equality, strengthening the defence of human rights, democratisation and social justice and contributing to the consolidation of local organisations.⁴

Structural Adjustment and Neoliberal Policies lead to Increased Debt, Unemployment and Migration

The policies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have failed in regard to poverty reduction and the payment of debt by Central American countries. The economic structural adjustment measures applied during the 1980s and the neoliberal policies launched by the Bretton Woods institutions have increased poverty, exclusion and structural and cultural violence despite the signing and implementation of the Central American-DR Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR) in 2005,⁵ the European Union Central American Association Agreement (EUCAAA),⁶ and other agreements which have diversified the market. However, coffee rust during 2011-2013 and the drought in 2014 had an effect on the loss of 2 million jobs and 500 thousand small farmers who were affected by the drought, increasing general poverty levels to 43% and extreme poverty to 23% of the population.

The foreign debt, levels of general and extreme poverty, unemployment, the ecological crisis, migration from countryside to cities, drug-trafficking, social violence and corruption have all increased during the last decades. At the same time a process of decapitalisation of the people is produced due to the growing deficit generated by an unjust economic exchange system, and the increase in taxes and cost of services. It is evident the productive structure of Central American countries is not capable of absorbing the annual Economically Active Population, which leads to migration and informal economies.

According to reports from Central American Central Banks, the foreign debt of Central American countries reached US\$105.1 billion by 2018, which affects the levels of inflation, interest rates, unemployment, lack of investment, country risks. Due to this, Central American society has started a debate to propose alternatives to face the foreign debt phenomenon, which is increasing annually and affects sustainable development in the region.

Families migrate due to violence, unemployment and increasing poverty, especially out of Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. Migration is massive, especially towards the United States. However, since 1990, thousands of people have died in the deserts trying to reach the “American Dream” which in the end becomes a tragedy.

Diakonia in Multilateral Dialogue

Multilateral cooperation, governments, churches, social movements, indigenous movements and ecumenical organisations of service converge in some global topics for development, although generally there is no consensus in the interpretation or methods to approach the following: 1) State reconstruction; 2) Strategies to fight and reduce poverty; 3) Reduction of foreign debt; 4) Rule of Law; 5) Strengthening Civil Society; 6)

⁴ The Diakonia of churches organized in CEPAD, CIEETS, CIEDEG, CREDHO, CCD, and the diaconal mission of the Moravian Church and the Baptist Church in Nicaragua, the Mennonite Church in Honduras, the Emmanuel Baptist Church, Lutheran Church and the Episcopal of El Salvador are notable. All these church organisations have also published Pastoral Letters to mobilise the churches in favor of the people, women, peasant and indigenous peoples' movements.

⁵ In 2005, the parliaments of each Central American country approved the CAFTA-DR.

⁶ EUCAAA is a dialogue and negotiation process between the EU, Central American governments and the Central American Integration System, whose main issue is to carry out Central American integration and establish of an area for trade.

Democratisation, social justice and citizen participation; 7) Sustainable agriculture and food security; 8) HIV Prevention; 9) Fight against corruption of state and private sectors; 10) Risk and vulnerability prevention; 11) Women and healthcare; 12) Childhood, adolescence and youth; 13) Institutional strengthening; 14) Migration and human settlements; 15) Gender equality, reconstruction and sustainable development.

Efforts in the Regional Ecumenical Diakonia activities have introduced some of these topics to strengthen dialogue and cooperation for an alternative development approach, which seeks the socio-economic equality of Central American peoples. It is important to point out that pastoral accompaniment and cooperation from the World Council of Churches and Protestant organisations for development from Europe such as *Brot für die Welt*, EMW, ICCO, NCA, Sweden Church Aid, Christian Aid, HEKS, DCA, Tear Fund as well as Church World Service, Mennonite Central Committee, UMCOR, ACT and churches from the National Council of Churches USA and Canada, have been vital in developing a comprehensive diakonia of the churches, in ecumenical dialogue and in pastoral and social commitment to promote sustainable human development, reconciliation, peace, social justice, gender equality, the formation of grassroots leadership, ecumenical formation, contextual theological education and the development of a philosophy for transformation and socio-economic sustainability.

Ecumenical Diakonia within a Situation of Martyrdom

Diakonia of Central American churches tries to serve with humbleness towards all, in the spirit and teachings of Christ (Luke 22:24-30), which is a novelty due to its commitment to consider a prophetic, humanist, social, spiritual diakonia committed to those in need and their struggles. Today Diakonia tries to give life to others with the purpose of improving the quality of life of the peoples and encouraging transformations in their societies (John 10:7-21). Therefore, Diakonia has been present and acting in social processes for socio-political change, as well as in popular insurrections such as the indigenous struggles in Guatemala and Nicaragua, the popular movement in El Salvador, the peasant and workers' movement, women's movement and students' movement in the region.

As a consequence of this ecumenical militancy, the number of Central American martyrs has multiplied. Christians are killed for following Jesus of Nazareth. All know the martyrdom of Monsignor Oscar Arnulfo Romero, Archbishop of El Salvador, priests, pastors, teachers of the Bible and pastoral agents are also killed for their prophetic testimony in service of the poor. This martyrdom becomes deeper with the pain, suffering and persecution of indigenous, peasant, worker and student leaders in defence of their rights and the search for a life of dignity. In peaceful social struggles, Central American people become historical subjects in a proposal for an alternative society and become conscious of their dignity; these who "once were not a people, but now are the people of God" (1 Peter 2:10). The Spirit has made it rise up against a system of injustices, going through a fecund pain from where the fraternal practice of love is proclaimed, God's Shalom.⁷

A Diakonia under the sign of martyrdom is nurtured from sources of hope. In the first place, we affirm the Spirit of Life (Rom. 8), which the poor and believing people announce, in spite of suffering oppression and hostilities. Life in the Spirit is the affirmation of the values of plenitude and transcendence of life.

Secondly, we affirm Life in Love (John 8:31), in which the spirituality of the people challenges itself to live truth in love as the highest ethical imperative. In which the people walk, challenging itself to discern its acts, plans and history. The people know that this practice of love and justice is needed on the road leading to the cross, or in other words, towards a spirituality of martyrdom needed to fulfil our vocation as daughters and sons of God.

Thirdly, we affirm the Life of Faith (Mt. 8, 10:9, 2), where the most solid fundamentals of biblical faith are revelation, redemption and resurrection. This is the reason why the faith is inexhaustible. In this sense,

⁷ Kairos Central America. *A challenge to the churches of the world*. 3rd April, 1988.

the people's existential faith continues discovering Jesus of Nazareth. This faith confesses that he was incarnated in human realities and shares his life, calling us to live Diakonia in the heart of the conflict of these human realities. This is how comprehensive Diakonia is experienced, and from those human realities arise visionary perspectives of the future.

And finally, we affirm that martyrs are a profound inspiration in everyday life. They lived the real Gospel because they were faithful to God. In Central America, the collective-martyr testimony of thousands of Christians beseeches us to set aside fear and open the way to the reign of God because they loved justice and freedom. They challenge us to recover the subversive potential of the Gospel to make an ethical revolution possible in this time of deep crisis. The poor who have burst into the churches and the whole world demand participation as a subject in the construction of a qualitatively different world "where we all fit".

Proposals from the Diakonia of the Churches for an Alternative Society

The diakonia of Central American churches proposes continuous dialogue and cooperation from all spheres of development because, it too, experiences in its own flesh the suffering of Central American people. During the last three decades, an agenda to influence reforms and transformations starting at a local level has been proposed, considering the following principles for strategies and priorities:

1. The poor are the main focus of programs and projects to get rid of poverty;
2. Place emphasis on the promotion of human rights and a person's value;
3. Emphasise the development of human resources;
4. Raise awareness around gender equality and its importance in dialogue and cooperation;
5. Promote peace, social justice and humanistic values;
6. Humanitarian accompaniment and action towards migration;
7. Professional counselling and social-ethical training;
8. Advocacy within the target population about the affirmation of their dignity and rights;
9. Training in Risk Management for communities;
10. Develop conditions for long-term sustainable life;
11. Strengthen churches to improve the quality of their ministries;
12. Consolidate theological education connected to the comprehensive development of the peoples;
13. Contribute to the increase of food security;
14. Preventive health care – especially for HIV/AIDS;
15. Promote peace processes and actions to remove violence;
16. Strengthen representative governments, democratic culture and governability.

Conclusions

The continuity of dialogue and the cooperation between churches is a priority in the 21st century to be able to strengthen an ecumenical, prophetic, theological and social Diakonia. This dialogue must continue to be related to the peasant, indigenous, women's, students', workers' and social movements and with the cultural and academic movements of the Central American region. Likewise, the ecumenical dialogue must be deepened with the World Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches USA and Canada and their cooperation organisations to explore the urgent socio-economic and democratic reforms the region urgently needs. *Without peace there is no development, and without sustainable development there is no peace.* Therefore, there is an interest in the consolidation of courses about diakonia to take place in seminaries and theology schools in order to improve the quality of the formation of priests and pastors in regards to this important topic.

Diakonia's starting point is human suffering and the historical commitment to faith experienced and celebrated through the liberating and salvific project of God. Diaconal theology reflects and acts in such a way that enlightens the human situation, gives meaning to the prophetic mission, and demands permanent dialogue and cooperation with other human knowledges serving for better life quality.

Ecumenical diakonia comes from following Jesus Christ and the continuous formation in His teachings, therefore it is a believer's diakonia inspired in the intelligence of faith, which in turn enriches life. Ecumenical diakonia is responsible for its itinerary in the sense of assuming its realities and contexts. It is historical and social because it ministers and lives the signs of the times. It is didactic because it seeks and tries to contribute to jointly create with those who seek dignifying answers to life. It is practical because it is linked to a concrete and real project which is to contribute to the planning of a human future for the least of these. It is the Evangelical because it announces the Good News of the Kingdom of God, which promotes love, justice and peace, mercy, grace, liberation, salvation: the liturgy of hope and jubilee.

37. THE DIACONAL CHURCH IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE IN THE BRAZILIAN CONTEXT TODAY

Rudolf von Sinner¹

Theology is a game that is played when life is at stake.²

Christian theology is a theology of life seeking to contribute in society, by God's will, so that there may be life that is worthy of being lived by all. It is the theological and practical expression of the church's intrinsic task to serve and to advocate for not only its own members, but to witness, through its diaconal action, God's love and justice in the public sphere. On the way to such transformation, education is paramount. This is the basic thesis of this chapter. To this end, it is necessary to reflect on the role of religion in the contemporary world. Informed by a thorough analysis of such presence, a public theology reflects on it in a constructive, critical and self-critical way, communicating with other sources of knowledge and seeking to provide orientation to the churches regarding being present in public.³

In present-day Brazil, there is a highly ambiguous mixture of politics and religion, and this is one of the reasons why the COVID-19 pandemic has been able to propel the country to a shameful second rank worldwide (after the U.S.A.) in terms of both infections and deaths.⁴ In 2018, around two thirds of *evangélico*⁵ Christians and slightly over half of the Catholic electorate voted for retired army captain and seven times federal deputy Jair Messias Bolsonaro for president.⁶ Publicly visible religious leaders, mostly of Neo-Pentecostal churches, like Edir Macedo (Universal Church of the Kingdom of God), his brother-in-law R. R. Soares (International Grace Church – Faith Show), Valdomiro Santiago (World Church of God's Power), Silas Malafaia (Assemblies of God – Victory in Christ), among others, regularly rally around the president to assure him of his being chosen by God. Macedo even anointed him in a ceremony on 1st September 2019, saying: 'I use all authority to bless this man and give him wisdom. May this country be transformed. To give him courage, health, and vigour, so that the president may rock it. Not because it is me that am here. But because it is the Holy Spirit.'⁷

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² Iuri Andréas Reblin, 'Waves of Liberation Theology: God non-science since Rubem Alves', *Protestantismo em Revista*, 27 (January-April, 2012), pp. 2-8: 5.

³ An earlier version of this chapter was published as 'The Diaconal Church in the Public Sphere', in Stephanie Dietrich, Knud Jørgensen, Kari Karsrud Korslien and Kjell Nordstokke (eds) *The Diaconal Church* (Oxford: Regnum, 2019), pp. 171-184. Used by permission. For an introduction into and overview of public theology see Katie Day and Sebastian Kim (eds), *Companion to Public Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

⁴ According to the Johns Hopkins University Coronavirus Resource Center, on 30th August 2020, over 3.8 million Brazilians were reported infected and more than 120 thousand had been confirmed to have died of COVID-19; <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>.

⁵ *Évangélico* means, literally, 'evangelical', but the connotations of this term in English do not cover its meaning in the Brazilian context. In its most common usage today, the term refers to members of Pentecostal and Neopentecostal churches.

⁶ According to a Data Folha poll realised on 25th October 2018, quoted by Ronaldo Almeida, 'Bolsonaro presidente: conservadorismo, evangelismo e a crise brasileira', *Novos Estudos CEBRAP* 38(1) (2019), pp. 185-213: 206.

⁷ As quoted by Gustavo Schmitt, 'Bolsonaro vai ao Templo de Salomão e é abençoado por Edir Macedo', *O Globo* online, 1st September 2019 (updated 2nd September 2019), available at

Members of historical churches, like Baptists and Presbyterians, have assumed high posts, for instance in the Ministry of Woman, Family and Human Rights, seeing it as an opportunity to do politics in the way that they believe God wants them to. Some of them call this public theology and take inspiration in Abraham Kuyper and other Neocalvinist thinkers. However, there have also been dropouts, in part because they felt the government was not Christian enough, and the inner nucleus called the ‘hate cabinet’ oriented by the highly polemic Olavo de Carvalho (hence the keyword *bolsolavismo*) had gone far astray from a Christian, namely Reformed, orthodoxy.⁸ Baptist journalist Ricardo Alexandre formulated a strong critique of Bolsonaro’s frequent use of Jesus’ famous dictum in John 8:32, ‘and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free’. Bolsonaro customarily uses this verse when he presents a different version of truth in comparison to facts published by traditional media.⁹

While in some contexts there might be a lack of religious and, specifically, church presence in the public sphere, here we clearly have an excess that backfires considerably and dangerously on the image of *evangélico* churches, churches that by default should seek to be moved by the *Evangelho*, the Gospel. After a panoramic introduction on the presence of religion in the public sphere (1), I shall argue for the need and pertinence of discourse and rational argument (2), for a thorough contribution of churches practicing *diakonia*, not least through education toward solidarity (3), and point to specifically Lutheran contributions toward a theology of citizenship (4), all in the perspective of a diaconal church, a church that participates in God’s mission, nurtures discipleship in the world and develops faith-based and rights-based relief, solidarity and advocacy.¹⁰

Religion in the Public Sphere – Positive, Ambiguous, Nefarious

There can be no doubt, and not only in Brazil, that religion is present in the public sphere – in a positive way, in an ambiguous way, in a nefarious way.¹¹ Regarding the positive role of religion, there is the example of the *contribution to citizenship* in many places; let us remember the fundamental role of wide sectors of the Catholic Church in Brazil in the resistance, both practical and theological, to oppression, and in the construction of civil society during the period of the military regime.¹² In the Brazilian context, citizenship does not primarily refer to nationality or possessing a specific passport; rather, it is, as defined by Brazilian lawyer Darcísio Corrêa, ‘the democratic realisation of a society, shared by all the individuals to the point that all have their access to the public space and conditions of a dignified survival guaranteed, having as its basic value the fullness of life’.¹³ It usually has very positive connotations and has not yet been stained by signs of a xenophobic nationalism as is the case in other contexts – although there are signs that this might change. For example, the motto of the present government is ‘Brazil above everything, God above all’ (*Brasil acima*

<https://oglobo.globo.com/brasil/bolsonaro-vai-ao-templo-de-salomao-e-abencao-por-edir-macedo-23920121>, accessed on 31st August 2020.

⁸ Guilherme de Carvalho, ‘O Nome de Deus no Governo Bolsonaro: uma crítica teológico-política’, <https://guilhermedecarvalho.com.br/2020/03/20/o-nome-de-deus-no-governo-bolsonaro-uma-critica-teologico-politica/>, accessed on 31st August 2020.

⁹ Ricardo Alexandre, *E a verdade os libertará. Reflexões sobre religião, política e bolsonarismo* (São Paulo: Mundo Cristão, 2020, Kindle Edition), especially the first chapter on ‘verdade e pós-verdade’ (truth and post-truth), pp. 11-18.

¹⁰ On this see the as yet unpublished working document of the WCC on ‘Called to Transformative Action: Ecumenical Diakonia’, revised as of 15th January 2020.

¹¹ See Judith Butler, Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor and Cornel West, *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

¹² For an in-depth analysis see Rudolf von Sinner, *The Churches and Democracy in Brazil: Towards a Public Theology Focused on Citizenship* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), and ‘Public Theology as a Theology of Citizenship’ in Katie Day and Sebastian Kim (eds), *Companion to Public Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 231-50.

¹³ Darcísio Corrêa, *A construção da cidadania: reflexões histórico-políticas* (Ijuí: Unijui, 2006), p. 217.

de tudo, Deus acima de todos) and, as it appears on all government websites and letterheads, ‘Beloved Fatherland Brazil’ (*pátria amada Brasil*), part of the national anthem.

As far as *ambiguity* is concerned, there are more than a few examples of churches being present on both sides of the divide. It is important to remember the ambiguity that has existed in Brazil between conservative religious moral attitudes and progressive social attitudes, a conflict that remains present within any single church. More recently, however, conservative morality – rejecting, for instance, abortion under any, even legally foreseen, circumstances, as well as wanting to prohibit same-sex marriage – has become strongly associated with neoliberal economic policies and, thus, attracted the large business sector. Since the 2013 protests against the Dilma Rousseff government and the spending towards the FIFA Confederations and World Cup, polarisation has been growing and lefts its marks in social media, churches, and even families. The high usage of deliberately spread *fake news* has been an important factor in the 2018 electoral campaign and beyond. It is understandable that people grew weary of corruption, inefficient policies and a constant state of insecurity, with 65 000 homicides in 2017 alone. Such highly emotionally laden elements of public opinion led to a high rejection of the Workers’ Party government who were stained by corruption scams. This has benefitted Bolsonaro. However, as he and his family harvest harsh criticism, public investigations and court indictments precisely on corruption, the gross underestimation of the COVID-19 pandemic and the president’s consistent defiance of the use of face masks as imposed by the Federal District’s government, public opinion has to a considerable degree swung against him. The scandalous words of key government officials like former Education Minister Abraham Weintraub’s against the Supreme Court has forced Bolsonaro to undertake some changes in his government, and to include more traditional centre party politicians. Yet, he does not seem particularly troubled by his low approval rates, and can count on fairly stable support from 30% of the population, unaffected by whatever disclosure becomes public and might lead to conviction. The above-mentioned religious leaders are not representing any majority church or even prominent minority, but they are the most publicly visible and, thus, politically very influential. One of the most visible symbols in the search for power, ever more publicly articulated, is the self-acclaimed replica of Solomon’s Temple, constructed by the neo-Pentecostal and multinational Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, inaugurated on 31st July 2014 with a significant presence by the political authorities from Brazil (including then president Dilma Rousseff), and clearly intended to position itself as the Christian church *par excellence*.¹⁴ It is there that Bolsonaro’s anointment – recalling, of course, medieval anointments of rulers by bishops and popes – took place.

There is also the *nefarious role* of religion. There are conflicts with religious overtones, alongside political, economic and social ones. Religions, as much as they may declare that they are for peace, and act as though they are the proprietors of ethics, cannot, it seems, effectively restrain such violence. Even worse, there are situations where they support, even if not openly, violence and death as the solution of conflicts.¹⁵ The new Minister of Education, Milton Ribeiro, a Presbyterian pastor, advocated, in 2016, education ‘with pain’ through the use of the ‘stick of discipline’; when this became known, he had the video deleted and adopted a low positional profile.¹⁶ With or without religious connotations, there are strong tendencies to think it is the task, and the sole task, of the military, the police and the intelligence agencies to resolve the problem of violence. Violence is to be resolved by violence. There is, in many places, widespread support from the

¹⁴ The inauguration ceremony can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eYpreb5Jg3U>, last accessed 2nd September 2020; see also Andreas Heuser (ed), *Pastures of Plenty: Tracing Religio-Scapes of Prosperity Gospel in Africa and Beyond* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2015).

¹⁵ See Rudolf von Sinner and Euler R. Westphal, ‘Lethal Violence, the Lack of Resonance and the Challenge of Forgiveness in Brazil’, *International Journal of Public Theology* 12(1) (March 2018), pp. 38-55.

¹⁶ Chico Alves, ‘Ministro da Educação apaga vídeo com defesa de castigos físicos a crianças’, UOL online, 11th July 2020, 11:57, <https://noticias.uol.com.br/colunas/chico-alves/2020/07/11/ministro-da-educacao-apaga-video-com-defesa-de-castigos-fisicos-a-criancas.htm>, accessed on 31st August, 2020.

population for such measures. This might all too easily turn into the idea that there is a certain group that bears all the guilt for the situation – be it drug traffickers, bandits, or migrants – and that the only way for a solution is to destroy them. This dangerous attitude is not mitigated by the fact that such groups might themselves see such solutions as their conviction. A precarisation of the attitude toward the preciousness of the human being is affecting the democratic, constitutional State. At the same time, it is not by mere appeal that religions shall contribute to the overcoming of violence. Rational argument is an important element to relevantly contribute to public discourse and the finding of ways, together with other religious and secular communities, to foster the common good. This is the basic thesis of the next section.

Discourse, Dialogue, Rational Argument as Emancipation

Violent actions often have religious implications, not only on the side of the attackers. I recall the initial invocation of ‘infinite justice’ by then US President George W. Bush, later moderated to ‘enduring freedom’, in reaction to the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center Twin Towers. In contrast, I am helpfully reminded of Jürgen Habermas’ words in his well-known address on ‘Faith and Knowledge’, given when he received the peace prize from the German publishers on October 14, 2001, shortly after 9/11. We can see Habermas’ search for understanding as to what happened as a consequence of the force of a destructive religious imperative, bringing into spotlight the influence of a religious dimension all too easily overlooked by secular minds. At the same time, Habermas has come to recognise the important role religion can also play in motivating morality and providing a fertile ground for solidarity. While the secular, liberal state should neither succumb to an absolutistic religion or a naturalist science, people should not exclude either contribution. Along with others, Habermas states: ‘the search for reasons that aspire to general acceptance need not lead to an unfair exclusion of religion from public life, and secular society, for its part, need not cut itself off from the important resources of spiritual explanations, if only the secular side were to retain a feeling for the articulative power of religious discourse.’¹⁷ Long before 9/11, in Habermas’ writings, there is evidence for his continuous search for dialogue based on communication by argument, and not by decree, still less, of course, by the language of weapons.¹⁸ In this, it seems to me that Habermas rightly calls attention to the need for communication, discourse, and not least rational argument that can be tested and contested. In contexts where rule by decree and authoritarianism reigns – and such is the case also in a good number of *evangélico* churches – rational argument has a true emancipatory power.¹⁹ Religious fundamentalism, on the other hand, based on the idea that it is undertaking a literal and the only true interpretation of its doctrine, demonstrates it has a very particular and, indeed, selective understanding of religious truth. It tends to shun rational argument as alien and dangerous to such truth.

Speaking from within a Christian fold, instead of truly listening to the Spirit’s voice, fundamentalism silences it, understanding doctrine in an extreme one-sided, allegedly literal way. We urgently need to overcome an absolutism that prevents us from recognising God’s love and instead focuses nearly exclusively

¹⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *Faith and Knowledge. Peace Prize of the German Book Trade 2001 – Acceptance Speech*, available at: <https://www.friedenspreis-des-deutschen-buchhandels.de/alle-preistraeger-seit-1950/2000-2009/juergen-habermas#:~:text=Der%20Stiftungsrat%20Friedenspreis%20des%20Deutschen,Laudatio%20hielt%20Jan%20Philipp%20Reemtsma>, accessed 26th March 26, 2019; see also his *The Future of Human Nature* (Cambridge and Malden: Polity, 2003) and *Religion and Rationality: Essays on Reason, God, and Morality* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

¹⁸ The classic is Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (two volumes, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1985).

¹⁹ See Eneida Jacobsen, *Theologie und Politische Theorie. Kritische Annäherungen zwischen zeitgenössischen theologischen Strömungen und dem politischen Denken von Jürgen Habermas*. Translated by Bruno Kern (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2018); also her ‘Deliberative public sphere: The rereading of Habermas’s theory in Brazil and its significance for a public theology’, *Missionalia* 43(5) (2015), pp. 493-512.

on the anger and exigencies of a demanding and wrathful God. According to Luther, believers are related to God, the God of love and mercy, by faith, and related to their neighbour by love.²⁰ Jon Sobrino, a well-known theologian of liberation, defined the centre of liberation as love: ‘The theology of liberation is before anything else an *intellectus amoris*, intelligence of fulfilment of the historical love to the poor of this world and of the love that makes us related to the reality of the revealed God, which definitely consists in showing love to human beings.’²¹ A concrete, diaconal example of fostering love, listening to the Spirit and promoting liberating emancipation is the training of women leaders by the Ecumenical Centre for Capacity Training and Consultancy (CECA) in São Leopoldo, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. These women are trained to become ‘popular attorneys’ who help women who suffer violence – mostly domestic violence from their husbands or family members who do not admit a woman’s autonomy and self-affirmation – to get the legal, medical and social assistance they are entitled to, but often cannot effectively access.²² One story I was personally told was that of a child, while being examined by the public health service doctor, vomited and this splashed on the doctor’s apron. The doctor then told the mother to take her daughter away. By coincidence, one of the popular attorneys had followed the scene and reminded the doctor of her lawful duty to examine the child. The doctor then asked: ‘Who are you?’ in a way to suggest that this ‘Ms. Nobody’ had no right to question the person in charge, who held a degree, was State employed, and was entitled to the status of doctor. Lawyers and physicians are commonly called *doutor* – although they generally do not hold a doctoral degree – and spoken to in the formal way, while they address clients and patients in the informal way, indicating a clear hierarchical asymmetry. However, the popular attorney, well aware of her own and the patient’s rights confidently cited the law, and the doctor gave in to such confidence and examined the child. This shows a conquest of citizenship from below, speaking ‘truth to power’!

Love does not exclude truth. On the contrary, it is indeed necessary to speak ‘truth to power’ as the biblical prophets did and today’s prophetic voices still do. They do so out of love for God which implies love for the neighbour, not in a fundamentalist, destructive way. A one-sided emphasis on truth, understood as being clear and unique, prepared to see as enemies those who do not agree, is prone to enhance hate speech and foster violence, as was visible in many manifestations during the electoral campaign in 2018 and beyond. Where there is no love, such ‘truth’ becomes absolute and violent.

The indispensable and urgent task of the churches and of theological education is to stimulate love, dialogue, forgiveness and reconciliation. By doing this, they serve, they minister and they practice *diakonia*. Only on the basis of precisely such ‘fundamentals’ – love, dialogue, forgiveness and reconciliation – can there be a debate about truth. The churches have a teaching ministry through which they transmit the qualities and foster the practice of *diakonia*. This is of special importance in a country like Brazil where public education is frail and churches are providing not only formal – and as such secular – education through their confessional schools and universities but also through preaching, catechesis, counselling and many other ways of relating to people even in the poorest and most remote areas in which they are present, often as the only kind of institution. Therefore, in what way they exercise such ministry becomes paramount, which is the content of the next section.

²⁰ Martin Luther, ‘On the Freedom of a Christian’, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 31 (ed) Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), pp. 343-77; see also the Sermon on the Third Sunday after Epiphany, quoted in Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, *Public Church: For the Life of the World* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), p. 52, 88 n. 14.

²¹ Jon Sobrino, ‘Teología em um Mundo Sufriente: la Teología de la Liberación como Intellectus Amoris’, *Revista Latinoamericana de Teología* 5(15) (1988), pp. 243-266: 259.

²² CECA was founded in 1973 by Fr. Orestes Stragliotto as a catechetical institute in Caxias do Sul and later moved with him to São Leopoldo, where it became an ecumenical, diaconal institution in the early 1980s; see José Carlos Stoffel, *Ecumenismo de justiça: reflexão e prática. CECA – uma entidade a serviço do movimento ecumênico* (São Leopoldo: FAAP/CECA/Oikos, 2006); Mara Sandra Parlow, ‘Fruto maduro não volta a verde: Promotoras Legais Populares – um estudo de caso’, unpublished Master’s Thesis (São Leopoldo: EST, 2000).

Three Positions of the Church Related to Education – Traditional, Modernising and Prophetic

As I elaborate on the churches' educational dimension, by which they nourish faith and diaconal service, I first refer to a text written by the great Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1921-1997), a Catholic and an important reference for education – including training for *diakonia* – worldwide and also for Liberation Theology.²³ While working in the World Council of Churches in Geneva, where he came after fleeing the military regime in Brazil, Freire wrote a seminal text in 1972 entitled 'The educative role of the churches in Latin America.'²⁴ He made a distinction between three positions related to the church's role in education. Although he, of course, used the terminology of his time, I believe that the tendencies he indicated are still helpful for a church's reflection and positioning. Freire first refers to the position of a *traditionalist church*, whose position is based on a dichotomy between the world and transcendence, searching to live in a supposed purity in contradiction to the world which is seen as dirty. These churches serve, according to Freire, as 'balm' to the 'existential tiredness' of the oppressed. At the same time, they confirm an already strong 'culture of silence' about oppression, without explicit – however, potentially with implicit – questioning. Freire acknowledges the importance of such silent posture as a form of tacit resistance, rejecting a world dominated by the lords. At the same time, he considers it a 'salvation without liberation', resulting in a 'quietist' and 'alienated' church.²⁵ Freire describes another church position as *modernising*, reformist, obeying the 'ideology of development'²⁶ then in vogue, which sought to use technical and professional education to overcome the perceived backwardness of Latin America. Such a modernising attitude is an advance and it raises the efficiency of the church's action, but, for Freire, it does not produce real liberation, and this position is compromised by aligning itself with the elite rather than the oppressed. The third line or church position is the *prophetic*, 'as old as Christianity itself, without being traditional, as new as it, without being modernising',²⁷ seeking to perceive and put into practice true liberation amid the contradictions of history. Being prophetic, as Freire says, is 'to be utopian and hopeful'; it is 'to denounce and announce', something that requires a scientific knowledge of reality. Like Christ, the prophetic church should be a 'wanderer, constant traveller, dying always and always rising'²⁸ – we hear resonate the *semper reformanda*, the Reformation principle of seeing the church in need of constant renewal – exposing itself to the risk of participating in the dramatic struggles of reality. It is not possible to be prophetic without risk. In this view, education must be, in fact, transforming, 'in service of the permanent liberation of human beings'.²⁹

If the church is, thus, to be a prophetic church, announcing God's word to this world and denouncing injustice, serving while seeking liberation and transformation, the issue arises as to how this is best done in today's context. As for Brazil and Latin America, let me cite another seminal text, published 22 years later than Freire's, by Hugo Assmann, a Brazilian Catholic theologian who migrated from the properly theological field to education. His text is entitled 'Theology of solidarity and citizenship, or else: continuing the Theology of Liberation', and was written in a context that has been clearly transformed.³⁰ Having been one of the most articulate theologians of liberation, he now made a scathing critique of this theology. Among other things, he

²³ His classic work is the 1968 *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 50th Anniversary Edition. Trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018).

²⁴ Paulo Freire, 'O papel educativo das Igrejas na América Latina', in *Ação cultural para a liberdade e outros escritos* (14th rev. edn. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 2011), pp. 169–211; English version: Paulo Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Educational Review, 2000).

²⁵ Freire, 'O papel educativo', p. 190.

²⁶ Freire, 'O papel educativo', p. 191.

²⁷ Freire, 'O papel educativo', p. 199.

²⁸ Freire, 'O papel educativo', p. 202.

²⁹ Freire, 'O papel educativo', p. 204.

³⁰ Hugo Assmann, 'Teologia da Solidariedade e da Cidadania, ou seja: continuando a Teologia da Libertação', in *Crítica à lógica da exclusão* (São Paulo: Paulus, 1994), pp. 13–36.

wanted to better perceive, within the concrete, daily and always ambiguous real life, the poor people with their genuine desires and aspirations. Thus, he advocated ‘a theology of the right to dream, pleasure, *fraternura* [tender fraternity], *creativiver* [creative living], happiness’, summed up in the concept of embodiment or corporeity.³¹ As the poor became, so to speak, ‘disposable’ for the dominating capitalism of the neoliberal market, they only became visible for people ‘converted to solidarity’. It is for this reason that Assmann insists on the need of educating for solidarity. As Assmann says in another text: ‘Over the background of the appearance of a society of learners, characterised by a market economy and changing forms of employability, there is no doubt that educating is to fight against exclusion. In this context, educating really means saving lives.’³² He also insists that it is necessary ‘to conjugate values of solidarity with effective rights of *cidadania* [citizenship]’.³³

Following Assmann, theologically I see today the necessity of elaborating this within the perspective of a public theology, a public theology for transformation through the struggle for *cidadania* by, among other aspects, educating for solidarity, seeking to practice, mindful of Freire, a prophetic *diakonia*. As a concrete example of diaconal practice in this line, let me cite again the ‘popular attorneys’, in my view one of the most effective projects to foster citizenship through education serving the mostly poor population. A rights-based initiative started in 1998, it received support by a faith-based ecumenical NGO and international faith-based agencies. After 20 years, much of the project that once provided the initial and continuous training has been assumed by the ‘attorneys’ themselves.³⁴

A Lutheran Public Theology of Citizenship

As indicated above, *cidadania*, citizenship, has become a key concept of democracy in Brazil since the 1990s. It denotes more a conceptual field than a clearly defined concept, and goes far beyond the definition of citizenship in legislation or national documents. Instead, it refers to an arena of the constant struggle of all people in a particular territory for their rights and for the well-being of the society as a whole, whether its members are nationals or not. Its effectiveness requires the profound transformation of people, society and institutions. It is clear that the definition given by Corrêa transcends the issue of rights (and duties) as foreseen by law, instead introducing a utopian, even eschatological, dimension, when speaking of the ‘fullness of life’, recalling John 10:10, often quoted by Christian movements and Non-Governmental Organisations: ‘I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly.’

Christians know that our earthly citizenship is always precarious, transitory, in view of our future citizenship in the kingdom of God. This is not a reason to flee the construction of the earthly city, however. Instead, it underlines the necessity, inspired by the values of the kingdom, of contributing as Christians in this struggle for citizenship, with *parrhesia* (speaking candidly) and *kenosis* (renunciation), boldness and humility at the same time.

Here, I now wish to present five elements that I consider central to an effective contribution to the struggle for citizenship. They are an answer to specific issues, which I can only touch upon here, and, at the same time, they take up central aspects of theology from the perspective of the Reformation, especially in the Lutheran branch of which I belong, without, however, making any claims to exclusivity. On the contrary, my hope is

³¹ Assmann, ‘Teologia da Solidariedade’, pp. 30-31. *Fraternura* and *creativiver* are neologisms created by Leonardo Boff and Hugo Assmann, respectively.

³² Hugo Assmann, ‘Por uma teologia humanamente saudável: fragmentos de memória pessoal’ in Luiz Carlos Susin (ed.), *O mar se abriu: trinta anos de teologia na América Latina* (São Paulo: Loyola, 2000), pp. 115-30: 130.

³³ Assmann, ‘Teologia da Solidariedade’, p. 33.

³⁴ Much of this is unfortunately still undocumented; I had the privilege to serve on the board of directors of CECA from 2008-18.

that this will lead to many forms of convergence with theologians of other confessions. I believe that these elements are central to the being of the church in the world and, thus, of the public presence of a diaconal church as outlined in this book.

1. It is not possible to be a citizen, to feel part of a community governed by justice and seeking the well-being of all, without being able to feel one's own value as a person. In society, value is attributed, in general, asymmetrically, depending on the importance of the family, the possession of economic goods, the formal level of educational, skin colour and gender, among other characteristics. However, where should people who do not meet the expected standard in these categories find their dignity? Many people feel too humiliated to see themselves as citizens, and do not think of themselves as being part of society. Lutheran theology insists on justification by grace through faith *extra nos* (outside us), received as gift, freely given. Moreover, the theology of creation focuses on human beings being made in the image and likeness of God as a basis of citizenship. Thus, a person is a citizen not through their specific characteristics or merits, but simply by being a human being with intrinsically attributed dignity. The theology of the Reformation has a rich tradition of seeing individuals as being unconditionally accepted by a merciful God. However, we have to recognise that, here in Brazil, it is the Pentecostal churches who have been most efficient in transmitting a real feeling of dignity and self-respect to people in situations of precarity and vulnerability. Ironically, in Brazil, such people are often colloquially referred to as 'citizens' (*cidadão*), which would, in principle, denote people with their full rights guaranteed – but, in fact, these are people without rights, without roots, without recognition, not even called by their name but, anonymously, by 'citizen'. For an effective citizenship, in the first place, there is the need *to be* a citizen and to feel and understand oneself as such.

2. A second step is to be able to live as a citizen as part of a society made possible by solidarity based on bonds of trust. It is trust, however, that seems to be most lacking in this country. Only 4 per cent of Brazilian respondents in a continental survey responded positively when asked if they trust other people. The average in Latin America is 14 per cent, while in Norway it is as high as 74 per cent.³⁵ It is not that there is no trust all, but it is bound to people within the family, in one's immediate surroundings and people one knows personally. In general, it is distrust which reigns, reinforced by a constant narrative and news of scams, corruption, deception and violence. At the same time, the churches are among the institutions considered most reliable, which gives them a high potential responsibility. The fact that faith, in Greek *pistis*, in Latin *fiducia*, means trust in God, transcending the trust required for the building of citizenship needed for democracy to function, but can strengthen and renew it. Trust in God can, in an extreme situation of distrust, make possible the risk of forgiveness, of reconciliation and of construction or reconstruction of the bonds of trust between human beings.

3. The third issue is how to deal with violence, scams, corruption, the fact that some take advantage of others, or the fact that there are a thousand reasons to distrust? To live in this world means to live in an ambiguous situation. The Bible itself is full of examples of life's ambiguity, of the mixture of good and evil, and of the impossibility of remaining with clean hands in such situations. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-45), the famous German Lutheran theologian, spoke of our existence in the penultimate, even if oriented toward the ultimate word of justification through grace and faith. He took upon himself the ultimate consequences in this situation, which recognised the penultimate, supporting the July 1944 attempt to kill Hitler and suffering the consequences of its failure through his death at the gallows.³⁶ Everyday life is, in Brazil as anywhere, characterised by the co-existence of good and evil. Some people attempt to avoid dealing with such ambiguity by running away from it. One way of doing this is to point to Christ as being the only one able to bring about

³⁵ See the latest report of Corporación Latinobarómetro, *Informe 2018* (Buenos Aires: Latinobarómetro, 2018), pp. 46-47, available at: <http://www.latinobarometro.org/lat.jsp>, accessed 31st August 2020; on Norway, see the table at: <https://ourworldindata.org/trust>, last accessed 31st August 2020.

³⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (London: SCM, 1955).

change on his return. In this case, the whole world is considered evil, a standpoint present in many conservative and millenarian churches.

Another way is to promise an all-encompassing solution through a fulfilled eschatology, as preached by the churches that hold to the gospel of prosperity. A moralistic legalism can also be seen as an attempt to resolve ambiguity. Instead of such attempts to escape ambiguity, it seems to be possible to see ourselves and others as being *simul iusti et peccatores* (both justified and sinners), being justified *in spe*, in hope, and being sinners *in re*, in reality, as Luther said.³⁷ I do not think this is a pessimistic vision, as some might think, but rather realistic. This also means that trust, as discussed above, cannot be a naïve trust, as if evil did not exist and the world were completely harmonious. For Christians, there is always the mistrust before human beings, as much of ourselves as of others, given our awareness of the power of sin. Knowing this, but not falling into despair because of our trust in God, we are able to endure ambiguity, a lack of clarity, constantly seeking the right path as an intrinsic part of life. This is why we as citizens are able to persevere.

4. We also need to highlight the motivation for citizenship, something that is not limited to people's rights or even their duties. Such motivation, which for Christians has a specifically theological foundation, is neither autonomy misunderstood as mere individual interest, nor heteronomy as blind subservience, but is based on seeking free service in freedom. Through justification by faith, Christians become new creatures, free from the captivity of evil, in a position to serve amid sin and evil. In his treaty on Christian freedom, Luther clearly shows that such freedom is not simply freedom of choice, but of service; being, at the same, a 'free lord' and 'subject to all', through our own will, not by coercion. Thus, we can see citizenship as service.

5. Finally, it is important to highlight that some Christian people and churches have a tendency to separate religion and politics, church and State, in a way to free themselves, incorrectly, of their responsibilities in relation to society as a whole. Others tend to confuse the two spheres and to impose their faith and church on others. Both tendencies need to be overcome by Christian citizens who see themselves as serving God under two distinct, but not separate, regimes. For Luther, living in the era of Christendom, it was clear that God would reign through the two regimes. This cannot be our starting point today, given religious pluralism and a secular state that is neutral in matters of religion. However, distinguishing the roles of the secular power and of the spiritual and ecclesiastical sphere still matters today in order to avoid an improper intrusion from the other side. We know that, historically, the doctrine of the two kingdoms or, more specifically, regiments, led to various limitations and dangers, resulting in subservience to an authoritarian, totalitarian regime in Nazi Germany. However, in a context where there are clear claims to power by churches and their leaders, making a distinction between the spheres as Luther insisted acquires a new contemporaneity.

These five aspects of the person as a citizen – of being, of living, of persevering, of serving, and of being under two regiments – represent for me the nucleus of a theology in the tradition of the Reformation that offers itself today for being a diaconal church in the public sphere contributing toward the transformation of society.

Conclusion

In concluding, I would affirm that there are tremendous challenges for the churches' diakonia in a highly polarised, insecure and violent context. Despite much necessary assistance being offered by the churches, the only institutions with such high capillarity, present even among the poorest of the poor, compete and strive for political power which has never worked well for the churches. While their role in the public sphere is strongly to be affirmed, by the Gospel it is better to be configured as a humble, but courageous contribution, rather than a self-interested occupation of the public sphere. As Jesus said to his disciples as they competed to sit close to Jesus in his Kingdom: 'whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and

³⁷ Martin Luther, 'Lectures on Romans', *Luther's Works*, vol. 25 (Missouri, MN: Concordia 2002), p. 260.

whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many' (Mt. 20:26-28).

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38. A LUTHERAN THEOLOGY FOR *DIAKONIA* IN NORTH AMERICAN CONTEXTS

Craig L. Nessian¹

Diakonia begins with the ministry of the Triune God in relation to all creation. God's creation of the cosmos, this world, and all its creatures, including humankind, expresses God's service (*diakonia*) to all that has been created, not out of obligation but out of the freedom of divine love.

All human beings were given the original diaconal charge: "to till [the garden] and keep it" (Gen. 2:15). Through the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16). The ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are expressions of God's *diakonia* for the sake of the world's redemption.

By the work of the Holy Spirit, each member of the church is incorporated into the body of Christ and has been equipped with gifts "for the work of ministry" so that "as each part is working properly" these gifts promote "the body's growth in building itself up in love" (Eph. 4:11-16). The Holy Spirit is loose in the world to preserve an endangered creation and to invent paths, often through the experiences of suffering, to render the *diakonia* of joining people into the life-giving relationship with God, with one another, and with the creation itself. The work of each member of the Holy Trinity is a form of *diakonia* to bring forth the shalom of God.²

God's Two Strategies at Work in the World

According to Luther, God employs two distinct but interrelated strategies for extending His kingdom. Each of these strategies employs specific means to attain God's purposes. According to the right-hand strategy, God has accomplished salvation by the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Central to Luther's concept is that the work of Jesus Christ occurs according to justification by grace through faith. Salvation is entirely God's merciful work granted to sinners for Christ's sake alone.

This gift is mediated through Word and Sacrament, the means of grace, by which the Holy Spirit delivers to recipients Christ's real presence and the gifts that belong to Christ. Holy Baptism and Holy Communion are sacraments by which Jesus Christ is present to incorporate members into the body of Christ and to nourish with his body and blood those who partake of the meal. Proclamation of the Word entails not only the preaching and teaching of the church in the gathered assembly but also encompasses the verbal communication by church members, who tell the promises of Jesus Christ to others in their various roles and relationships in daily life.³

For Luther, a central gift of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is Christian freedom. Jesus Christ grants freedom from everything that holds them in bondage. This means, according to Luther's *Small Catechism*, that Jesus Christ sets us free from sin, from death, and from the power of the devil. It is vital to understand that Jesus Christ also grants believers freedom. Although Christian existence always remains under the proviso of *simul justus et peccator* (simultaneously saint and sinner), Christian freedom always means *freedom for* service to the neighbours God gives us in this world, including creation itself as our neighbour.

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² The terms shalom and kingdom are here employed as synonyms for describing God's purposes for the world.

³ Richard H. Bliese and Craig Van Gelder (eds), *The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005), Chapter 7.

By the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel as mediated by the means of grace, Christians are sent into the world to embody the neighbourliness (*diakonia*) of all believers.⁴ This sending propels the baptised to participate in God's right-hand strategy through evangelical listening and speaking the promises of Christ to others, even as Christians are also sent to participate in God's left-hand strategy in the public world.

God's left-hand strategy involves God's governing the public world through structures that protect from harm and approximate justice, justice being the public form of love.⁵ In the 16th century, Luther named three institutions established by God for ordering the world: family, government, and church. At that time, family encompassed not only domestic relations but the economic livelihood of the family. Given the demarcation between family and work after the Enlightenment, it is more useful today to think about four interrelated arenas of public responsibility by Christians: family, work, government, and the church as religious institution.

Christians are formed by worship and the narrative of Scripture to render service to one's neighbours in God's left-hand strategy.⁶ These neighbours include members of one's own family, persons served through relationships in the workplace as well as by the work itself, those encountered in one's local community, those served by political advocacy for just legislation and policies, and people served by the contributions of religious institutions to civil society.

It is important to stress not only that Christians serve neighbours through these arenas but rather that God seeks to engage all people, whether religious or not, in serving their neighbours through the arenas in the left-hand strategy. While Christians claim their baptismal vocation in serving neighbours through these arenas, according to Luther all people are engaged in serving neighbours in these capacities whether they know it or not, thereby participating in God's left-hand strategy.

A Theology of Ministry Oriented toward Serving Neighbours

Although Martin Luther and other Reformation theologians sought to reconfigure the late medieval priesthood as the priesthood of all believers, the practice of the Reformation churches has never fulfilled the promise of this proposal. To a significant degree, the limitation of Reformation theology in relation to the priesthood of all believers is tied to the usage of the term "priesthood" to describe the vocation of the baptised. The metaphor of "priesthood" perpetuates a clerical misunderstanding of Christian vocation in the world, that is, real ministry is what "priests" (clergy) do. By contrast, the church needs to reimagine a theology for the ministry of the baptised in the world as "the neighbourliness" (*diakonia*) of all believers.

By the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, God sets Christian people *free from* all that holds them captive to the powers of this world – sin, death, and the power of the devil – and *free for* service of the neighbour in this world. In baptism, every Christian person has put on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In baptism, the Holy Spirit "ordains" every baptised person into the vocation of service to God and neighbour.

At the rite of affirmation of baptism (confirmation), the baptised are asked the question: "Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in holy baptism: to live among God's faithful people, to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper, to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, to serve all people, following the example of Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?" To which each person is asked to respond: "I do, and I ask God to help and guide me."⁷

⁴ Craig L. Nesson, "The Neighborliness (*Diakonia*) of All Believers," in Kathryn A. Kleinhans (ed), *Together by Grace: Introducing the Lutherans* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2016), pp. 143-146.

⁵ Cf. Paul Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 71.

⁶ Craig L. Nesson, *Shalom Church: The Body of Christ as Ministering Community* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2010), Chapter 3.

⁷ "Affirmation of Baptism", in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), p. 237.

As we have seen, God's purposes for this world are carried out through two distinctive, yet complementary strategies:

- 1) The right-hand strategy of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ; and
- 2) The left-hand strategy of providing structure and order to the created world.

God employs the baptised in both strategies *as the primary agents* to accomplish God's diaconal purpose of bringing life to the world.

"To equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12) entails formation both for the right-hand strategy of speaking the Gospel to others (the ministry of evangelising) and for the left-hand strategy of service to others through four distinct arenas of life in the created world (the ministry of shalom).

Evangelising begins with the art of evangelical listening to others that takes seriously the concrete situation of those with whom we speak. Drawing authentically from one's own experience, evangelising next involves speaking the promises of the faith in pointing others to the reality of God's work in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Shalom ministry – encompassing peacemaking, social justice, care for creation, and respect for inherent human dignity – is lived out as Christian neighbourliness in the four primary arenas in which God has placed the baptised for living in service to others: a) family, b) workplace, c) religious institutions, and d) engagement for the common good of the public world.

God gives us neighbours to serve in the primary community of family, no matter what the configuration of family might be. Two primary responsibilities of serving neighbours in families include: a) providing basic nutrition and b) providing healthy nurture through effective education, leading to the capacity to care for others. The agenda of a family politics thus involves guaranteeing nutrition (food security) and nurture (effective public education) for the next generation.

God gives us neighbours to serve in our daily work, no matter how that labour is constituted. Two primary responsibilities for serving neighbours in daily work include: a) securing sufficiency for human livelihood and b) providing significance and meaning through the creative use of human gifts in the workplace. The agenda of a politics of the economy therefore involves advocating sufficient livelihoods for all people and promoting opportunities for work that lend significance to the lives of workers, drawing upon people's abilities in a meaningful way.

God gives us neighbours to serve through religious institutions as these institutions contribute to the common good. Two primary responsibilities of religious institutions in serving neighbours in the left-hand strategy include: a) instilling a posture of gratitude in relation to life itself, and b) promoting generosity in relation to the needs of others. The public agenda for religious institutions thereby involves advocacy for laws that provide equity among all members of civil society and with attention to the well-being of those persons most endangered.

God gives us neighbours to serve through political engagement for the common good. Two primary responsibilities for serving neighbours in public life include: a) participation in the democratic processes to implement strong and equitable laws for promoting the common good and b) community organising and advocacy in the political process to protect the needs of "the least" (Mt. 25:31-46), something other than safeguarding one's own self-interest. Good government must always be measured by how the most endangered and marginalised people are treated, as well as creation itself.

The service of deacons, pastors, and bishops is properly oriented in a theology of ministry that gives priority to equipping the baptised for neighbourliness in daily life. Deacons are called both to model through their own ministries and to foster among the baptised the essential movement from sanctuary to street, church to society, which is marked by "the sending" from worship into the world.

Pastors serve Word and Sacrament through preaching, teaching, worship leadership, and pastoral care, in order that the Gospel of Jesus Christ sets the baptised *free from* all that holds them captive and *free for* serving

the neighbours God gives them in the arenas of daily life. Bishops serve the one holy catholic apostolic church, so that the ministries of unity (ecumenical relations, conflict resolution), holiness (discipline of faith and life), catholicity (global connections across time and space), and apostolicity (leadership in evangelical mission) promote the neighbourliness of the baptised.

A missional ecclesiology orients all offices of ministry toward *the sending of the baptised to be the primary agents in God's mission of serving neighbours in the world.*

And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 'Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?' He said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (Mt. 22: 35-40)

Having told them the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus asked: "'Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.' (Lk. 10: 36-37)

The Service of Deacons in Relationship to the Service of Pastors

How might we reimagine the service of pastors, Word and Sacrament ministry, in relation to the service of deacons, Word and Service ministry, and to the service of the whole people of God as diaconal ministry? A theology of ministry begins with affirming Word and Sacrament as a ministry of service "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12).

How do Word and Sacrament ministers contribute to this service? By so proclaiming the Word and stewarding the sacraments that the *laos* are: 1) set free from everything that prevents them from serving as the diaconal ministers they have been called to be, and 2) set free for living out their baptismal calling in all the arenas of daily life where they have been given neighbours to serve – in family, workplace, the local community, and civil society.

Word and Sacrament ministry must be renewed as a ministry oriented toward God's purposes of equipping a diaconal church in service for the life of the world. The ministry of Word and Service is neither a threat to nor in competition with Word and Sacrament ministry. Instead, Word and Sacrament ministry finds its fulfilment only when it is exercised as a contribution to the vibrancy of a diaconal church, sent and scattered for the ministry of Word and Service in all the arenas of daily life.

With this expansive understanding of the diaconal ministry of all believers, also expressed as the neighbourliness of all believers, the role of those called as deacons becomes as crucial for the contemporary church as it was in the life of the earliest church. Deacons provide a twofold necessary role on behalf of the diaconal church. Firstly, through the exercise of their own charismatic gifts (in whatever areas of specialisation), they themselves participate in Word and Service ministry: sent by the church from worship into the world for service to neighbours and bringing the needs of the world to the attention and ministry of the church. Secondly, deacons, through their ministry, serve as catalysts among the whole people of God, equipping the baptised people for service, in order that the church becomes a diaconal church at the heart of its identity and mission.

The revitalisation of the one holy catholic apostolic church in our time includes the renewal of the diaconate as a historic and inherently necessary office. The future of diaconal ministry involves the ongoing reformation of the entire church to engage in Word and Service ministry for the life of the world in the name of Jesus Christ. Word and Sacrament ministers have opportunity to become articulate interpreters and advocates for deacons as ministers of Word and Service, in order that the post-Christendom church be transformed into a missional church to fully engage diaconal ministry in the arenas of daily life.

The *Diakonia* of All Believers

The church in North America faces a Babylonian captivity as all-encompassing and debilitating as that criticised by Luther in the sixteenth century. Today, the Babylonian captivity of the church, although differently guised, is equally deadly for the vitality of the church's mission: the reduction of Christian ministry to that which is done in the name of the institutional church. Church members largely think that only what is organised by the institutional church or done within the confines of a church building really counts as Christian ministry. This compartmentalisation of Christian existence, confined to those activities organised and conducted by congregations, constitutes what can be described as the "churchification" of Christian ministry.

Recent literature on "missional church" addresses the question of how congregations as primary agents can become more missional; how leaders and members can become more welcoming and proactive in congregational outreach. While this development is salutary, the missional church needed for our time must develop intentional focus on how congregations can serve as equipping communities connecting faith with the many roles and responsibilities through which the baptised live out their ministries in daily life. The centre of gravity for embodying "missional church" needs to shift from what we do as the church gathered to what we do as the church scattered.⁸

For Luther, "faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace so certain that you could stake your life on it one thousand times."⁹ At the time of the Reformation, the universal priesthood made a radical claim about the equal status of all believers before God based on baptism. This was intended to overcome the dependency of the laity on the ministrations of a clerical hierarchy. While leaders of the institutional church pay lip service to the universal priesthood of all believers, primary attention in most efforts at outreach involve securing financial resources and attracting new members for the sake of the survival of the church as institution. The divide between what happens in and for the institutional church, especially on Sundays, and living out one's faith the rest of the week – in service to neighbours at home, at work, in the local community, and through citizenship – has become enormous.

Whereas in North America a deep rift exists between what happens in the name of the institutional church and the rest of people's lives, in other parts of the world, especially in the Southern Hemisphere and in Asia, Christianity as an entire way of life remains more integral and unified. The churches of the North have much to learn from the churches of the South and in Asia about validating and equipping all the baptised for their vocations in daily life. How can we participate in God's renewal of the church in the sense of the universal neighbourliness (priesthood) of all the baptised?

The "priesthood of all believers" needs to be reinterpreted as "the *diakonia* of all believers." *Diakonia* is an ancient Christian ministry necessary for renewing and reforming the ministry of the baptised, engaging them in service to the mission of the Triune God. Deacons were first appointed in the book of Acts to be persons "full of the Spirit and of wisdom" appointed to wait on tables in the daily distribution of food (Acts 6:1-6). At the heart of *diakonia* is the service of the neighbour. *Diakonia* means following the Great Commandment of Jesus: to love God and to love one's neighbour as oneself. *Diakonia* means freedom from everything that keeps us in bondage to self-preoccupation and freedom for imagining multiple forms of service to others in the arenas of daily life.

"The sending" at the end of the liturgy calls for the continuation, not conclusion, of Christian worship: "Go in peace, serve the Lord;" "Go in peace, share the good news;" "Go in peace, remember the poor;" "Go in peace, Christ is with you!" One of the central theological themes since the time of the Reformation has

⁸ Dubois, Dwight L. *The Scattering: Imagining a Church that Connects Faith and Life*. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015).

⁹ Martin Luther, "Prefaces to the New Testament," Luther's Works (American Edition) vol. 35 (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1960), pp. 370-371.

been “the priesthood of all believers.” In the rite for “Affirmation of Christian Vocation” the baptised are asked this question:

Will you endeavour to pattern your life on the Lord Jesus Christ, in gratitude to God and in service to others, at morning and evening, at work and at play, all the days of your life?¹⁰

The baptised respond: “I will, and I ask God to help me.” This also conforms with the promise made at the affirmation of baptism (confirmation).

Everything we do at worship is directly related to forming us for a way of life as Christian people in the world. As we participate in liturgy, we not only worship God but also engage in ritual practices that immerse us in the way of Jesus Christ himself, who makes us members of the body of Christ and engraves upon us the character of Jesus Christ.¹¹

God in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit is the Primary Actor when we gather for worship. When we define liturgy as “the work of the people”, we must not lose sight of a central conviction informing our worship: “We” are not the primary actors when we gather for worship; instead, the Triune God is the Primary Actor who is doing something “to us”. Worship is less about what we are doing for God and more about what God in Christ does to us. As we immerse ourselves in the practices of worship through the liturgy, we are being formed for distinctive Christian life practices in the world.

At the conclusion of worship, we are sent to be the people of God conforming to the way of Jesus Christ in every role and relationship throughout the week. We are sent to serve the Lord, share the good news, and remember the poor. At worship, the members of the body of Christ become the forgiveness of God, the praise of God, the word of God, the intercessions of God, the peace of God, the hospitality of God, and the food of God, who are sent forth to be the forgiveness, praise, word, intercessions, peace, hospitality, and food of God through universal neighbourliness, the *diakonia* of all believers, in daily life.

Toward the Recovery of the Diaconate within Lutheran Social Ministry Organisations in North America¹²

The renewal of *diakonia* movements and the founding of diaconal organisations, particularly deaconess orders, is one of the great retrievals of the biblical tradition in 19th century Europe. Impulses from German Pietism, in particular from August Hermann Francke (1663-1727) and Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760), gave rise to the recovery of the diaconate by Johann Hinrich Wichern (1808-1881), Theodore Fliedner (1800-1864), Wilhelm Loehe (1808-1872), and Friedrich Christian Carl von Bodelschwingh (1831-1910), each of whom organised orders of deacons and deaconesses for social ministry in institutions founded to address the needs of the most vulnerable people in society. In Germany, Scandinavia, and other parts of Europe these institutions have continued to provide social service informed by a strong tradition of Christian *diakonia*.

The founding of the deaconess movement in North America is attributed to the work of William Alfred Passavant (1821-1894). Passavant had visited Fliedner and prepared for establishing deaconess work in North America with the intention to extend the Kaiserswerth model in the U.S. In 1849, Passavant and Sister Elizabeth Hupperts, who had been directing a children’s station in Berlin and was designated to serve as the

¹⁰ “Affirmation of Christian Vocation,” in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 84.

¹¹ Cf. “Worship Practices as Life Practices,” Life of Faith Initiative, <<http://lifeoffaith.info/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Worship-Practices-as-Life-Practices.pdf>> Accessed 10 January 2019.

¹² For a more extensive treatment, see Craig L. Nesson, “Diakonia in an International Perspective: The Diaconate and Lutheran Social Services in North America,” in Johannes Eurich, Beate Hofmann, and Thorsten Moos (eds), *International Perspectives on Research in Diakonia*. Forthcoming.

lead sister in Pittsburgh, arrived in America accompanied by three recently consecrated deaconesses: Paulina Ludewig, Luise Hinrichsen, and Elizabeth Hess.¹³ A motherhouse was formed on June 17, 1850 with Hupperts as house matron and Passavant as director.

While the work of Passavant continued among deaconesses at Milwaukee, as well as at three institutions in Pennsylvania and one at Jacksonville, Illinois, it never flourished among social ministry organisations according to the German pattern. This was likewise true of the work by those few deaconesses sent by Wilhelm Loehle.¹⁴ Attempts by the Iowa Synod to establish a motherhouse at Toledo, Ohio in 1870 and an orphanage at Buffalo, New York in 1869 floundered. In the end, all *Neuendettelsau* deaconesses sent to America either married or returned to Germany.

In the U.S., the focus of deaconess service increasingly shifted from the establishment of social ministry institutions to diaconal service in institutions organised by congregations and judicatories. The deaconesses from the Philadelphia Motherhouse, founded at the impetus of John D. Lankenau (1817-1901) in 1888, embodied most fully the German model: space dedicated to the deaconess formation and community life that included a home for the aged, a children's hospital, and eventually a kindergarten.¹⁵ The Kaiserswerth General Conference granted conditional membership to the Philadelphia deaconess community in September 1888 and the General Synod established a Board of Deaconess Work in 1889.

Centred in a Motherhouse, deaconesses offered many forms of service, for example, nursing, social work, chaplaincy, and management, among other forms of service, and in various institutional settings, for example, hospitals, orphanages, homes for the elderly, and care facilities for the intellectually disabled. This pattern is underscored by the historical narratives about the origin of Lutheran social service organisations in America, which only cursorily acknowledge connections to the ministry of deaconesses. In contrast to the origins of historic social service organisations in Germany that remain deeply grounded in diaconal service, social ministry organisations in the U.S. have been impoverished by the loss of an explicit and particular focus on diaconal theology.

The historical narrative of those social ministry organisations in the United States that became affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has been written with scant reference to diaconal movements in Germany, Scandinavia, and other parts of Europe, despite the origins of these institutions from 19th and early 20th century immigrant communities.¹⁶

Among the requisites for social ministry organisations are sound administrative practices, integration of services, and the holistic care of persons.¹⁷ Challenges include financial sustainability, maintaining a collegial atmosphere, abiding by the laws of the state, providing quality of care, and the religious diversity of staff. As social ministry organisations have evolved in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, an increasing focus has been directed at the Christian *specificum* that connects these efforts at social service with Christian commitments in general and Lutheran identity in particular.

At the founding of Lutheran Social Services in America in April 1997, the vision statement looked “to increase the service and witness of God’s people in both church and society” in accordance with the mission “to support the members’ ministries of service and justice by creating a unified system to build and maintain

¹³ Jeannine E. Olson, *Deacons and Deaconesses throughout the Centuries* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2005), p. 261.

¹⁴ See Olson, *Deacons and Deaconesses*, p. 265.

¹⁵ Frederick S. Weiser, “The Origins of Lutheran Deaconesses in America,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 13 (1999), p. 427.

¹⁶ See Carl T. Uehling, *Hope and Healing: Lutheran Social Ministry Organizations Expressing the Compassion of Christ in American Life* (St. Paul, MN: Lutheran Services in America, 1999); Foster R. McCurley (ed), *Social Ministry in the Lutheran Tradition* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008).

¹⁷ Foster R. McCurley, *The Social Ministry of the Church* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1989), pp. 67-89.

relationships and resources.”¹⁸ As a national system, Lutheran social ministry organisations encompassed services which included “addiction, administration, advocacy, aging, children/youth/family, congregational and chaplaincy, consulting and education, disability, emergency/disaster, grant making, health care, housing and community development, mental health, outreach and support.”¹⁹

Given the consolidation of Lutheran social ministry organisations, there have been distinctive challenges that needed attention. Uehling explored these issues at the end of the 20th century, a process of discernment that continues to the present day. Beyond the issues of financial viability, inter-Lutheran cooperation, and negotiating the issues related to state regulations, a central question facing Lutheran social ministry organisations is about the tie that binds them to the church.²⁰

In a pluralistic and religiously diverse society: “What is essential is the agency’s understanding of itself as a ministry that is motivated by the gospel of Jesus Christ and driven by its commitment to participate in God’s mission in the world.”²¹ At issue is not only the specific Christian mission fulfilled by Lutheran social ministry organisations but in particular their Lutheran identity in relation to those church communities that belong to their historical origin.

Rebecca Larson has observed how Lutheran social ministry organisations might be renewed in their identity through greater attention to the theology of *diakonia*:

I have been involved in an international project on *diakonia* that is bringing together experiences from different parts of the world. In Europe, including the historic Lutheran countries, there are very low levels of church membership and/or engagement in social ministry. In these situations, diaconal institutions have grown up on principles very unconnected with the church in many cases. People value and support these institutions and see in them the presence of the church. In Africa and Asia (and differently in Latin America) there is a total integration of diaconal and church work. It is understood as one and the same. Sorting out these relationships between the church and SMOs in North America is critical for the future.²²

Throughout the literature dedicated to the history and work of Lutheran social ministry organisations in America, there is only infrequent mention of the history and theology of diaconal ministry. We propose, with Larson, that the way forward for Lutheran social ministry organisations for recovering Lutheran identity is through renewal of the historic understanding of *diakonia* as preserved by Lutheran churches in other global contexts in continuity with their origin in diaconal theology and practice.

Lutheran social ministry organisations have begun an exploration to “more fully incorporate the hallmarks of Lutheran understanding into their daily work.” This includes Lutheran themes such as “grace, vocation, neighbourliness, forgiveness, mercy, and community.” As a key initiative, James M. Childs, Jr. was commissioned to develop a resource book and study guide devoted to the question: “What It Means to be Lutheran in Social Ministry.”²³ Lutheran Social Services in America undertook this project because: “Being Lutheran in social ministry is identifiable, valued, and supported by social ministry organizations, church bodies, and communities.”²⁴

¹⁸ Robert Duea, “Bringing Hope and Life: Lutheran Social Ministry Organizations in America since World War II,” in McCurley (ed), *Social Ministry in the Lutheran Tradition*, p. 124.

¹⁹ Duea, “Bringing Hope and Life: Lutheran Social Ministry Organizations in America since World War II,” p. 125.

²⁰ Uehling, *Hope and Healing*, p. 127.

²¹ Uehling, *Hope and Healing*, p. 129.

²² The Future’s Group, “Where Do We Go from Here?” in McCurley (ed), *Social Ministry in the Lutheran Tradition*, p. 133.

²³ James M. Childs, Jr. “Joined at the Heart: What It Means to be Lutheran in Social Ministry,” *A Resource for Lutheran Social Ministry Organizations* (St. Paul, MN: Lutheran Social Services in America, 2000).

²⁴ Childs, Jr. “Joined at the Heart,” p. 2.

As the “distinctive theological and ethical themes and convictions”, Childs, Jr. named six topics central to the Lutheran tradition: Christian freedom and neighbourly love, human existence as being saints and sinners at the same time, the distinction between law and Gospel, civil righteousness, the two realms, and justification by grace through faith.²⁵

One limitation of this proposal involved the question of agency. Who are those called to serve as the bearers of the Lutheran theological and ethical tradition? Does responsibility depend upon the influence of the Chief Executive Officer and other executive level staff? Does the inculcation of these theological and ethical themes depend upon those employees who remain connected to the Lutheran tradition and congregations? Does it depend on the influence of those auxiliary to the social ministry organisations, local pastors or perhaps a chaplain?

The recovery of the historic office of deacon with its biblical warrant, traditions, theology, and practices offers clear direction for addressing the challenge of agency for retrieving distinctive Lutheran understandings within social ministry organisations. How might Lutheran social ministry organisations be transformed by the service of deacons as catalysts within these institutions?

An Appeal for Theologically Trained and Bi-Vocational Deacons

Claiming this vision for diaconal ministry within Lutheran social ministry organisations has the potential to dramatically transform the identity and mission of these organisations in the sense of a revitalised understanding, not only of Lutheran identity but in the spirit of Christian *diakonia*. This could be accomplished by intentional partnership in the education and formation of theologically trained, bi-vocational deacons to serve in Lutheran social ministry organisations.

Theological preparation and formation can be undertaken in collaboration with Lutheran social ministry organisations throughout the student’s educational process. Candidates for the diaconate receive theological education from a seminary, while the contextual education and internship components could be served within a Lutheran social ministry organisation. Upon completion of the degree or certificate program, the graduate would be ready for employment to provide agency for reclaiming the focus on *diakonia* within that organisation.

This bi-vocational preparation involves education in a parallel track through an undergraduate major and advanced study in a field directly related to the vocation to serve within a Lutheran social ministry organisation. There are a range of majors that could be encompassed that are of direct relevance for the work within these organisations, including but not limited to social work, counselling, psychology, public health, nursing, occupational therapy, health and fitness, music therapy, leadership, computer science, management, business administration, accounting, finance, marketing, intercultural studies, and foreign languages, especially Spanish. The education of students as theologically trained and bi-vocational deacons could be accomplished through accelerated programs of study designed especially for them.

Insofar as European social service organisations have generations of experience and expertise in the integration of diaconal ministry with corporate business culture, an international exchange between North American and European-based social ministry leaders and theologians could prove extremely valuable for learning how to reimplement the ministry of deacons as agents of *diakonia* within Lutheran social ministry organisations.²⁶

Barbara Städtler-Mach writes:

²⁵ Cf. Childs, Jr. “Joined at the Heart,” pp. 21-27.

²⁶ See Peter Helbich, Peter Oberender, and Jürgen Zenker (eds), *Diakonische Perspektiven für innovative Strategien: Impulse für eine nachhaltige Unternehmensführung in der Sozial- und der Gesundheitswirtschaft* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2015), esp. Section One on “Theological Strategies in Diaconal Business Operations,” pp. 34-81.

Lived spirituality provides a competitive advantage. In no way is this competitive advantage weak or even in vain. As all other possible competitive advantages, it is necessary to make a foundational decision and offer continued attention. Without the conviction that this effort is requisite, and without continual engagement for this transformation, there will be no such recognisable advantage.²⁷

Taking this assertion as a serious business proposal, what kind of lively innovations might emerge from international engagement toward the transformation of Lutheran social ministry organisations in the U.S.?

The conversation in the U.S. could also be advanced by dialogue with theologians of diaconal science in Scandinavia and Germany. Writing from the context of Norway, Stephanie Dietrich proposes that “*diakonia*” implies both voluntary help and care offered by individuals based on their own motivation, and socio-political *diakonia* focusing on just structures in society and proactive work. These are not alternatives, but both sides complement each other.”²⁸ Reflecting a German perspective, Beate Hofmann sets forth this key issue:

In the leadership of “*diaconic enterprises*” you will find people with training in business administration, some with a background in the social sciences, and some with a theological education. The challenge is to address professional standards, economic limits, and spiritual needs. Questions about “*Christian management*” and a diaconic science have emerged.²⁹

Theologically trained bi-vocational deacons could help to reimagine and address these questions in the U.S. context.

The historical narratives and study processes related to Lutheran social ministry organisations in the U.S. at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century is notable for the relative absence of *diakonia* as an organising theological theme. While there is recognition of the need to focus on Lutheran theological themes, the question about agency for the implementation of this effort remains largely unaddressed. Reclaiming the agency of deacons within Lutheran social ministry organisations in North America offers promise for addressing this gap. There is much to be learned from an international exchange about the integration of diaconal ministers within the Lutheran social service system in the U.S. context.

Suggestions for Further Reading

- Nessan, Craig L. “*Diakonia* in an International Perspective: The Diaconate and Lutheran Social Services in North America,” in Johannes Eurich, Beate Hofmann, and Thorsten Moos, Eds. *International Perspectives on Research in Diakonia*. Forthcoming.
- Nessan, Craig L. Issue Editor, “The Future of Diaconal Ministry.” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 42 (July 2015): <http://currentsjournal.org/index.php/currents/issue/view/6>.
- Nessan, Craig L. *Shalom Church: The Body of Christ as Ministering Community* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2010).
- Nessan, Craig L. “The Neighborliness (*Diakonia*) of All Believers,” in Kathryn A. Kleinhans, Ed. *Together by Grace: Introducing the Lutherans* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2016), pp. 143-146.

²⁷ Barbara Städtler-Mach, “Spiritualität, Führung, und Unternehmen,” in Helbich, Oberender, and Zenker (eds), *Diakonische Perspektiven für innovative Strategien*, p. 55 (author translation).

²⁸ Stephanie Dietrich, “‘Mercy and Truth Are Met Together; Righteousness and Peace Have Kissed Each Other’ (Psalm 85:10): Biblical and Systematic Theological Perspectives on *Diakonia* as Advocacy and Fight for Justice,” in Stephanie Dietrich, Knud Jørgensen, Kari Karsrud Korslien, and Kjell Nordstokke (eds), *Diakonia as Christian Social Practice: An Introduction* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014), pp. 43-44.

²⁹ Beate Hofmann, “*Diakonia* between Church and Society: Learning from German Experiences and Challenges,” in *Currents in Theology and Mission* 42 (2015), pp. 221-222, in an issue dedicate to the theme, “The Future of Diaconal Ministry.”

39. NORTH AMERICAN DIACONIA AND THE DEACONESS MOVEMENT¹

Jenny Wiley Legath²

Early Beginnings of the Deaconess Movement in the 19th Century

Diaconia has a robust history in North America, growing from roots in the nineteenth-century deaconess movement. Inspired by the figure of Phoebe in Paul's New Testament letter to the Romans and following examples of deaconesses in Germany and England and Catholic sisters nearby, North American Protestant women adapted and adopted the office of deaconess. Episcopal and Lutheran churches attempted to establish deaconesses in North America as early as the 1850s. These earliest efforts were fragile; it was another few decades before the movement gained traction on the American side of the Atlantic. Often women began deaconess work on their own or with the support of individual sympathetic clergymen before the denomination officially authorised the office. But within a twenty-five-year span, more than a dozen denominations formally established the order of deaconesses in their church polities: Norwegian Lutherans, 1883; Church of England, provincial synod of Canada, 1886; Methodist Episcopal Church, 1888; Protestant Episcopal Church, 1889; Evangelical Synod, 1889; Presbyterian Church (USA), 1892; German Reformed Church, 1892; German Methodist Episcopal Church, 1896; Church of the United Brethren in Christ and Canadian Methodists, both 1897; Evangelical Association, 1898; African Methodist Episcopal Church and General Conference Mennonites, both 1900; Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1902; Danish Lutherans, 1903; United Evangelical Church, 1906; Methodist Protestant Church and Canadian Presbyterians, both 1908; and Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, the outlying latecomers, 1919.³

Caregiving as Key Role of Deaconesses and Gendered Expectations of the Women's Work in German American Traditions

With many variations among different groups, deaconesses wore a uniform garb in a dark colour, remained unmarried, lived together in community, and earned no salary, receiving instead room and board and a small allowance. Most deaconesses refrained from making vows – a practice they deemed too Roman Catholic – and thus remained free to leave their communities if they chose. The work these women did also differed, but it was encompassed within the rubric of diaconia: rendering service. The caregiving performed by deaconesses coincided with the gendered expectations of women's work in this period, protecting them from fellow church members who might object to women in public roles. Nursing, teaching, childcare, eldercare, and neighbourhood-visiting were all in accord with late-nineteenth-century assumptions that women were naturally more nurturing and sympathetic than men. Deaconesses argued that they used women's divine gifts of heart and influence to serve others, the way ideal white women should, manipulating prevailing cultural assumptions about womanhood, marriage, motherhood, and family to create the deaconess vocation.

Deaconesses in the German and Scandinavian denominations specialised in health care in hospitals and branch institutions of orphanages and homes for the elderly. This focus on nursing served as an evangelistic

¹ This essay is an abbreviated version of Jenny Wiley Legath, *Sanctified Sisters: A History of Protestant Deaconesses* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), p. 18. This essay draws largely from chapters 1 and 6. Please refer to *Sanctified Sisters* for further reading.

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³ See: Jenny Wiley Legath, *Sanctified Sisters: A History of Protestant Deaconesses* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 18. This essay draws largely from chapters 1 and 6. Please refer to *Sanctified Sisters* for further reading.

strategy and as a remedy to the immediate needs of their ethnic group. Germans constituted the largest group of foreign-born Americans in 1900, with Scandinavians not far behind. Although they also each had distinct theological traditions, Lutheran, Mennonite, Evangelical Synod, German Reformed, and German Methodist deaconesses shared a cultural history and – not insignificantly – the German language. Together, these groups created a diaconate that aspired to be faithful to the continental motherhouse ideal. In the 1880s and 90s, German Americans from different confessions even worked together to found a handful of interdenominational motherhouses.

More Social and Structural Approaches in Methodist Deaconess Traditions

At the other end of the American diaconal spectrum, the Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and a sprinkling of Congregationalists and Baptists often took a social and structural approach to their work. These deaconesses were influenced by the Social Gospel, which, as its name suggests, was an endeavour to redeem individuals by redeeming society and gave special attention to the plight of the poor. The Methodist diaconate also reflected the influence of the Holiness movement, which encouraged believers to seek the “second blessing” of entire sanctification. This idea of Christian perfection provided additional impetus for evangelism and proved amenable to women preaching. These deaconesses concerned themselves especially with cities and new immigrants. They, too, found nursing an effective means of ministry, although they spent more time in poor neighbourhoods than in hospitals. They also could be found within government structures, serving as election judges, riding in police paddy wagons, assisting in the juvenile courts, or serving the immigrants detained on Ellis Island in New York and Angel Island in California. Yet, their work remained distinct from secular social service; these deaconesses always insisted that the gospel was at the heart of the Social Gospel. The Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and others could be found either in deaconess homes (as they preferred to call motherhouses) or working independently. While they favoured, and even sentimentalised, communal living, deaconess founders in these denominations lacked the fierce commitment to the motherhouse ideal.

Deaconesses as Forerunners of the Ordination of Women in Protestant Denominations?

Contemporary authors have celebrated deaconesses as the “forerunners of the ordination of women in Protestant denominations.”⁴ But the on-the-ground relationship between deaconesses and the clergy was complicated: just as deaconesses used the professional example of the minister to construct their vocations, ministers used deaconesses to buttress their own professional identities. Clergymen were glad to shift onto deaconesses responsibilities that did not bolster their own masculine sense of profession, such as pastoral care. Deaconesses who attempted to use tools that ministers valued more highly, such as preaching, encountered more resistance. In the end, most deaconesses sought to construct a vocation that had the same legitimacy and esteem as the ordained ministry but that was *not* the ordained ministry.

By 1920 the deaconess office was well established, with an infrastructure of brick-and-mortar institutions. But just as the deaconess movement was poised to take off, it faltered for lack of recruits. Additional career options opened for women that did not make such counter-cultural demands on their personal liberty, including, in almost all the denominations that had established deaconess offices, ordination to the ministry. The Evangelical and Reformed Church permitted the ordination of women in 1949. Methodist women gained full clergy rights in 1956, the same year the Presbyterian Church began ordaining women as ministers. The

⁴ Rosemary Radford Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin, *Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), p. 24.

Lutheran Church in America permitted women's ordination in 1970, and the Episcopal Church followed suit in 1976.⁵ The ordained ministry offered yet another option to women who felt called to serve the church.

Growing Spaces for Women's Decision Making and Options on How to Shape the Deaconess Roles in the Late Twentieth Century

In the face of declining interest, deaconess groups made decisions about which changes they were willing to accept and which they were not. Some deaconess bodies, unwilling to lower their standards, as they saw it, did in fact die out. In some churches, deaconesses became deacons, indistinguishable from their male colleagues in a newly gender-neutral diaconate. Eventually, the deaconess groups who endured made wearing the garb optional, allowed marriage, and began paying salaries. For these groups, the late twentieth century provided the opportunity to rethink and articulate anew the need for the office of deaconess. Deaconess bodies that survived and thrived into the twenty-first century have creatively re-envisioned their office in a way that makes sense of new expectations by and of women yet remains true to the heart of the diaconate as a unique way of being and doing in the world. Using different approaches, several Methodist and Lutheran deaconess groups are leading the diaconate into a new period of growth and flourishing today.

As the largest Protestant denomination throughout the heyday of the deaconess movement, Methodism was able to produce by far the greatest number of consecrated deaconesses in the United States, although most were not lifelong members of the office. Methodists also proved flexible in adapting the office over time, though not without considerable introspection and administrative trial and error. They devoted the early to middle part of the twentieth century to untangling the deaconess work from its distinctive lifestyle. In 1920, the wearing of the prescribed garb was made optional. In the 1930s and 40s, the allowance ideal quietly gave way to a model of equal pay for equal work. In 1959, Methodist deaconesses were permitted to continue in their office after marriage. Rethinking garb, allowance, and marriage was only part of a larger effort of soul searching for mid-century Methodist deaconesses. In the 1970s, Methodist deaconesses encountering emerging feminist theology questioned whether the gender-segregated office promoted women's oppression.⁶

Consecrations slowed to a trickle from 1980 to 1995 while committees deliberated, and the number of active United Methodist deaconesses reached a nadir of sixty-nine. The 1996 General Conference restated its support for the deaconess office, and the movement slowly began to grow once more, claiming its unique mission as the only order of lay people consecrated to the full-time vocation of love, justice, and service.

Methodist Deaconesses Opening the Diaconal Office to Men

To twenty-first-century Methodist deaconesses, opening the diaconal office to men has been important but complicated. Because the term "deacon" has traditionally marked a step in the Methodist ordination process, that term is not available as a male or gender-neutral naming option for the lay diaconate. In 2004, the position of "home missionary" was created as a parallel diaconal opportunity for men, and today there are close to a dozen in full-time service nationwide. Today's Office of Deaconess and Home Missioner, administered by the United Methodist Women, represents a compromise between valuing the tradition of deaconesses in biblical and Methodist history and offering men a parallel consecrated lay vocation.

⁵ Laura R. Olson, Sue E. S. Crawford, and Melissa M. Deckman, *Women with a Mission: Religion, Gender, and the Politics of Women Clergy* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005).

⁶ Elizabeth Meredith Lee, *As Among the Methodists: Deaconesses Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (New York: Woman's Division of Christian Service, Board of Mission, Methodist Church, 1963), pp. 66-67; Mary Agnes Dougherty, *My Calling to Fulfill: Deaconesses in the United Methodist Tradition* (New York: Women's Division, General Board of Global Ministries, the United Methodist Church, 1997), pp. 223; 61: 249.

As of 2019, there were 280 United Methodist deaconesses and home missionaries in the United States. Most deaconesses first sense a calling to a particular career, and then, recognising that their vocation aligns with the mission of love, justice, and service, seek out a relationship with the Office of Deaconess and Home Missioner. United Methodist deaconesses serve as firefighters, court-appointed children's advocates, chaplains, community organisers, and non-profit administrators, to name a few roles. Some are outspoken advocates for immigration justice and detention issues along the US/Mexico border and at least two deaconesses have worked for the Reconciling Ministries Network, which works for the inclusion of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. Although not all Methodists in the United States are liberal, many deaconesses embrace liberal social causes, heirs to both their foremothers' Social Gospel commitment and the twentieth-century social justice tradition of mainline Protestantism. United Methodist deaconesses, along with their home missionary counterparts, seem to have successfully re-envisioned their office as an opportunity to join a community of laypeople, recognised by the church and committed to love, justice, and service.

Changing roles and cultural patterns in the Lutheran Deaconess Movement

Deaconesses in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America have also spent the past century re-envisioning their office. Beginning in the 1920s, Lutheran deaconesses, like their sisters in other churches, asked for more concessions to popular culture, particularly in issues of personal liberty. In 1948, Lutherans again revamped their garb in an effort to update and standardise the uniform across the Lutheran motherhouses, but more drastic steps were needed. In 1952, the United Lutheran Church instituted a parallel track for deaconesses who chose to wear "civilian clothes" instead of the garb and chose to be paid a salary instead of receiving the allowance. In 1978, the traditional "cooperative plan" was phased out, and all new deaconesses received a salary. Lutheran deaconesses slowly warmed up to the idea of permitting women to continue to serve as deaconesses after marriage. Although disagreement persisted, in 1969, the following carefully worded policy was adopted: "Deaconesses who marry may be privileged to continue to serve in their office as deaconesses as long as in the opinion of the Sisters' Council they are available for full time service." It was not until 1982 that this policy was amended to allow for part-time service.⁷

From the Motherhouse Model to the Covenanted Community Model

One of the more sweeping changes to the Lutheran deaconess community has been the transformation from the motherhouse model to a covenanted community of geographically dispersed women. In 1953, the Philadelphia motherhouse had moved from downtown into the mansion known as Skylands on a lush piece of land in the suburbs of Gladwyne, Pennsylvania, donated to the order by friend and supporter, Mary Ethel Pew. In the 1960s, deaconesses from the Baltimore and Omaha motherhouses joined their sisters in Gladwyne. For the next thirty years, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) deaconesses were consolidated in this one motherhouse. A monumental change came in 1998 when the deaconesses opted to sell the multi-million-dollar property, deciding that spending upwards of a million dollars just to bring the aged estate up to code was not a justifiable use of their resources.⁸

The ELCA deaconess community now has an office in Chicago alongside the denominational headquarters, but, outside of retirement homes, its individual deaconesses no longer live in community.

⁷ Frederick Sheely Weiser, *To Serve the Lord and His People, 1884-1984: Celebrating the Heritage of a Century of Lutheran Deaconesses in America* (Gladwyne, PA: Deaconess Community of the Lutheran Church in America, 1984), pp. 22-27.

⁸ Marc Schogol, "Gladwyne Deaconess Estate is Saved from Development," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 11, 2002.

Despite their geographical dispersion, community remains a defining feature of the current ELCA deaconess office, recast as an intentional community of prayer and mutual support, enabled not just by yearly conferences but also by new technologies of email newsletters and Facebook “likes.”

ELCA deaconesses now also live in the tension of holding a gender-neutral office in a gender-specific community. Although still members of the Deaconess Community, in 2017 ELCA deaconesses officially became deacons when the church merged three rosters of lay workers (deaconesses, associates in ministry, and diaconal ministers) into a unified roster with the gender-neutral title of “deacon.” As of March 2019, there were 78 sisters in the ELCA Deaconess Community. This number is growing as eighteen candidates prepare for consecration.⁹ The story of the diaconate in the ELCA will evolve with them.

The Special Role and Distinct Theological Character of Deaconess Movement in the Lutheran Church Missouri Tradition

The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) was a latecomer to the American deaconess movement. The most theologically and socially conservative of the many US Lutheran bodies, the Missouri Synod remained suspicious of Romanism lurking in the deaconess office throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. It was not until 1919 that five ministers and three laymen independently organised the Lutheran Deaconess Association (LDA), which, although founded by and for LCMS members, has never been formally affiliated with the Missouri Synod, or any other Lutheran church. From its inception, the LCMS emphasised more explicitly than other denominations the circumscription of women’s roles. Rev. F. W. Herzberger, a city missionary in St. Louis, was a vocal early advocate for training LCMS deaconesses. In the first issue of the *Lutheran Deaconess*, he insisted, “The office, as we all know, is limited in its scope by the physical nature of woman and certain limitations of Holy Writ. Within these limitations our Society purposes to carry on its deaconess work.”¹⁰ Writers from other denominations were more oblique about the scriptural limitations of women’s role in the church, but for the LCMS, this was, and remains, a key part of their confessional identity.

The mid-twentieth century witnessed increasing financial, administrative, and doctrinal struggles between the Missouri Synod and the Lutheran Deaconess Association. In the 1970s, LCMS deaconesses and their supporters became unhappy with liberalising theological positions of the LDA, including “resolutions supporting sisters preparing for the ministry” and allowing an ordained woman from the American Lutheran Church to celebrate Holy Eucharist at the 1978 annual deaconess conference in Valparaiso, Indiana. The LCMS disaffiliated with the LDA in 1979 and created its own confessional deaconess training programme at the synodical colleges and the new Concordia Deaconess Conference (CDC). As in other contemporary diaconates, LCMS deaconesses live independently, receive a salary, and are permitted to marry. Yet, in contrast to other deaconess groups that have abandoned the wearing of the garb in favour of, at most, a designated lapel pin, the new Concordia Deaconess Conference reinstated a uniform: a navy-blue suit or dress with jacket. A cross pin is worn on the lapel, and the left sleeve is marked by a cross insignia.¹¹

Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod deaconesses have participated in the crafting of an office that upholds their theological distinctiveness. The LCMS affirms that because man and woman were created individually, “the identities and functions of each are not interchangeable; they must remain distinct.” Woman’s subordination to man is neither a result of Adam and Eve’s fall nor a relic of a foreign past culture. Thus, all the Pauline proscriptions against females speaking in church or holding authority over men remain binding today, and the church does not ordain women to the clergy. The confessional position of the LCMS is co-constitutive of the patriarchal gendered hierarchy in Missouri Synod polity, families, and society. In 2005,

⁹ E. Louise Williams, interview by author, 6th September 2018.

¹⁰ Cheryl D. Naumann, *In the Footsteps of Phoebe: A Complete History of the Deaconess Movement in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis, Concordia, 2008), p. 17.

¹¹ Naumann, p. 436, p. 408, pp. 448-9.

the CDC created and adopted a code of ethics that clearly articulates the deaconess' role supporting the ordained ministry. She promises to "point others to Word and Sacrament provided by the Office of the Public Ministry" and to refrain from performing the distinctive works of the clergy: preaching and administering the sacraments. LCMS deaconesses maintain that women are divinely created with special gifts for diaconal service. Missouri Synod deaconess Kristin Wassilak affirmed, "We do believe the Lord has created women with by and large some unique skills and perspective on life," elsewhere defining deaconess work as "a uniquely feminine care, perceiving need and responding with gentle helpfulness, expressing the compassion of Christ in a tender nurturing way."¹²

The LCMS emphasis on male headship and the order of creation reinforces a structure of strictly defined gender roles in church ministry: as men and women are seen as complementary, so deaconesses understand themselves as complementary to the male pastorate. In the context of an all-male clergy, deaconesses argue that they play a crucial role in the pastoral care of women.¹³

The twenty-first-century female diaconate of the LCMS retains strong connections to the movement's founding era, emphasising the suitability of woman's nature for deaconess work. LCMS deaconesses serve in roles that do not conflict with traditional commitments to male headship, such as church musicians; missionaries; teachers of youth or women; workers in confessional institutions for children, women, the disabled, or the elderly; and prison ministries. As of 2019, there were 306 deaconesses on the roster of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod.¹⁴

The Distinct Learning Journey of the Lutheran Deaconess/Diaconal Association

Despite parting ways with the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod in 1979, the Lutheran Deaconess/Diaconal Association continues to thrive. Headquartered at Indiana's Valparaiso University, the LDA remains open to Lutherans from different confessional branches and focuses on forming deaconesses and deacons to exercise their ministry in secular or church settings. The LDA constructs diaconia as an identity rather than a vocation. The LDA is reinterpreting diaconal formation as recognising how to be a diaconal presence in whatever job one has been called to by God, whether that be pastor or "burrito chaplain" (as one deaconess who works at Chipotle Mexican Grill and ministers to her co-workers and customers has named herself).¹⁵

In 2014, the Lutheran Deaconess Association began training men alongside women for the diaconate and, in 2018, changed its name to the Lutheran Diaconal Association. One way in which the LDA is redefining the diaconate as gender neutral is by broadening the biblical imagery of diaconal service. The paramount biblical image for the deaconess founders was Phoebe. But in the LDA formation process, Phoebe steps back to make room for five different images of diaconia: foot washing, table serving, storytelling, door keeping, and light bearing. Each of these has its own biblical origin in the life of Jesus and the early church. Former executive deaconess, Louise Williams explained that she adapted these five images over decades of training LDA deaconesses. The images represent a spectrum of service, moving from the most personal, embodied service of foot washing out to the public, prophetic leadership of bearing the light of hope. It spans serving on lowly bended knee to stretching up to serve on tiptoe. In emphasising images other than Phoebe and expanding the vision beyond images of care of the body, the LDA contributes to the construction of a less

¹² The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod Commission of Theology and Church Relations, "Women in the Church: Scriptural Principles and Ecclesial Practice" (1985), p. 22; 24; 27; Concordia Deaconess Conference, "Code of Ethics," 18th May 2005, <https://blogs.lcms.org>; Kristin Wassilak, interview by Andy Bates, *Faith and Family*, KFUE, 7th December 2016; The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, "In Service to our Lord: Deaconess Ministry Overview; English" (YouTube, 2011).

¹³ Grace Rao, interview by author, 16th February 2017.

¹⁴ LCMS "Find a Worker" Locator, Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (<https://lcms.org>, accessed 12th February 2019).

¹⁵ Valerie Webdell, interview by author, 13th December 2016.

gender-bound vision of the diaconate. As of 2019, the LDA claimed 778 deaconesses and five deacons, of whom 450 are currently active, making it the largest contemporary diaconal body.¹⁶

The Deaconess Movement and the Catholic Church Tradition

In the twentieth century, deaconesses shed certain aspects of the consecrated lifestyle, such as the allowance, almost effortlessly. Although it required more incremental steps, most deaconesses shrugged off the garb with few regrets. Furthermore, there is almost no discussion among deaconesses today of their distinctions from their Roman Catholic counterparts. The Catholicism of Protestant imagination no longer plays the constitutive role it once did in the late-nineteenth-and early-twentieth-century deaconess movement, and today's deaconesses no longer feel the need to define themselves against Catholic sisters. Interestingly, the place where the diaconate and Catholicism intersect today is in heated conversations over the possibility of ordaining women to the diaconate within the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁷ The possibility of combining marriage with the deaconess office proved a greater challenge to resolve, although it too has been settled. How the diaconate relates to the ordained ministry has been worked out differently by different groups. Deaconesses continue the process of working out the relationship of the office to constructions of gender. Most diaconates have had to address the question of what it means to be in a gender-specific ministry once all the other church offices have become gender neutral.

The Growing Relevance of the Diaconal Movement for Making the Church Visible in Secular Contexts

If the work of the twentieth century seemed to unravel the tapestry of diaconates woven by the nineteenth-century founders, perhaps the twenty-first century is the time of weaving the tapestry anew. Taken together, these four groups of contemporary deaconesses illustrate different aspects of the reimagined vocation. Although their numbers remain small, women and men in several American churches have reclaimed the diaconate for the twenty-first century. Nineteenth-and twentieth-century deaconesses understood themselves as women called by God to a life entirely devoted to service. Although specific aspects of the consecrated life have changed, deaconesses' stated purpose remains largely intact. After a nadir in the second half of the twentieth century, the deaconess movement, or what today would best be called the diaconal movement, appears to be growing again. Chaplaincy scholar, Wendy Cadge argues that, in the United States today, a person may be more likely to meet a religious professional in a secular setting than in a church.¹⁸ Deaconesses and their male counterparts are well positioned to respond to this phenomenon, attempting to meet people out in the world, people who may never cross the threshold of a church. Deaconesses draw on their history of ministry at the margins, and the flexibility of the diaconal vocation encourages a ministry of service in secular settings. With a century and a half of presence in the United States, deaconesses argue that they are well poised to meet the needs of the world today.

¹⁶ Williams, interview.

¹⁷ Phyllis Zagano has studied and written extensively on the possibility of Roman Catholic women deacons. See her *Holy Saturday: An Argument for the Restoration of the Female Diaconate in the Catholic Church*, among others.

¹⁸ Wendy Cadge and Michael Skaggs, "Chaplaincy? Spiritual Care? Innovation: A Case Statement." White paper, Brandeis University, 1st September 2018, p. 15.

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40. THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION: MISSION AND SERVICE OF UNITINGCARE AUSTRALIA¹

Ji Zhang²

Introduction

“God is love...We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:8; 19). The primary motivation for the Uniting Church in Australia in providing social services is our Christian response to the universal and self-giving love of God. Love is the foundation of compassionate service to the world.

Service is our vocation. The community service ministry was an essential part of the formation of the Uniting Church in Australia.³ The Uniting Church’s response to the Christian gospel will continue to involve us in Australian society and beyond; social engagement is fundamental to the mission of the Church.

UnitingCare Australia⁴ is a national agency of the Uniting Church in Australia, corresponding with and advocating for social service agencies within the life of Uniting Church. UnitingCare Australia’s mission is to give voice to the Uniting Church’s commitment to social justice through advocacy and by strengthening community service provision.

Today, the Uniting Church’s community service ministry has grown into a national network with a footprint of 1600 sites. It has become one of the largest providers of community services in Australia. The network employs 40 000 staff and is supported by the work of over 30 000 volunteers. It has an annual turnover of more than \$2.5 billion and serves one in twelve Australians. It provides services to children, young people and families, Indigenous Australians, people with disabilities, the poor and disadvantaged, people from culturally diverse backgrounds and older Australians in urban, rural and remote communities.

This large footprint of service consists of a web of relationships. Indeed, this lived experience with people embodies an innate calling that requires theological reflection to discern its purpose and renew our identity.

During the forty-year journey of Uniting Church, Australian society has experienced significant social, cultural, demographic, economic and environmental change. God’s mission has moved the Church from the social and political centre to the multicultural and interfaith margins. UnitingCare Network’s vision of “all people thriving in a healed and reconciled world” is now grounded in the multicultural society and our relationship with Australia’s First Peoples. UnitingCare’s high service capacity is also greatly valued in the Asia-Pacific region, in whose transformation Australia plays an important part. Our history of social involvement and our knowledge of quality service delivery form the backbone of the Uniting Church’s intellectual property which serve as a renewable resource in God’s mission and the church’s service.

These changing contexts become a source of theology for reshaping our identity as a faith-based, as well as a skills-based organisation. Our experience will continue to inform our tradition.

¹ This article was originally developed as part of the Uniting Church’s project to renew the *Faith Foundations Document* for social service agencies within the Uniting Church. The purpose of this theological reflection is to reflect the changing context of faith-based social services in Australia and discern God’s calling to be the Church in and for the world. The content of this chapter has been published as an internal document within the life of Uniting Church, and it has been modified for this publication.

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³ See: <https://assembly.uca.org.au/>

⁴ <https://unitingcare.org.au/>

Love God and Love Your Neighbour

The commands to love God and love your neighbour (Mark 12:30-31) underpin UnitingCare's social response to "God is love" and "we love because God first loved us" (1 John 4:8-9). Our shared mission is to embody God's love for all people and exemplify the Uniting Church's commitment to supporting individuals, families and communities through advocacy and the enhancement of service provisions.

The Uniting Church, in accordance with its *Basis of Union*, believes that God guided the Church into Union.⁵ Acknowledging the postcolonial context of our faith and action, the Church's *Preamble to the Constitution* recognises that the land has been created and sustained by the Triune God before churches arrived as part of the colonisation process.⁶

Through this land God had nurtured and sustained the First Peoples of this country, the Aboriginal and Islander peoples, who continue to understand themselves to be the traditional owners and custodians (meaning 'sovereign' in the languages of the First Peoples) of these lands and waters since time immemorial.⁷

The Uniting Church is located within this cultural and geographical context. It is informed by its history, is committed to ecumenism and understands itself as a pilgrim people on a journey.⁸ The 14th Assembly repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery, and its theological foundations as a relic of colonialism, feudalism and religious, cultural, and racial biases that have no place in the treatment of First Peoples. The 15th Assembly in 2018 expanded the definition of sovereignty. Hence, the whole church affirms that the First Peoples of Australia, the Aboriginal and Islander Peoples, are sovereign peoples in Australia.

UnitingCare community service ministry is part of this journey, working with the wider Uniting Church, communities and government to extend services to our First Peoples. By faith and action, the Uniting Church celebrates its Covenantal relationship with the First Peoples as a foretaste of that future reconciliation with God which is the purpose for the whole of creation.⁹

The Uniting Church and UnitingCare are not separate entities, but one in Christ. Many witnesses of the Church and community services are inwardly connected through the unfolding life of the Triune God by gathering people into the household of God. This unity is not dependent upon human aspiration, "but upon the will of God made effective through Jesus Christ".¹⁰ The Spirit of God permeates the boundary between the sacred and the secular, and the church and the world by creating life throughout the whole of creation. UnitingCare further broadens the horizon of God's mission by building relationships with multiple stakeholders, including the church, people, government and communities. Our compassion for the lives of people seeks to incarnate God's love for the world (1 John 4:8-10), so that the people may have life abundantly (John 10:10).

UnitingCare's engagement with social justice exists in the DNA of our tradition. At the time of formation, the Uniting Church's *Statement to the Nation* declared:

A Christian responsibility to society has always been regarded as fundamental to the mission of the Church. In the Uniting Church our response to the Christian gospel will continue to involve us in social and national affairs.¹¹

⁵ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 1.

⁶ *Preamble to the Constitution*, Paragraph 1.

⁷ *Preamble to the Constitution*, Paragraph 2.

⁸ Colleen Geyer, "Transforming Mission in Faith-Based Community Services": in *Uniting Theology and Church*, 3 (October 2010).

⁹ *Preamble to the Constitution*, Concluding paragraph.

¹⁰ Davis McCaughey, *Commentary on the Basis of Union*, p. 19.

¹¹ *Statement to the Nation*, 1977.

Our forty-year journey has manifested this commitment and given birth to a diverse range of services reaching out to all aspects of life. God's love in Christ is bound neither by time nor space (Eph. 3:18-19), and this love never ends (1 Cor 13:8). Indeed, loving God is made visible in loving one's neighbour, and God's peace is found in service – "to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with the Lord" (Micah 6:8).

God's love is universal; everyone has the right to receive care. This equality extends to all peoples, with no discrimination on the grounds of age, gender, cultural origin, ability, sexuality, class, colour, or creed. The commitment to equality will continue to draw many skilled people into service, to involve diverse members of the Church and many others from society and to build the whole mission of God in the world.

God's Mission in the Margins

The large footprint of the UnitingCare network enables us to reflect broadly on where God's mission is in Australia. UnitingCare learns with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) that our experience with the Land and ancient cultures is a source of theology. The self-emptying God, vulnerable yet magnificently human, has broken unbreakable boundaries and become the suffering servant and risen friend.¹² Living in a post-Christendom world, we affirm with the World Council of Churches a paradigm shift in mission, from "Church's mission to the margins" to "God's mission in the margins".¹³

"The Word became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14). Incarnation is the marginalisation of God.

God the Creator participates in the world and lives among the people who are God's radical "other". In Jesus' ministry, we come face-to-face with the humble, non-violent, self-giving God among humble people in difficult circumstances.¹⁴ Through service to the disadvantaged, the passion narrative of Jesus continues to unfold in communities while our staff gather the suffering into hope. Our chaplains and pastoral care workers exercise servanthood ministry and witness to the Risen Lord who pardons sin, restores life and awakens faith: so if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

It is through the self-emptying love of God moving into the world that UnitingCare speaks on behalf of the most disadvantaged and marginalised. Our advocacy of social justice is matched with daily service to all peoples in Australia through a vast workforce of employees and volunteers. The Spirit of Life, indeed the totality of all life, is most visible in the margins. Through the large footprint of service provision, we see the Spirit upholding the dignity of the "other" by our compassion and care, and through our social justice advocacy we strive to set the people free through access to care and healing.

Christian belief in the Triune God invites us to see God as a divine community whose inner life is fundamentally about love-abiding relationships among the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This inner community of God is constantly moving outwards by the virtue of self-giving love (John 3:16), forming diverse communities of life through the Spirit that give witness to the risen life of Christ.

Today God is in our communities. In serving the marginalised, we discover that the Spirit of Life has moved from the centre to the margins of society. This same Spirit calls the Uniting Church to be part of society, including in the margins of social service. In so doing, the marginalised may come to the centre of social attention as they are already at the centre of Christ's attention.

We are accountable to God's mission in the margins. God's mission affirms the brokenness of Christ's Body in humble places where God's mercy touches upon the lives of the lonely, the jobless, the homeless, the abused and the dying. The future of social service is in God's becoming – in the likeness of the incarnation

¹² Faith Statement from UAICC Tasmania, a paraphrase of the Apostles Creed by Rev Tim Matton-Johnson.

¹³ *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*, World Council of Churches, 2012, pp. 6-9.

¹⁴ Parts of a speech by Randall Prior and Sally Douglas at the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania 2017, later adopted by Uniting VicTas.

– forming a life-giving relationship with the “other” and gathering communities into the unbounded love of God for the world.

For this purpose, UnitingCare seeks partnership with congregations so that both can be connected to God’s mission in the margins. In daily service, we seek to remove the social divide, deliver best practice and enhance the quality of people’s lives. We honour the Uniting Church’s openness to the world and continue to journey with those in our community seeking support. Together, we nurture love-inspired communities where people live in dignity, enjoy full lives and have their needs met. There is a mutuality in our relationship with those who engage with our services; our connection to them leads to our shared discovery of the mystery of God’s love as a beloved person.¹⁵ This image of Christ, the crucified and risen One who lives in the “other”, is to be named and embraced.

UnitingCare partakes in ecological justice. Social service seeks to connect people both in community and with the Land which gives life to all existence, for the ecological world has sustained the whole circle of life with many interrelated blessings. We have learned from the First Peoples: life is inwardly connected. Therefore, we affirm mutual relationships in all dimensions of the world so that in the future humanity and the natural world will transform each other.

A Fellowship of Reconciliation

The Uniting Church was formed in response to God’s mission in Australia – to be a fellowship of reconciliation. Before this calling, the churches did not have separate missions of their own, but the Uniting Church was called into existence to partake in God’s mission – “reconciliation and renewal [...] for the whole creation”.¹⁶

The mission of UnitingCare and the mission of the Uniting Church are one. This unity is a relational wholeness that accepts operational differences and follows God’s mission in Australia. It affirms that God’s reconciliation is radically open to the world; our engagement with peoples, cultures, and religions through service provides us with the opportunity to live out a vision of hope in God’s ultimate renewal in New Creation. This vision is inclusive, all encompassing, and restores the covenanting relationship with the Creator, as well as renewing the whole creation.¹⁷

The mission of God is larger than the mission to the Gentiles, to the non-Jews, by the early church. In the mission with the Gentiles, the horizon of God’s mission begins to open, bringing the common good of life into focus beyond the duality of the secular and the sacred. This outward unfolding of God’s Self is the Incarnation of God’s own life in the world, regardless of the Church’s capacity to conceptualise its fullness in theology and practice.

As we look deeply into all services and reflect truthfully on this, we see one thing in common; suffering. Again, suffering unites us. On the cross, Jesus’ suffering draws the world’s attention to the irreducible problem of human suffering. The Uniting Church proclaims this risen crucified one:

Christ calls people into the fellowship of his sufferings, to be the disciples of a crucified Lord; in his own strange way Christ constitutes, rules and renews them as his Church.¹⁸

¹⁵ Stuart McMillian, the 14th President of Uniting Church, points out the mutuality of living in relationship in his reflection on Henri Nouwen’s book *Adam – God’s Beloved*. Adam could not speak nor move, but it was in the caring for Adam that the scholar Nouwen learnt a new and deeper understanding of faith – what it means to be God’s beloved.

¹⁶ *Basis of Union*, paragraph 3.

¹⁷ *UnitingCare Australia Mandate*, approved by Assembly Standing Committee, July 2008.

¹⁸ *Basis of Union*, paragraph 4.

Our discipleship in service is a pathway that draws the whole church into the fellowship of Christ's suffering. In aged care facilities, people are gathered daily from all walks of life into communities celebrating lives. During the Royal Commission into child sexual abuse, the Uniting Church as a whole was invited into the mystery of the Cross and called to put survivors first before the crucified Lord. Through the establishment of the Australian Regional & Remote Community Services, we rediscover that "in his own strange way, Christ constitutes, rules and renews" us all as his Church.¹⁹ By engaging with the National Disability Insurance Scheme, we relearn a biblical teaching – "Faith without action is dead" (James 2:17).

"The Son of Man does not come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Many of our services, Blue Care for instance, came into existence explicitly not to be served but to serve. The ministry of the laity has been expanded over many decades as part of the church's vocation. Today many leaders, managers, and staff have given a significant part of their life for the overall mission, becoming a Christ-like salvation for many. In order to achieve the best outcomes for the people, most service providers work with multiple stakeholders including congregations, communities and government. This collaborative work aims for an outcome where the restoration of a person's life and the reconciliation of the world are akin.

The Uniting Church is made up of pilgrim people on a journey. The Uniting Church community service ministry participates in and contributes towards God's ever-broadening circle of reconciliation in the world.

The Uniting Church prays that, through the gift of the Spirit, God will constantly correct that which is erroneous in its life, will bring it into deeper unity with other Churches, and will use its worship, witness and service to God's eternal glory through Jesus Christ the Lord.²⁰

As a church, our unity is not fixed, but still in the making. On the way, God constantly corrects that which is erroneous in its life; this includes the removal of false tension between faith-based service and rights-based action. Social service belongs to the very nature of the church. It calls the whole church to be in communion with Christ through the daily action of loving one's neighbour and walking the journey with the sick and afflicted. Social service is not a mere expression of ethical goodness by citizens but emerges from Christian discipleship to Christ's renewal of the world. By serving the world, the Uniting Church becomes one with Christ and, at the same time, brings Christ into the world, not by proclamation but by action.

To achieve this common good, ecumenical relationships are nurtured to influence government policies which enhance the dignity of people. Collaboration with other Assembly agencies further enables UnitingCare Australia in the exchange of information across Synods and service providers and in providing leadership in community matters. Ministry formation is encouraged to include the theology of service in the training of future ministers. Theological reflection is used in the continuing education of mission directors, chaplains and pastoral care workers.

All these activities point towards a purpose which the Uniting Church articulated in the *Statement to the Nation*. "We pledge ourselves to hope and work for a nation whose goals are not guided by self-interest alone, but by concern for the welfare of all persons everywhere".²¹ Forty years on, we, as the church, still embrace policy changes to enhance people's dignity and capacity, even if those changes require our own organisational transformation.

Mission with God

The Greek word *diakonia* is often narrowly translated as "service" to others. In ancient Greek, *diakonia* was not all about charity, but also means an assignment, like a messenger who goes in-between, who both instructs

¹⁹ *Basis of Union*, paragraph 4.

²⁰ *Basis of Union*, paragraph 18.

²¹ *Statement to the Nation*, final paragraph.

and delivers. Paul uses the term *diakonia* when he affirms his relationship to the Triune God (Acts 20:24; 2 Cor. 3:8), and to Christ who has authorised him to be his *diakonos* (1 Cor. 3:5; Eph. 3:7; Col. 1:25).²² The notion of “service”, therefore, denotes God’s mission through a messenger like Paul to embody the relationship between God and the purpose of God for the world.

Based on the biblical reflections, it is the church’s affirmation that social service is not a secondary order of the church but embodies the primary order of God’s mission. Social service is the church’s vocation.

Uniting Church community services are part of Christ’s presence in Australia. “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Mt. 18:20). By participating in Christ’s service to the world, UnitingCare becomes a partner with God’s mission in gathering diverse people before God who first loved us (1 John 4:19). Hence, the identity of faith-based service also grows by including rights-based professionals and action-based service-delivering staff. All of them are called into Christ’s mission in the world; their collective status also changes from being an agent delivering the Church’s service and various providers of government programs, to becoming a contributor informing the uniting identity of the Church.

Being a partner of God’s mission also means bearing witness to the inclusive unity of the Uniting Church. From the personal experience of salvation to the delivery of social services, the community of care has broadened the scope of the community of faith, turning the outsider of the church into the insider of social transformation. God has been calling into existence a new way of being the church, that is a church for the other in the margins of faith and at the peripheries of society. There, the commandment of loving God is like salt dissolved into community actions of loving one’s neighbours, so the light of God shines in people’s renewed hope for life. “The Church of God is committed to service in the world for which Christ died”.²³ Like the Kingdom of God, social service is the yeast which permeates every part of the dough of society (Matthew 13:33). The Church is a part of, not apart from, society.

The Uniting Church’s community service ministry intentionally supports mutual engagement between congregations and community services in all forms. This priority of mission rests upon the understanding of God’s peoples as a fellowship of God’s abundant life, in which the Spirit of God draws diverse peoples to share in God’s transforming Spirit. It is through the people who we serve that UnitingCare rediscovers the ancient promise “God will dwell with people” (Ez. 37:17, Rev. 21:37), reclaims the Good News for us today: God with us (Mt. 1: 23), and renews the mission in partnership with Christ who takes away sins of the world (John 1:29).

Mission with God will enlarge the scope of our faith tradition. Social service in the margins is a pathway for church growth. The Spirit demands our attention to Jesus’ passion and the aching love of God for the world, which always touches first upon the suffering people. God’s Church is called into existence to bear witness to the cross of forgiveness and salvation. The Spirit also leads us to see the rising of the fallen and recalls the resurrection of Jesus underpinning our deepest faith. This mission with God awakens hope, empowers the poor in spirit, supports the meek, and takes away social injustice and sin, so that people may live to their full potential as the image of God.

The community service ministry of the Uniting Church is part of God’s vision of how life should be lived. It actively discerns what God is doing in creation and history in the power of Spirit.

God in Christ has given to all people in the Church the Holy Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation.²⁴

²² *Called to Transformative Action: Ecumenical Diakonia*, Central Committee, World Council of Churches (revised draft), 2018, pp. 31-33.

²³ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 1.

²⁴ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 3.

The partnership between community services and the councils of the Uniting Church embodies a relational model of mission. “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor. 3:17). All councils of the Uniting Church, and Assembly agencies, are invited to encounter the Spirit of God in our diverse communities.

Conclusion

While Australian society is undergoing population, cultural, economic, and environmental change, this theological reflection speaks for UnitingCare Australia’s strategic engagement with the external changes and argues for a life-giving connection between faith-based Church identity and rights-based service delivery.

“Love God and love your neighbour”: this biblical teaching reclaims a core value underlying the work of community services over many decades. While it gives expression to our changing context about how the Spirit of God is moving our attention into social margins, it also articulates where community services and church identity are called to mutual affirmation, and how to go forward into the world with hope, as partners within the life of the Uniting Church, to embody the vocation of service and participate in God’s mission in the world.

The theological outlook sees the large network of community service agencies as a web of human relationships through which the Uniting Church is connected to the land and its diverse peoples. Professional skills, lived experience, and operational innovation within community services are a collective gift to the church. These skills and lived experiences will enhance the church’s capacity to work in many areas of social discourse, including social justice, multiculturalism, sovereignty of the First Peoples, community development, and climate change.

Social service is a relational bridge into God’s mission. This theological reflection names the “goldmine” that is the breadth of the Uniting Church. Australia is an ageing society in which healthcare and social assistance have become, and will continue to be, the largest part of a service-based economy. The Uniting Church possesses an intellectual property through decades of service provision. Australia’s proximity to Asia has already positioned us to cater for the increasing demand for social service from the world’s largest middle-class. UnitingCare is positioned to cultivate Australia’s leadership capacity in service provision, develop cultural competence for its leadership, and prepare the sector to be Asia-ready.

Furthermore, UnitingCare belongs to the universal Church through the church’s ecumenical relations. Social service is a pathway for the Uniting Church to participate in and contribute to ecumenical dialogues. The engagement will further bear witness to a unity of Christ “that transcends cultural, economic and racial boundaries, and seeks special relationships with Churches in Asia and the Pacific”.²⁵ Forty years ago, the Uniting Church declared to the whole nation that, by partaking in the spirit of God’s self-giving love, “we seek to go forward in to the world”.²⁶ Today, we reclaim the same spirit: the church is in and for the world, or it is not church.

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²⁵ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 2.

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41. DIAKONIA AS A QUEST FOR JUST AND PEACEFUL COMMUNITIES IN THE PACIFIC

James Bhagwan¹

If we are to respect Pacific culture, identity and spirituality, we must begin this introduction with our home, our mother – the Pacific Ocean, the liquid continent. The largest and deepest of the world's four oceans, covering more than a third of the Earth's surface and containing more than half of its free water. The Pacific Ocean has an immense biodiversity, including the most coral reef species in the world. 70 per cent of the global fish catch comes from the Pacific Ocean. The ocean regulates local and global weather and climate. On land, the Pacific Islands are home to approximately 5 330 native plant species, 242 native bird species, 61 native terrestrial reptiles, 15 native mammals, three endemic amphibians and some 4 000 snail species. Geographers estimate that the South Pacific contains more than 20 000 islands and a population of over 8 million people speaking some 1 200 languages: two fifths of the total languages spoken around the world.

Aspects of the History of the Pacific

The history of the Pacific from a human perspective goes back 60 000 – 45 000 years with the settlement of Papua and the land now called Australia. Around 1600-1200 B.C., a cultural complex called Lapita (identified by a distinctive pottery style and named after a site in New Caledonia) spread from New Guinea in Melanesia as far east as Fiji, Samoa, and Tonga. Polynesian culture developed at the eastern edge of this region (that is in Samoa and Tonga). Around 300 B.C. or earlier, seafarers from Samoa and Tonga discovered and settled islands to the east – the Cook Islands, Tahiti-nui, Tuamotus, and Hiva (Marquesas Islands). By 300 A.D., voyagers from central or eastern Polynesia, possibly from Hiva, discovered and settled Easter Island. By 400 A.D., voyagers from the Cook Islands, Tahiti-nui, and /or Hiva had settled Hawai'i. By 1000 A.D., voyagers from the Society and/or the Cook Islands settled Aotearoa (New Zealand).

The Pacific region is, from a western or Global North perspective, seen as comprising of geographically remote islands spread over large expanses of the Pacific Ocean. An alternative perspective that has gained much currency describes the region as our 'large ocean states'. On the one hand, the region is described by its perceived remoteness, 'small-ness', isolation – the emphasis being on the lesser characteristics. On the other hand, the region is seen in its vastness and with inherent strength – a vision of the possible, of opportunity and hope.

Indigenous Pacific Values and the Concept of the Island of Hope

In this story of diakonia in the Pacific, it is important to note that the values upheld in this region – articulated by both indigenous wisdom and Christianity put the welfare of the community above the individual. These values are encompassed in the concept of the "Island of Hope."

At the dawn of the 21st century, Pacific Churches responding to globalisation resulted in envisioning an Island of Hope where:

life is significant, valued and celebrated. There is a celebration of life over material wealth.

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Spirituality, family life, traditional economy, cultural values, mutual care and respect are components of the concept of the Island of Hope which prioritises relationships, celebrates quality of life and values human beings and creation over the production of things. The Island of Hope is an alternative to the project of economic globalisation which entails domination through an unjust economic system. “The Island of Hope” is life-centred, affirming the very soul of the Pacific Islanders. The concepts of *whenua*, *fenua*, *enua*, *vanua* all mean that the land is the people’s identity, life and soul. Land is people, resources, cultures, beliefs, spirituality, languages, social systems, and the sea. The practical outcome of this understanding is communitarian sharing and distribution of resources with the absence of the selfish pursuit of wealth. While Western economics revolve around profit and economic growth, the traditional economies of the Pacific are concerned with people and the total quality of their lives; caring and concern for others within the extended families and compassion for all people, especially for the sick and elderly are values of the communities; respect, hospitality, generosity, and forgiveness are other marks of the traditional communities. Nobody is excluded.

The land, the sea and people are integral parts of one entity. Subsistence farming, a sustainable agriculture and the sensitivity of the sacredness of the trees and the sea are part of their identity. While traditionally these values operated mainly within the context of the wider family or clan, Jesus challenges us to extend them to all, because we are all members of the family of God. The Island of Hope is in tune with nature and by sharing and caring, to which people want to journey in order to celebrate life in all its fullness (Isa. 25:6). The Island of Hope has the “mana” (power) to draw human beings together.²

The Island of Hope is sustainable, wholesome, peaceful and all-embracing. The concept of the Island of Hope is not merely a dream. It is founded in reality and has been our normal life in our islands.³

The ethics of “The Island of Hope” are based on the deep respect for the whole community of life. It fosters a culture of sharing and caring, based on justice. Its values reflect God’s care for creation and Christ’s teaching to love one another and do justice to the poor.⁴

Diaconia as Part of the Pacific Way of Life

This concept identifies diakonia as part and parcel of not just Christian life and practice but as part of the Pacific way of life, especially of reciprocity, the practice of abundance, even in times of scarcity. An example of this, during the period of COVID19 lockdowns and the resulting loss of employment from the collapse of the tourism industry and other supporting industries in Fiji, is the indigenous system of “solesolevaki,” which refers to the community coming together for the greater good. Community-organised plantations ensured enough food for those not able to access shops and markets either due to lockdowns or loss of employment.

While church missions were the first to introduce formal and vocational educational institutions to the Pacific, along with hospitals, health and other social welfare facilities, these are mostly funded, managed and operated either solely by Pacific Island governments or in partnership with government, church and overseas mission, development and relief agencies. Civil Society Organisations involved in humanitarian work – in particular responses to the increasing natural disasters as a result of climate change; rapid political economic and social changes; urbanisation; social, economic and psychological impacts COVID19 etc – work in partnership with local churches for implementation and localisation of services. In particular, churches and civil society are partnering to identify and address the root causes of the above issues from a justice perspective.

² World Council of Churches, *Island of Hope: The Pacific Churches’ Response to Alternatives on Globalisation* (Geneva: WCC, 2001).

³ *Island of Hope*.

⁴ *Island of Hope*.

The Prophetic Voices of Pacific Churches in Struggling for Decolonialisation and Justice

For almost six decades, the Pacific Churches have raised their prophetic voice on decolonisation, nuclear proliferation, sustainable development and socio-economic and political justice. Today, this mission continues in the ongoing struggle for political and economic and social self-determination in the face of an intense promotion of the neo-liberal economic agenda of globalisation. Kanaky /New Caledonia is seeking decolonisation from France with a referendum on independence due later this year. Bouganville voted for autonomy from Papua New Guinea last year but is still awaiting independence. West Papua continues to suffer from structural violence and widespread human rights abuses and is also seeking decolonisation from Indonesia, while Maohi/French Polynesia struggle for decolonisation from France and has acknowledged by the UN but still has a lengthy and difficult process ahead. There is also the ongoing struggle for justice for the impact of nuclear-testing in the region.

Climate Justice and Environmental Stewardship as Key Concerns of Churches Diaconal Witness

Climate Justice and Environmental Stewardship in the face of both Climate-Induced Migration and land and sea exploitation and degradation is perhaps the biggest challenge facing the Pacific today. It is feared that the current level of exploitation of natural resources in the Pacific is unsustainable and constitutes a credible and serious threat to the natural environment. For more than a decade, it has been accepted that the Pacific islands are especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Current models show sea-level rise reaching 5.4m by 2300 (average 1.5 to 2m per century – possibly higher). The Pacific is also extremely vulnerable to extreme weather patterns, caused by climate change such as Severe Tropical Cyclone (STC) Pam in Vanuatu, STC Winston in Fiji in 2016 and the recent STC Harold in the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji and Tonga.

Climate change is already and will continue to have profound implications for Pacific Island populations, many of whom reside in coastal areas and rely on natural resources for their livelihoods and well-being, this being especially so in the atoll nations. The impacts of climate change will affect internal and international migration flows as some island environments become less able to support the communities that depend on them. It is anticipated that climate change-related migration will take different forms, each of which is likely to require different types of policy response. For example, community relocation due to extreme events requires considerably different kinds of support and protection from that provided for the staggered migration of individuals or families due to slow-onset environmental pressures. The absence of a proactive approach to addressing climate risk could contribute to a spiralling of risk which can further undermine community resilience. Climate change-forced displacement and planned relocation is highly disruptive to livelihoods, culture and society unless proper, well-planned interventions support people in their effort to adapt to the challenges.

Maintaining sovereignty, self-determination, cultural identity and territorial rights are of primary concern to Pacific Islanders in any form of climate change-related migration (gradual or staggered relocation). The Moana Declaration (Pacific Church Leaders, 2009) makes a number of important recommendations for actions for the protection against climate change for displaced persons, including the full spectrum of rights enshrined within the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and subsequent human rights treaties.

Other environmental issues include: ocean pollution through carbon emissions from boats; plastics choking sea-life; unsustainable fishing practices; and extractive industries such as sea-bed mining.

Engagement Concerning Violence against Women and Children

Violence against women and girls takes many different forms in the Pacific region. These include intimate partner physical and/or sexual violence, non-partner sexual assault, sexual exploitation and trafficking, and harmful practices such as bride price and accusations of sorcery. Prevalence of these types of violence is high

in the region; in most countries, it is much higher than the global average of 35 per cent. National research shows the rate of lifetime experience for any woman is high: in Tonga (79 per cent), Samoa (76 per cent), Kiribati (73 per cent), Fiji (72 per cent), Vanuatu (72 per cent) and Solomon Islands (64 per cent). The global average of intimate partner physical and/or sexual violence for women is 30 per cent. Again, Pacific women report higher levels of violence – for example, of the eleven countries that have undertaken national research in the Pacific so far, Kiribati (68 per cent), Fiji (64 per cent), Solomon Islands (64 per cent), Vanuatu (60 per cent), and the Republic of the Marshall Islands (51 per cent) have recorded the highest rates of intimate partner physical and/or sexual violence for women. Palau has recorded the lowest, at 25 per cent.

PCC has acknowledged that for too long and, more often than not, faith communities have been part of the structural violence enacted upon women of all ages and social statuses in the Pacific. Patriarchal structures of leadership and decision-making, biblical interpretations and attitudes towards women in faith communities have underpinned the psychological, emotional, physical, sexual and economic violence that Pacific women have had to endure. PCC acknowledges the complicit and implicit actions and inaction by those in positions of authority and responsibility, and the abuses of power and trust experienced by women and children in our Pacific churches. PCC recognises that there are places where the gospel of love, inclusion, preference for the least among us in society and of peace and abundant life for all is preached and held out as the ideal but is not practiced.

At the same time, we acknowledge with gratitude the many mothers and fathers who have had the courage to address these and other forms of gender-based violence experienced in homes, churches and church institutions for more than two decades, in their local and national churches, and in the Pacific Conference of Churches membership, and those sisters and brothers currently working to continue and strengthen this work. This is part of a global move by Christian communities to address all forms of abuse of power and trust.

Theological and Ethical Transformations towards More Inclusive and Contextual Bible Interpretations

There is a growing shift by member Churches of PCC, from conservative, colonial, fundamentalist and patriarchal theology to one based on a more inclusive and contextual biblical interpretation. This includes strong Christian theological and ethical reflection that violence against women and children, in all its forms, is a sin – it goes against the Christian understanding of God's intention for human relationships.

There has been a decay of traditional social structures and patterns which in the past provided basic security and stability within Pacific Island society. This is the result of a rapid transition from communally oriented societies into a hard cash-oriented society.⁵ Modern slavery and human trafficking in the context of migrant labour, deportees, suicide, HIV-AIDS and the high risk situation of seafarers and other migrant workers are all serious social issues as a result of increasing development.⁶ As the result of the adoption of the neo-liberal economic model by Fiji and other Pacific countries, there is an increasing exploitation of natural resources, a widening of the gap between the poor and rich, and a legitimization of greed.⁷

Overcoming Political Instability and Speaking Up on Key Social Issues

Another challenge of the 21st century for the Pacific is law and order and political instability as a result of corruption, conflict between traditional and modern forms of governance and a lack of civic education and

⁵ Manfred Ernst, "Politics, Justice and Governance in the Pacific Islands", Discussion paper presented at 3rd Mission Conference, Viwa Island, Fiji 9th-18th April 2010.

⁶ God's Pacific People Programme and Pacific Conference of Churches, "The Mission Call from Viwa to the Pacific Churches".

⁷ God's Pacific People Programme and Pacific Conference of Churches, "The Mission Call from Viwa to the Pacific Churches".

understanding of democratic principles and fundamental freedoms and rights. The large number of students dropping out early from school is also a critical problem since it is one of the major contributing factors to the growing incidence of poverty. With limited skills and knowledge to improve their livelihoods, early school leavers make up a large number of the unemployed. As a result, they contribute disproportionately to the rising tide of crime and violence occurring in most urban centres.⁸ Mental health is a major issue among Pacific youth who have one of the highest suicide rates in the world. There also is a growing substance abuse problem with methamphetamines now a major issue in Ma'ohi Nui, Samoa, American Samoa, Tonga, Fiji and Palau. Rapid technological changes are also affecting young people and the issue of child abuse is a serious concern.

Disability is part of human diversity so the interests of people with disabilities relate to all aspects of life. Pacific cultural practices, many of which support inclusion, are highly valued. When persons with disabilities are included, communities are richer and everyone's lives are improved. The Pacific region has many new challenges, such as more natural disasters and climate change. Persons with disabilities are already experiencing the negative impact of climate change and are increasingly involved in disaster risk reduction, response and recovery. Persons with disabilities have an important role to play in government and community planning and adaptation, but they often do not have enough access to information about these issues. Crucial for implementing the diaconal responsibilities of the Pacific churches, in light of these multi-faceted challenges, is the following:

The Pacific understanding of the interrelatedness of land, ocean and people, if it is fused with justice and peace for all, offers new ways for sustainable development which is highly relevant not only for the Pacific but far beyond for this globe.

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⁸ National Council for Building a Better Fiji, *Draft Peoples Charter for Change, Peace & Progress & The State Of The Nation And Economy Report*, p. 56.

PART III

TRENDS AND CRUCIAL CONCERNS IN DIACONIA

42. DIACONIA AND HUMAN DIGNITY – SOUTH AFRICAN THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Nadine Bowers Du Toit¹

Introduction

In the work of Diaconia, a key dimension of working with and alongside those on the margins of society is the notion of human dignity. It is key, not least because those relegated to the margins (such as those in poverty, migrants, women and children, LGBTQI, the disabled, indigenous groups etc.) by economic, political, social and even religious forces, have been rendered marginal by the very undermining or non-recognition of their human dignity. These groups are often not seen as worthy of respect, let alone as requiring care and concern for their wellbeing. What is more, in daily diaconal engagement with vulnerable and marginalised groups, the need to affirm and uphold the notion of human dignity as rooted in the very character of the triune God is essential in affirming such groups intrinsic worth and own agency as a starting point of diaconal praxis. This contribution will, therefore, argue that Diaconia which seeks to serve the most marginal must root its work in a theological understanding of human dignity and personhood. It will then briefly explore these implications for diaconal praxis.

Human Dignity as Inalienable

Koopman's notion of human dignity is rooted in the idea that our dignity and worth as persons is "imputed to us by the love of God for us as expressed in our being created in God's image".² Christ is the embodiment of this image and it is through his redemptive work that we are "again image of God". This is, however, not merely embodied within an understanding of a vertical relationship with God, but includes all relationships – between God and humans and all of creation. This interpretation of Theilicke's alien dignity not only means that our worth as persons is viewed according to individual capacities, but that it is inextricably linked to God's claiming of us as God's own. We are worthy, because we are God's children – not because of any capacities or our positioning within society. In this way, Koopman argues the following:

[...] it is important to note that not even the most humble, threatening and vulnerable state impacts negatively on our dignity. Because we have alien dignity we can be assured of special protection in the most threatening conditions and situations, the notion of alien dignity also implies that all people are equal, despite any diversity of role, social status, race, colour, class or sex.³

Alien dignity encourages us to accept diversity, affirm equality and recognise all people – not only the powerful or privileged – as God's own. Koopman's focus on alien dignity (which because it comes from God is inalienable), therefore, implies that we are all equal and to be treated justly.⁴ Both Liberation and Dalit theologians note that poor people, for example, are often viewed as "non-persons" and it is therefore the task

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² Nico Koopman, "Some theological and anthropological perspectives on human dignity and human rights", *Scriptura*, 2014, 95, p. 180.

³ Koopman, "Some theological and anthropological perspectives", p. 181.

⁴ Koopman, "Some theological and anthropological perspectives", p. 185.

of good theological praxis to “restore to the poor the right to participate in life of society”.⁵ Therefore, when prophetically engaging together with, or on behalf of, marginalised and vulnerable groups, our action must be firmly rooted in this notion of alien dignity and the call to the restoration of those society considers “non-persons” – notions which cannot be removed by often seemingly dehumanising circumstances or actions of state actors or other stakeholders.

Human Dignity, Identity and Vocation

Part of the work of diaconia is not only prophetically addressing those seeking to marginalise certain groups in calling them to recognise this God-given human dignity, but it is also in addressing the manner in which economic, social, political and religious systems may have distorted the poor and marginalised’s own view of themselves with regards to their identity and humanity. Myers, a theologian and Christian development practitioner, notes that the poor and marginalised often suffer from what he terms a “marred identity”. This “marred identity” is the belief that they have little value or worth and, therefore, no contribution to make. He roots this brokenness firmly in the Fall and adds the dimension of brokenness with self (not only with God, others and the environment).⁶ Christian, goes as far as to say that this marred identity provokes within the poor and marginalised a feeling that they are “god-forsaken” – with no hope of escape from their circumstances.⁷

According to Bediako, therefore, transforming people begins “with helping people discover that their human dignity and identity are intrinsically related to God in Christ through his redemptive purpose in salvation history”.⁸ This, then, is a core function or starting point for diaconal work with poor and marginalised people. This restoration of identity – or what Anderson terms “an opening up of our true self” – allows the poor and marginalised to understand who they are (identity), their value (dignity) and through the restoration of these to understand that they have gifts which can contribute to both the wellbeing of themselves and their community (vocation).¹⁰ In this way, there is a movement from the particularity of the individual person towards their place or vocation within advocating for *shalom* (wholeness, justice, peace, freedom, equality etc) within community. The poor and marginalised can and should be agents of their own transformation and diaconal praxis, not only subjects of diaconal work. Sands,¹¹ therefore, advocates for a vocational view of the *Imago Dei*, which views all human beings as stewards of God’s creation and resources and De Gruchy notes the following in this respect:

Any vision of Christian involvement in social development cannot have as its assumption, as so much of it unfortunately does, the faith and works of Christians and the church over against those who are poor and needy; but has to affirm, enhance and appreciate the faith words of the poor themselves. This is the message of the Gospel for the poor; that they are both made in the image of God and called to be actors in the drama of creation and

⁵ Jayakumar Christian, *God of the Empty-Handed: Poverty, Power and the Kingdom of God* (Monrovia: Regnum, 1999), p. 57.

⁶ Bryant Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2011), p. 115.

⁷ Christian, *God of the Empty-Handed*.

⁸ Kwame Bediako, “Theological Reflections”, in *Serving the Poor in Africa* (ed) Tetsunao Yamamori (Monrovia: Marc, 1996), p. 8.

⁹ Ray Anderson, *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982).

¹⁰ Myers, *Walking with the Poor*, p. 115.

¹¹ Paul Sands, “The Imago Dei as Vocation”, *Evangelical Quarterly*, 82(1), 2010, p. 37.

salvation itself. They are not and cannot be, simply passive objects of history, but are invited to be the subjects of their own history.¹²

Those who are marginalised and powerless must, therefore, be recognised as having agency through stewardship over the affairs of their community. Consequently, part of sound diaconal praxis is placing the full participation of those who have been marginalised as central to our praxis. Those individuals and communities with whom we engage are not merely “patients” or recipients of our diaconal action, but are in fact agents who indeed possess assets for their own development.¹³

Human Dignity and Communitarian Ethics

It is also well worth reflecting on the African notion of *Ubuntu* (“I am because we are”) within our diaconal work, as a value which recognises human interconnectedness and dependency. The African communitarian ethics of Ubuntu is based on an understanding that one’s humanity is affirmed through the recognition of the other – in effect “the communitarian ethics of Ubuntu advocates the understanding of a person as essentially relational and normative”.¹⁴ Renowned South African theologian, Dirkie Smit interprets Ubuntu in the following manner:

Human beings are only human in their interdependency on other human beings. Sociality, belonging, mutual responsibility and service, connectedness, solidarity, care and sharing are all important values, constituting our very being.¹⁵

Whether or not one gives credence to this age-old African value, personhood as understood within the context of community is not a new concept within theology and, although there are various theological perspectives on personhood, many theologians tie this relationality back to an understanding of the Trinity.¹⁶ In this way, the *Imago Dei* describes “human life in relationship” – the image of God is not only to be understood as a “set of human faculties, possessions, or endowments” but rather within an understanding that “human beings are created for life in relationships that mirror or correspond to God’s own life in relationship”.¹⁷ Bracken concurs: “human sociality [...] should mirror the sociality of the divine persons, their free self-gift to one another and their ongoing reception of that self-gift from one another within the communion of the divine life”.¹⁸ In Diaconal engagement, we are then asked to evaluate whether our relationships with communities that we are seeking to serve or our relationships within our own diaconal organisations indeed mirror and correspond with God’s own life in relationship. Diaconal engagement that recognises the central role of relationality within its praxis should, therefore, be constantly questioning the ways in which our praxis upholds a recognition of values such as service, connectedness, solidarity, care and sharing. It also calls us towards diaconal praxis that always places individuals within the context of community.

¹² Steve De Gruchy, “Of Agency, assets and appreciation: Seeking some commonalities between Theology and Development”, in *Keeping Body and Soul together: Reflections by Steve de Gruchy on Theology and Development* (ed) Beverly Haddad (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2015).

¹³ De Gruchy, “Of agency, assets and appreciation”, p. 77.

¹⁴ Anthony Oritsegbubemi and Olga Yukivska, “Can a Communitarian concept of African personhood be both relational and gender-neutral?” *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 33(1), 2014, p. 86.

¹⁵ Dirk Smit, *Essays in Public Theology: Collected Essays I* (Stellenbosch: Sun Media, 2007), p. 119.

¹⁶ Joseph Bracken, “Personhood and Community in a New Context”, *Horizons*, 35(1), 2008, p. 94, 98

¹⁷ Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: an Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), p. 141.

¹⁸ Bracken, “Personhood and Community in a New Context”, p. 98.

Conclusion

While human beings may be deprived of their human rights, theologically humans cannot be deprived of their inalienable dignity. In working with marginalised and vulnerable groups, this should be a lodestar in rooting diaconal praxis – particularly prophetic diaconal praxis, which seeks to engage socio, economic, political or religious powers with regards to the deprivation of human rights to certain groups. It is also the departure point for working and journeying with marginalised and vulnerable groups, who often have a distorted understanding of their identity and vocation due to the deprivation of these rights. At the same time, it also challenges diaconal practitioners to recognise the agency and assets of those they are working with as having gifts to contribute to their own healing and empowerment. Finally, diaconal praxis that seeks to be relational, should constantly be challenged in its own praxis by a relational ethic that recognises the interconnectedness of all within the diaconal context and values their place and contribution to the community.

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43. DIACONIA AND HUMAN DIGNITY – ASIAN THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Dennis Solon¹

Introduction

Human suffering and atrocities in innumerable forms seem to be the order of the day, in various places around the world, inflicting severe damage to the core of the humanity and creatures made in the image of God. There has been a proliferation of attention on the part of scholars in various fields on the theme of human dignity. Fairly recently, the Society of Biblical Literature published a collection of essays that each look into the vulnerability and precariousness of human dignity within families and in various segments in the human community even with those deeply influenced by Christianity, despite one of the principal tenets being that every human is created in the divine image.² This essay takes on the concept of diaconia in its relationship to the dignity of human beings. In reference to the current Philippine situation, in which the unbridled violation of human rights is apparent, this essay maintains that diaconia demands upholding human dignity, particularly for people forced to the margins of society. After exploring the meaning of human dignity in a cursory way, we shall consider the notion of diaconia as engagement for human dignity as drawn from insights of the Gospel of John, which will be followed by a brief reflection on the Philippine context.

Dignity is an essential element of humanity.³ In various legal and church documents, human dignity is deeply intertwined with human rights.⁴ Jürgen Habermas argues, I believe correctly, that human dignity is the precursor or basis of human rights;⁵ a human being with dignity commands certain rights and privileges, such that to remove them is to deny one's dignity. According to the 1987 constitution of the Republic of the Philippines, "[t]he State values the dignity of every person and guarantees full respect for human rights."⁶

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² L. Juliana Claassens and Klaas Spronk (eds) *Fragile Dignity: Intercontextual Conversations on Scriptures, Family, and Violence* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013). Select publications on the theme in the last decade from other disciplines are: Patrick Capps, *Human Dignity and the Foundations of International Law* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2009); Jürgen Habermas, "The Concept of Human Dignity and the Realistic Utopia of Human Rights," *Metaphilosophy* 41 (2010): pp. 464-80; Evelin Lindner, *A Dignity Economy: Creating an Economy that Serves Human Dignity and Preserves Our Planet* (Lake Oswego, OR: World Dignity University Press, 2011); Michael Rosen, *Dignity: Its History and Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012); Ana Maria Davila Gomez and David Crowther (eds), *Human Dignity and Managerial Responsibility: Diversity, Rights, and Sustainability* (Surrey, England: Gower, 2012); Erin Daly, *Dignity Rights: Courts, Constitutions, and the Worth of the Human Person* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); *Human Dignity of the Vulnerable in the Age of Rights: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (ed) Aniceto Masferrer and Emilio García-Sánchez, *Ius Gentium: Comparative Perspectives on Law and Justice* 55 (New York: Springer International Publishing, 2016); Remy Debes (ed), *Dignity: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

³ Frits de Lange, "The Hermeneutics of Dignity," in *Fragile Dignity: Intercontextual Conversations on Scriptures, Family, and Violence* (ed) L. Juliana Claassens and Klaas Spronk (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013a), pp. 9-27; 14: "In essence, dignity belongs to the definition of being human."

⁴ For a detailed discussion on the intrinsic relationship between human dignity and human rights, see Paulina Parhiala and Gorden Simango, "Diaconia and Human Dignity," *Ecumenical Review* 66 (2014), pp. 330-40.

⁵ Jürgen Habermas, "The Concept of Human Dignity and the Realistic Utopia of Human Rights," *Metaphilosophy* 41 (2010), pp. 464-80.

⁶ Philippine Const. art. II, sec. 11.

Consonant with this understanding of human dignity, the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) reminds the Philippine government at the height of the implementation of the Mining Act of 1995 that:

The Church stands by its prophetic task and calls on the State not to sell our birthright for a bowl of porridge. Not to sell our dignity for some pieces of silver or even gold. The Church stands by its mandate as a steward of God's creation and therefore makes known its opposition to the Philippine Mining Act of 1995.⁷

The first statement refers to the dignity of the individual Filipino; the second expands its embrace to include the dignity of all citizens of the Philippine republic. By dignity, we are referring here to the inherent worth and value or essence of humanity to which every human being belongs, rather than some honour or distinction ascribed or acquired;⁸ it is not an abstract idea, but is a “moral qualification of concrete practice of social recognition.”⁹ The thesis this paper represents is stimulated by trajectories of diaconia as a biblical concept, which has already been documented by various exegetes, even if they differ in their semantic understandings of the Greek terminology.¹⁰ Here, I follow the argument brought forth by the LWF document, which explains that diaconia is in the main “service to the neighbour” and “leads inevitably to social change that restores, reforms, and transforms [...]”¹¹ To look into the social dimensions of human dignity may reveal layers of meaning to deepen and broaden the discussion on the ethical imperatives of diaconia.

Arguing on the premise that humans are social beings, human dignity reveals that it is a matter of social concern, a “relational good” in the various relationships and interactions of human beings as subjects and objects.¹² In 1946, Bertram Morris built a strong case for the “indispensability” of taking into account human sociality in individuals and societies in construing the idea of human dignity.¹³ Given the observable ironic disconnect among individuals and societies in our highly tightly woven electronic fabric era of a global society, Morris' ethical plea still holds today.¹⁴ We shall now look briefly into the symbolic discourse in John 10 as our source for understanding the task of diaconia for human dignity.

Life as Symbol of Human Dignity

The text in John 10:1-10 is especially helpful for our consideration of human dignity as a topic in diaconia. Theologically, the biblical declaration that human beings are created in God's image is unassailable and stands as a secure foundation for the dignity of human beings. It takes us also to the discussion of life. The anthropomorphic account of creation (Gen. 2:1-8) describes how humankind, which in the earlier account is

⁷ UCCP, “A Statement of Concern on the Effect of the Philippine Mining Act of 1995,” (2020).

⁸ This differentiation can be seen in the application of the Latin word dignitas in the Greco-Roman world, where in many cases, dignitas corresponds to rank or position in the society. Cf. P. G. W. Glare, ed., *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, 2nd. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 596. Parhiala and Simango, “Diakonia and Human Dignity,” p. 330.

⁹ Frits de Lange, “The Hermeneutics of Dignity,” in *Fragile Dignity: Intercontextual Conversations on Scriptures, Family, and Violence* (eds) L. Juliana Claassens and Klaas Spronk (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013b), pp. 9-27: 9.

¹⁰ See, for instance, John Collins, *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); John Collins, *Diakonia Studies: Critical Issues in Ministry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Anni Hentschel, *Diakonia im Neuen Testament. Studien zur Semantik unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Rolle von Frauen* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), and further literature.

¹¹ Susanne Watson Epting, *Unexpected Consequences: The Diaconate Renewed* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2015).

¹² Cf. de Lange, “The Hermeneutics of Dignity”, p. 14.

¹³ Bertram Morris, “The Dignity of Man,” *Ethics* 57 (1946), pp. 57-64.

¹⁴ Remy Debes, “On Bertram Morris's ‘The Dignity of Man’”, *Ethics* 125 (2015), pp. 836-39 summarises the salient points of Morris' article.

made according to God's image (Gen 1:26-27), receives the "breath of life" (*nišmat hayyîm*) and becomes a living being (*yēhî hayyâ nepēš*). By God's breathing into Adam, he becomes a living being, which implies that life comes from God. It also allows us to infer that human dignity lies on the reality that humans have life, are alive and derive life – the abundant life – from God. The Hebrew *chāyāh* that English versions usually convey as "to live" has affinity to the ancient Egyptian *nh* ("life"/"live"), which was used as an oath declaring the suzerain as living for the person who makes the oath.¹⁵ This tallies with what is described in Genesis 2, where God breathes life in humankind.

The Gospel of John shows a close affinity to the creation stories in Genesis.¹⁶ Especially noteworthy is the gospel's attention to issues of life (Gk. *zōē* "life"; *zaō* "live"), where it mentions the term and its cognates a total of 56 times.¹⁷ The prologue (John 1:1-18) at this early stage puts forth the theme of life: "In him was life (*zōē*) and the life (*zōē*) was the light of the people" (1:4). This semantic field will later on become prominent in Jesus' pronouncements about himself and for those who come to him (e.g., 3:15-16, 36; 4:10-14; 5:21-40; 6:35-51; 7:38; 8:12; 10:10; 11:25-26; 14:6; 17:2-3; 20:31).

In the pericope in John 10:1-10, Jesus' statement on life appears as a concluding argument of his engagement for the people: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I come that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (v. 10, NRSV). In this statement, life stands contra acts that threaten it: stealing (*klepto*), killing (*thuo*) and destroying (*apollumi*, in the sense of "bringing about disaster"; cf. Menge-Bibel). These activities clearly reveal how precarious it is to live and how vulnerable life is to external attack. Life's fragile character is even more frightfully portrayed by the sheep imagery as a metaphor for humankind as it lives its life. In Psalm 23,¹⁸ that beautiful song of courage engendered by trust in the Shepherd, life is presented as hounded by evil, but it is conquered by the ubiquitous presence of the Lord. The power and presence of the Lord secured the safety of those who have faith and trust in him. The thief (Gk. *kleptēs*, which appears synonymously with *lēstēs* "robber"/"bandit" in v. 8) is presented as the main antagonist in John 10 as well as in Psalm 23¹⁹ (although only indirectly). The thief's main purpose is actually to steal, and is ready to kill when the situation calls for it. This is a picture people often hear or read when a victim is killed in the course of a robbery.²⁰ Thus, the effects of the thief's activities are not only loss of property, but also destruction of the dignity of the victim.

In contrast to that of the thief, Jesus speaks of himself parabolically as the gate that provides life – more precisely, abundant life (Gk. *hina zoen echosin kai perisson echosin*). The abundance of life in v. 10 is understandable in view of what is described in v. 9. Accordingly, the sheep that enters the gate shall "be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture" (emphasis mine). These existential experiences of salvation, safe mobility, and food security reflect the essence of human dignity.

Jesus as "Diakonos" in John's Gospel

John's Gospel is teeming with symbolic images and linguistic devices that convey ideas of service and benefaction that directly arise from the work of Jesus. Some of their occurrences directly apply to Jesus and his ministry. For instance, Jesus is described as "light of the people" (1:4), broker of belonging to a new

¹⁵ Helmer Ringgren, "חַיָּה," *TDOT* 4, p. 324.

¹⁶ See, for instance, Mary Coloe, "The Structure of the Johannine Prologue and Genesis 1," *Australian Biblical Review* 45 (1997), pp. 40–55; Craig Evans, *Word and Glory: On the Exegetical and Theological Background of John's Prologue* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), esp. pp. 76–78.

¹⁷ The whole Johannine corpus has 70 occurrences of the semantic field.

¹⁸ Cf. Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC 4 (Nottingham: Inter Varsity Press, 2003), p. 234.

¹⁹ Cf. Hermann Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, 6th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), p. 99.

²⁰ For instance, Nestle L. Semilla, "Unsafe Place." *Cebu Daily News*, 3rd October 2018.

community (“children of God” 1:12), one who mediates eternal life (3:16-17, 36) and “living water” (4:10, 14). Jesus’ role as a go-between is explicitly expressed in his own words. Responding to the question about his legitimacy or authority in chapter 5, Jesus asserts his being “sent” (Gk. *pempō*) and that he is out to undertake the “will” (Gk. *thelēma*) of his sender (cf. 5:30-47). Jesus’ identity is being God’s word of love to humankind, and that his principal mission is to serve humankind by breaking the stranglehold of evil upon them and lead them to abundant life. Jesus is the mediator between God and human beings; that is his *diakonia* as God’s “go-between”²¹ to fallen human beings.

Jesus’ direct pronouncements about himself, especially his “I am” sayings,²² declare and confirm, rather than contradict, his total transparency to God and his provenance to the one who sent him.²³ Jerome Neyrey²⁴ argues convincingly that Jesus is God’s broker in the Gospel of John. When John speaks of Jesus as “the door” (or “the gate”), Jesus is seen as an agent or broker quite similar to roles performed by an *angelos* (envoy), *apostolos* (ambassador), *diakonos* (servant/“go-between”), *dikastēs* (judge), *epitropos* (agent, representative) in the Greco-Roman world.²⁵ As God’s broker, Jesus conveys God’s will in protecting, upholding and promoting human dignity. Jesus’ commitment means absolute obedience in the fulfilment of his mission that he “lay down” his life “for the sheep” (10:11, 15; cf. 15:13). As we can see in John 10, safe mobility and food security are very basic necessities Jesus is ready and willing to struggle for to the death.

Jesus as Mediator of Salvation

The terminology of salvation in v. 9 (through the verb *sōzō*) comes as an antithesis to that of destruction (*apollumi*) in v. 10a. In this passage, God’s mission is explicitly stated in the drama of salvation as reflected in the passive formulation of the verb *sōzō*. The surrounding context of John 10:9 is the imminent strike of the enemy – the thief or bandit who “climbs in by another way” (v. 1). And so, being the perennial target of the thief, the sheep would be quite fortunate if, with the shepherd’s succour, the sheep could be placed in a safe refuge. By highlighting thievery and banditry in this parabolic narrative, Jesus points to such dreadful phenomena as realities in the lives of people at the time of his ministry.²⁶ The socio-political unrest that underlined the life of the people of the land was responsible for the irruption of the movement for change which Jesus seized as the focus of his ministry.²⁷

Against the ubiquitous power of a gentle yet tight domination of the Roman Empire, the phenomena of banditry may be attributable to Rome’s lackadaisical employment of brutal force to keep peace and order; but became savage and horrendous when challenged by the conquered people. Tacitus, the Roman historian (born ca. 56) who may have been active when John wrote his Gospel (ca. 80-120 CE), recalls the words of Calgacus, a Caledonian chieftain, who described Rome’s plundering of the conquered land and people:

But today the uttermost parts of Britain are laid bare; there are no other tribes to come; nothing but sea and cliffs and these more deadly Romans, whose arrogance you shun in vain by obedience and self-restraint. Harriers of the world, now that earth fails their all-devastating hands, they probe even the sea: if their enemy have wealth, they

²¹ For a semantic analysis of the term *diakonia/diakoneō*, see John Collins, *Diakonia Studies: Critical Issues in Ministry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), esp. pp. 78-83.

²² Cf. 6:35; 8:12; 10:9; 10:11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1).

²³ Cf. Jerome Neyrey, *The Gospel of John in Cultural and Rhetorical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), pp. 441-453.

²⁴ Neyrey, *The Gospel of John in Cultural and Rhetorical Perspective*, esp. pp. 454-476.

²⁵ Cf. Neyrey, *The Gospel of John in Cultural and Rhetorical Perspective*, p. 463.

²⁶ Cf. Mark Humphries, *Early Christianity*, Digital print. ed. (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 100-104.

²⁷ See, for instance, the striking summary of the economic and political conditions of first century Palestine that paved the way to various social movements in Richard Horsley and John S. Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets & Messiahs: Popular Movements in the Time of Jesus* (Minneapolis, MN: Winston Press, 1985), esp. pp. 49–50.

have greed; if he be poor, they are ambitious; East nor West has glutted them; alone of mankind they behold with the same passion of concupiscence waste alike and want. To plunder, butcher, steal, these things they misname empire: they make a desolation and they call it peace.²⁸

Such a recollection of Tacitus exposes the extent of damage inflicted by perpetrators of violence, whether through the slavish mechanisms of society, which we may call “imperial banditry” or through illegal acts of individuals and groups (“social banditry”). Such a situation is, in essence, an attack against human dignity which is the core of human existence. Hence, suffering is tantamount to loss of life. Jesus’ advent (“I have come...”) has its reason in offering a new or restoration of life – or the preservation and restoration of human dignity. Therefore, the salvific work of Jesus is presented here as rescue from every threat on life and dignity.

Safe Free Mobility and Food Security

The freedom to move where one wants, a do or die concern for millions of people around the world today, belongs to human dignity, which is also associated with safety. This is of supreme importance in today’s world where racism, ideological divisions, bigotry, religious intolerance are on the rise, causing tens of millions to leave their native homes as they search for places where they can live in peace and security. Millions of human beings are on the move today, and so many have lost their lives, left alone to die in hunger and nakedness; yet, there are groups of people for reasons of race, religion, ideology and sexual orientation who do not merely ignore the marginalised, but make political sport of them. The call of our historical hour is to make them see that these migrants are human beings who possess human dignity. This is the image we see of the sheep in John 10:9-10 being brought through the gate to safety and are able to move freely in and out of the gate. In Jesus, they are ensured safe mobility, since now they are in their own biosphere. In entering through the door, the sheep are not kept in an enclosure where they would lose their mobility. In Jesus, people are not locked in for the sake of safety. Under the care of the shepherd, they are safe and secure and have courage for the future.

The concern for food in John 10 is a metaphorical take on the issue of food within the socio-political life in Greco-Roman society. In John 10:9, the freedom of risk and danger of free movement is closely tied up with food security. Food, including water, are resources essential to life. The good shepherd makes a diametrical contrast between himself and the hireling; the good shepherd “lays down his life for the sheep”, the hireling comes to steal and destroy, and scampers away at the approach of a wolf who catches the sheep (10:10-13). This imagery makes a dramatic and hilarious caricature of the imperial Roman propaganda as agent or broker of salvation,²⁹ for in truth the Roman imperial order was unable to provide the basic needs of the people such as food and health care.³⁰ The hardships of the poor, exacerbated by the rapacious rule of the elite, happened in far off regions. For example, Gerd Theißen notes that the Galilean rural territory became a supplier of agricultural products to the rich city of Tyre.³¹ Against such horrendous economic realities, Jesus’ counsel to “[l]et the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs” (Mark 7:27; NRSV) acquires devastating power against the state of things.

Water, too, is taken up by the Gospel of John to point out its supreme importance for human survival. Jesus converses with the Samaritan woman (ch. 4), who hesitates to offer Jesus water to drink because Jesus is a Jew, and Jesus then shifts the level of their conversation from the physical to the spiritual (or rather from the pragmatic to the holistic). The woman makes her dubiety stronger by saying that Jesus has no means for

²⁸ Cornelius Tacitus, *Dialogus, Agricola, Germania* (London/New York: Heinemann/Macmillan, 1914), p. 221.

²⁹ Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid*, trans. Frederick Ahl (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 153-154.

³⁰ Cf. Warren Carter, *John and Empire: Initial Explorations* (New York: T & T Clark, 2008), esp. pp. 204-234.

³¹ Cf. Gerd Theissen, *The Gospels in Context: Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition* (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), pp. 61-75; Acts 12:20.

drawing water, and “the well (Grk. *phrear*) is deep.”³² “Where do you get your living water?” (cf. 4:11). Jesus’ response is not up against the woman’s dubiety, but may reflect his posture against the adverse effects of political activities and policies in the region by the authorities. Josephus, in his *Jewish Antiquities*, describes a political activity of Archelaus, who briefly ruled over Judea and Samaria from 4 BCE to 6 CE, wherein he “rebuilt the royal palace” in Jericho and “diverted half the water with which the village of Neara (about five miles from Jericho) used to be watered, and drew off that water into the plain, to water those palm trees which he had there planted” (Ant. 17.340). Such grandiose dreams of the high and the mighty never fail to impoverish the life of the poor and the exploited to cater to their whim and caprice.

Concluding Reflections

What I have presented in this essay is an exploration of what human dignity means in the nitty-gritty of human life, drawing analogies from the New Testament and its historical context. The actions stripping away dignity may seem small and hardly noticeable but they squeeze the joy and delight out of life and seem permanent, for they are built in over long stretches of time by the refusal of the powerful to render the dignity that humans at the margins of society have a right to. Jesus’ fundamental mission of salvation is not merely to snatch them from hell and its torments, but encompasses the basic needs of human existence, such as food and drink, clothing and housing, and healing; in fact, it embraces the whole range of what our modern world means by human rights. Jesus zeroed in on the essence of human life – that human beings are creatures made in the image of God, and that every human being deserves to have and live “the abundant life” here and now, even if, like Jesus, one has to die for it.³³

The image of the Good Shepherd who has come offering the good news of salvation must not simply be understood in the spiritual realm inasmuch as it stretches over the entire realm of life in this world. This includes everything a human being needs to live a human life in this world; to allow everyone to do that in concrete and specific ways is the task of diaconia. Those who commit themselves to this understanding of diaconia in this world whose values and goals are a direct reversal of the values of God’s reign should be prepared to bear the cross which Jesus bore. Jesus has revealed an understanding of being, where a passion for truth and justice and a genuine love for the other (not in the sense of “othering”) gives Christ’s loyalists the courage to be and assures them of victory even as they carry on with the struggle.

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³² This expression may reflect the natural dynamics of the “well of Jacob” in the course of time. The level of water of the well depended on the amount of water rainfall. Cf. John F. McHugh, *John 1–4*, ICC (London: T&T Clark, 2009), p. 274.

³³ For instance, among many others in the Philippines, Edison Lapuz, an ordained UCCP minister who was murdered in the midst of his engagement with local farmers in his home province. Cf. Dennis Solon, “Edison Lapuz and the Good Shepherd,” *Silliman Ministry Magazine* 76 (2006), pp. 15-17.

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44. PEACEBUILDING IN THE PHILIPPINES: THE DIACONAL ENGAGEMENT OF THE CHURCH

Victor R. Aguilan¹

Introduction

The mission of the Church in Asia, specifically in the Philippines is two-fold, namely: evangelism and social action; proclamation and diaconia. One crucial form of diaconal engagement in the Philippines is peace-making. Across the Philippines and Asia, religious institutions have been encouraging men and women to work for peace in the midst of armed conflicts. They have mobilised activists, bishops, congregations, and ordinary members to overcome violent conflicts, to establish and to build communities where peace is a reality.

To understand better the peace-making diaconal work in Asia, I will focus on the experience of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP).² The UCCP is the largest and most widespread Protestant church in the country. It was organised in 1948.³

Citizen Approach to Violent Conflict and Peace-making

The role of the Church can be located in the expanding conceptual terrain of citizen peace-making. Church people are also citizens. Citizen efforts seeking to address deadly and violent conflict can now thus be seen as part of peace-making. Several practitioners and scholars have developed overarching perspectives on the roles that citizens, which include religious people, can play to help ensure prospects for peace. John Paul Lederach, for one, offers a model which he calls “conflict transformation.”⁴

The “conflict transformation” approach focuses on the dialectic nature of conflict. It sees conflict across four dimensions: personal, relational, structural, and cultural.⁵ In this regard, John Paul Lederach asserts that in order to effectively address conflict, efforts often need to shift away from the issues of the conflict and towards a focus on reconciling and rebuilding relationships.⁶ In order to make peace, negative or destructive interaction patterns need to be transformed into positive or constructive relationships. Lederach focuses on both structural and cultural aspects of the relationships. It is a strategy that places an emphasis on conscientisation: raising awareness about the inequities of power and the injustices that people experience as a result of these inequities.⁷

William Ury has developed systemic frameworks that map the overall collective *potential* of private humanitarian agencies, human rights advocates, and individual NGOs. He develops the notion of the Third

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² T. Valentino Sito Jr, *Several Springs, One Stream: The United Church of Christ in the Philippines, Vol.I: The Formative Decade (1948-1958)*. (Quezon City: United Church of Christ in the Philippines, 1997).

³ The mainline Protestant denominations in the country are the United Church of Christ (UCCP), the United Methodist Church (UMC), the Iglesia Evangelica Unide de Cristo (UNIDA), the Iglesia Evangelica Metodista en las Islas Filipinas (IEMELIF), Lutheran Church, Salvation Army, and Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches.

⁴ John Paul Lederach, *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation across Cultures* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996). and John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*. (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997).

⁵ Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* p. 82.

⁶ Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* p. 24.

⁷ Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* p. 64.

Side in the conflict.⁸ In a conflict, it is a commonly held view that there are two sides, two protagonists, or two parties involved in any conflict. However, in reality, there is a third party. What is this third side? Ury says:

[T]he third side is the community itself taking responsibility for its own conflicts. It's the community forming what might be called a 'winning alliance' against violent conflict. It's the community learning to serve as a container for contention, a container within which conflict can be transformed from destructive ways like violence and war, into constructive ways like dialogue, negotiation, and democracy.⁹

His concept of the Third Side places emphasis on the role of community members with regard to steering conflicts away from violence and towards a just and lasting peace. According to Ury, the ten basic roles of the Third Side are Witness, Bridge Builder, Equaliser, Healer, Mediator, Arbitrator, Peacekeeper, Provider, Referee, and Teacher.¹⁰

From a *Third Side* perspective, the community includes any group or organisation who perform roles that serve to contain, resolve or prevent a conflict. The *Third Side* shares, in common with other citizen peace-making approaches, the idea that peace-making is a set of processes that requires the engagement of every dimension of society. The Church as a peacemaker could be viewed as a *Third Side* in the conflict.

UCCP Understanding of Peace

The foundation for the peace-making ministry of the UCCP is Christological. It is faith in Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church, of life and of history. He is the Prince of Peace who compels the Church to be a peacemaker. The peace-making ministry of the UCCP is a response to a violent and sinful world specifically in the context of the Philippines. It is participation in the ministry of Jesus Christ which is part of the social ethics of the Church as a body of Christ entrusted with Christ's ministry.

In this study, the term peace includes both "positive" and "negative" meaning. The negative aspect of peace means merely the absence of armed conflict and human rights violations. It focuses on the reduction of the incidence of war and the prevention of deadly conflict. Negative peace refers to the absence of violence. When, for example, a ceasefire is reached, a negative peace will ensue. Positive peace is filled with positive content such as the restoration of relationships, the creation of social systems that serve the needs of the whole population and the constructive resolution of conflict. The concept of positive peace involves the elimination of the root causes of war, violence, and injustice and entails the conscious effort to build a society that reflects these commitments.¹¹ In the UCCP perspective on peace and peace-making, both "positive" and "negative" meanings can be found.

In addition, the term *shalom* is used in the UCCP official documents to express this notion of "peace based on justice." In the statement, *Peace-making: Our Ministry*, the Bishop said: "The ministry of peace-making is an imperative of the faith we profess. The Statement of Faith of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines calls us *to participate in the establishment of a meaningful and just social order.*" A significant point mentioned by the Bishop in the Statement was the close connection between peace and justice. The Church declared that peace-making was a concrete expression of justice. It asserted that there can be no peace without justice. Justice was understood in terms of meeting the basic needs of people.

⁸ William Ury, *Getting to Peace: Transforming Conflict at Home, at Work, and in the World* (New York: Viking, 1999).

⁹ William Ury, *Must We Fight? From the Battlefield to the Schoolyard—a New Perspective on Violent Conflict and Its Prevention* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass., 2002), p. 78.

¹⁰ Ury, *The Third Side: Why We Fight and How We Can Stop*.

¹¹ Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research* 6(3) (1969), pp. 167-193.

For as long as peasants remain landless,
 For as long as labourers do not receive just wages,
 For as long as we are politically and economically dominated by foreign nations,
 For as long as we channel more money to the military than to basic social services,
 For as long as the causes of social unrest remain untouched,
 There will be no peace.¹²

The bishops believed that the root of insurgency was the structures of injustice.¹³

Major Rebel Groups in Peace Talks with Government

In the Philippines, there are two major armed rebellions.¹⁴ One is led by the Communist Party of the Philippines; its united front – the National Democratic Front, and its armed wing – the New People Army (CPP-NDF-NPA).¹⁵ GPH and Communist rebels have been engaged in on-and-off peace talks for the last 16 years. Peace between GPH and CPP-NDF-NPA remain elusive.

One faction split from CPP-NPA-NDF and established the *Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa–Pilipinas/Revolutionary Proletarian Army/Alex Boncayao Brigade* (RPMP-RPA-ABB) in 1998. A peace agreement and ceasefire was signed on 6th December 2000 with the Philippine Government.¹⁶ In 2019, the RPMP-RPA agreed on the final political settlement that included resettlement, development, demobilisation and disarmament.¹⁷

The Moro National Liberation Front and its military arm, the Bangsa Moro Army was founded in 1968. The goal was an independent Bangsa Moro Homeland. Their envisioned independent state is composed of 13 Islamised ethno-linguistic groups in Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan. On 2nd September 1996 the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GPH) and the MNLF entered into a peace agreement and accepted the creation of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

In 1984, however, a faction of the MNLF had broken away to form the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The MILF, whose leadership is derived from the traditional, aristocratic and religious elites in Maguindanao, viewed the MNLF as secular and left-leaning. It is now the strongest rebel group in the Southern Philippines.¹⁸ In 2018, the GPH and MILF signed a peace agreement and ended the armed conflict.

¹² Council of Bishops, “Peacemaking: Our Ministry, 21 August 1986,” in *UCCP Statements and Resolutions (1948-1990)* (ed) Lydia N. Niguidula (Quezon City: Education and Nurture Desk, United Church of Christ in the Philippines, 1990), p. 148.

¹³ Council of Bishops, “Peacemaking: Our Ministry”, p. 147.

¹⁴ Paz Verdades M. Santos *et al.*, *Primed and Purposeful: Armed Groups and Human Security Efforts in the Philippines* (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, 2010).

¹⁵ Joel Rocamora, *Breaking Through: The Struggle within the Communist Party of the Philippines* (Pasig City: Anvil Publishing, 1994); Alfredo Saulo, *Communism in the Philippines: Introduction* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila Univ. Press, 1990); Kathleen Weekley, *The Communist Party of the Philippines 1968-1993: A Story of Its Theory and Practice* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2001)., Patricio N. Abinales, *Fellow Traveler: Essays on Filipino Communism* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2001); Victor N. Corpuz, *Silent War* (Quezon City: VNC Enterprises, 1989).

¹⁶ RPMP CENTRAL COMMITTEE, “Rpm-P: Brief Profile”, RPMP <http://www.angelfire.com/rpg2/rpmp/profile.htm> (accessed 16 August 2013).

¹⁷ OPAPP.

¹⁸ Hilario. Gomez Jr., *The Moro Rebellion and the Search for Peace: A Study on Christian-Muslim Relations in the Philippines* (Zambonga: Silsila, 2001).

Some UCCP Engagements

The response of the UCCP to the conflict was to engage the government and rebels. The strategies adopted by the Church in its peace-making role were many and varied, depending on the conditions and opportunities that prevailed in the different jurisdictions or conferences. Some of these engagements include:

Human rights advocacy

The response of the UCCP to the peace and conflict issues was to engage the government and rebels. One engagement is in the issue of human rights. Some of the activities of the Church were participating in public hearings, consultations, and dialogues with government agencies. The UCCP provided legal aid and campaigned for the indemnification of human rights violation victims. It has participated in exposing and denouncing human rights violations in the media and other public forums. However, continuing education and organising work including networking with other people's organisations (POs) were launched as a means to sustain the peace-making role of the UCCP.

To do so, it created the Justice, Peace and Human Rights Program (JPHR).¹⁹ Much of the work of the JPHR has been focused on data gathering and monitoring about cases related to human rights violations, especially committed against members of the Church. It also conducted various fact-finding missions (FFM) organised with assistance from various international partners and local non-government organisations (NGOs). The FFM have documented both the failure of the government to uphold the human rights of its citizens and the continuing human rights violations resulting from the worsening conflict between the government forces and the rebels²⁰ specifically in the Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao regions.²¹ The UCCP has acknowledged that in human rights, ministry must always take the side of the victims and should hold the violators accountable whether perpetrated by rebels or government soldiers.

Peace zone and sanctuary

In 1990, during the height of the armed conflict between the New Peoples Army rebels and the soldiers that resulted in the massive displacement of people, the Executive Committee issued two statements: *A Statement of Concern For Internal Refugees*, and *A Declaration of UCCP Churches as Sanctuaries and Zones of Peace*. The church declared its church buildings, parsonages and lands, hospitals and schools, and other church-owned institutions and their premises as "sanctuaries and zones of peace." "These places and premises are open to all people – regardless of colour and creed, sex and status, and of political and religious affiliation – at all times in all circumstances of need." Those places designated as "zones of peace" should be "used for activities that build community and contribute to a deeper understanding of and commitment to peace and justice." Zones of peace are demilitarised areas. "No arms [...] and weapons of war should be brought to nor stored in these church places and premises."²²

¹⁹ UCCP Constitution and By-laws. The 1993 Constitution and By-Laws incorporated human rights as one of UCCP's declared principles. Section 10 says: "In accordance with the biblical understanding that all persons are created in the image of God, the Church affirms and upholds the inviolability of the rights of persons as reflected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other agreements on human rights, the international covenants on economic, social and cultural rights and on civil and political rights, the 1984 Convention against Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and those that relate specifically to refugees, women, youth, children, minority groups and other persons who cannot safeguard their own rights."

²⁰ Erme Camba *et al.* "Justice Not Vengeance: An Open Letter to the National Democratic Front and the Government of the Republic of the Philippines, 3 July 1989," in *UCCP Statements and Resolutions (1948-1990)* (ed) Lydia N. Niguidula (Quezon City: United Church of Christ in the Philippines, 1990).

²¹ Furrer Roger, Brenda Gonzalez, and Emily See (eds), *Mountain Tempest* (Quezon City: UCCP, 1991).

²² UCCP Executive Committee, "A Declaration of UCCP Churches as Sanctuaries and Zones of Peace, 23 February 1990," in *UCCP Statements and Resolutions (1948-1990)* (ed) Lydia Niguidula (Quezon City: United Church of Christ in the Philippines, 1990).

One case involved 1300 internal refugees who came down to Dumaguete City from the hinterland of Negros Oriental in the central part of the Philippine to avoid the conflict between the government soldiers and NPA rebels.²³ Silliman University, a UCCP related institution, was the only institution with a large enough compound to accommodate the internal refugees. Some faculty members of the Divinity School requested the Administration to allow these people to use the grandstand and ball field as evacuation areas.²⁴ Recently, the UCCP has sheltered around 700 Lumad or indigenous people who have sought sanctuary in the Haran Mission Center. They have been displaced from their communities in Talaingod, Davao del Norte, because of heavy militarisation.²⁵

Peace education

Some of the engagements of the UCCP on peace were carried out by the Church-related educational institutions. The Dansalan College Foundation, Inc. (DCFI), where 99 percent of the students are Muslims, is a UCCP-related institution in Marawi City, Lanao. “DCFI is recognized as a partnership of Christians and Muslims in confronting the challenges brought about by historical tensions, conflicts and wars.”²⁶ The Southern Christian College (SCC) has taken initiatives to promote peace and development in Midsayap, Cotabato an area which has been divided by historical conflicts and wars.²⁷ UNESCO has selected SCC as a pilot school for tertiary education on peace, human rights, and tolerance. Other peace activities of SCC include: the creation of the Community Peace Advocates of Cotabato (COMPAX) in 1998; the setting up of the Institute for Peace and Development Studies (IPDS) in 1999; the launching of *Kapihan sa Kalinaw* in November 1999; the *Paaralang Pangkapayapaan* in 2002, and the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding with the Ramos Peace and Development Foundation (RPDEV). The latter involves sharing information, studies and research on peace and development, finding ways to contribute to the peaceful resolution of the conflict in Mindanao, and monitoring the implementation of the terms of the peace accord between the GRP (GPH) and the MNLF.²⁸ In the Visayas, UCCP is in ongoing cooperation with the Justice and Peace Center (JPC) of Silliman University in Dumaguete. The JPC has developed a training programme for pastors and members on building peace and transforming conflicts. The JPC has linked up with the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and the Mindanao Peace Institute (MPI).²⁹

Third party/civil society representative

In 1996 the UCCP played another important role in the peace talks between the GRP (GPH) and the CPP-NPA-NDF. The General Secretary, Bishop Gomez, was invited to join the International Peace Advisory Committee as a third-party group along with the officers of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines and some Roman Catholic bishops. Bishop Gomez explained that a third-party for the UCCP would show that “The Church is church for all and of all both in government and out of government.” He further added that “As a third party, the UCCP once more shall underscore that the mercies of God are like rains from heaven, they fall on both, the sinner and the sinless, the poor and the rich, Communists and non-

²³ “Evacuees,” *The Negros Chronicle*, 3rd November 1991.

²⁴ Noriel Capulong, “Forum on the Internal Refugees,” *The United Church Letter*, March 1992.

²⁵ Bishop Hamuel Tequis and Bishop Melzar Labuntog. “Haran Mission Centre of UCCP in Davao City (Philippines) set on Fire.” <http://www.vemission.org/en/home/news-detail-view/archive/29/february/2016/article/anschlag-im-haran-mission-centre-der-uccp-in-davao-philippinen.html> accessed 27th April 2016.

²⁶ Edna J. Orteza, “The Quest for Lasting Peace: The UCCP Experience,” (photocopy, 12th December 2005).

²⁷ Orteza, “The Quest for Lasting Peace”.

²⁸ Orteza, “The Quest for Lasting Peace”.

²⁹ Peace Resource Center Brochure.

Communists, rebel groups and established governments.”³⁰ Bishop Gomez was also chosen as the civil society representative to peace talks between the GPH and RPMP-RPA-ABB.

Solidarity and peace linkages

The UCCP also used its partnership with other churches and ecumenical bodies to bring to the wider public its human rights, peace and justice concerns. One major involvement was with “the Peace for Life (PfL)” a multi-religious, inter-cultural movement for global justice and peace, which calls for action, building people’s solidarity, and mobilising faith-based resistance to the US war on terror and destructive forces of corporate globalisation. The PfL is supported by the National Council of Churches in the Philippines and World Council of Churches.³¹ There are also individual UCCP members and leaders who have joined other progressive national ecumenical organisations such as the Ecumenical Bishops’ Forum (EBF), Ecumenical Women’s Forum (EWF), and Promotion of Church People’s Response (PCPR).³² The United Church of Christ in the Philippines with other leaders from the Roman Catholic, Protestant and Evangelical Churches form the Philippine Ecumenical Peace Platform (PEPP) to encourage the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front to return to the negotiating table to talk peace and to stop extrajudicial killings.

Conclusion

We have shown that the UCCP as a servant of peace takes a Third Side role, such as witnessing, bridge-building, mediating and teaching. Many of the issues or campaigns of the UCCP were conflict de-escalation activities such as monitoring of, exposing, protesting against. They also included instituting legal measures to address human rights violations resulting from insurgent and/or counter-insurgency operations; calling for the resumption of peace talks and forging of ceasefires; relief and rehabilitation for internal refugees and other victims caught in the crossfire; the establishment of peace zones or sanctuaries to demilitarise the armed conflicts; and the campaign to observe international humanitarian law in the conduct of the war.

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³⁰ Hilario Gomez Jr., “Building up the Church: Continuing Task, Pressing Challenge: A Report to the General Assembly Executive Committee,” in *the Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee November 6-8* (Quezon City: UCCP, 1996), p. 14.

³¹ Orteza.

³² Orteza.

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45. DIACONIA AS PEACE AND JUSTICE ADVOCACY: A PHILIPPINE PERSPECTIVE

Noriel C. Capulong¹

Introduction

The Divinity School of Silliman University has been hosting classes for the UEM-organised degree program, Master in International Diaconic Management for several years already. One of the topics which this author was requested to lecture on is the *Theology of Struggle*.² In brief, it is an interpretation of an ongoing process taking place in the past and current history of the Philippines, referring to the Filipino people's continuing struggle for real peace and genuine justice after more than three centuries of being under colonial masters. It is a struggle that has been and is still being waged in the midst of the continuing absence of lasting peace and the persistence of unjust structures and class relationships in the basic social systems and traditions in the land. In such a situation, the method of interpretation of texts has always to be contextual, that is, to relate the texts to the contemporary context to which the message may be addressed in all its compelling power.

This paper suggests that the biblical model of Jesus' ministry serves as a diaconic model in offering a way by which real and lasting peace based on authentic and just relationships can be experienced even as the struggle for genuine transformation may not yet fully achieved.

Diakonia as Ministry or Service.

In Acts, chap. 6, the Greek verb *diakoneo* has been understood as a ministry of rendering service to people who are in need. It is a ministry of doing and offering concrete service by the disciples as a way of articulating their faith-response to the life changing encounter with the redeeming love of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even if in other contexts, such as in Luke 10:40, the noun *diakonia* could simply mean the act of waiting at table as an expression of hospitality to honoured guests, the overall impression is that the service rendered is something that is personally rendered and with much affection for the person being served.³ Thus, the term itself may in general be seen as expressing an act of service rendered out of genuine love for the person or persons to whom the service is being given.⁴

The proposition here is that the Philippine church's advocacy for peace and justice needs to acquire the biblical diaconic qualities of rendering service out of love as demonstrated in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.⁵ This has to be carried out, not just as a matter of institutional obligation to engage in social and charitable programs for the temporary alleviation of hunger, homelessness and aimlessness in life. This is what usually happens in most churches' Christian social witness and mission programs. But many of these programs fail to properly analyse and address the root causes of the situations which render people hungry,

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² "Theology of Struggle: Biblical Foundations," Unpublished lecture delivered during the UEM MA in Diaconic Management course lecture on "Theology of Struggle", 19th January 2019, Silliman University, Dumaguete City; see also, Eleazar Fernandez, *Toward a Theology of Struggle* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994).

³ *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2, Gerhard, Kittel, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans, 1964), pp. 81-82. Henceforth, TDNT.

⁴ TDNT, pp. 81-82.

⁵ Capulong, lecture, pp. 14-24.

homeless, aimless and hopeless in life. The result is that the church simply provides a very temporary solution to the prevailing and even worsening social and economic problems of Philippine society.

The diaconic quality of rendering service in love to the people requires the church and the individual members to connect in a more personal way with the people they are supposed to serve. In the same loving manner carried out by Jesus in his ministry, they would need to know these people, their personal circumstances and the challenges and issues they have been facing in life that brought them to such a dire situation. Without that diaconic quality of love and compassion for those being served, the advocacies of the church for peace and justice become mere formalities for the sake of programme compliance and positive accomplishment reports at the end of the year.

Advocacy for Peace and Justice as a Witness for Shalom Justice

Consistent with our contextual perspective and approaches, a diaconic advocacy for peace and justice will firstly require a re-examination of the context to which such advocacy is to be practiced, in this case, the contemporary Philippine context. Secondly, a re-examination of the essential meaning, significance and implications of the two terms is required to understand that for which diaconic witness stands.

As for the contemporary situation in the Philippine context, in the last few months, the country has been reeling from a spate of natural and human caused calamities that have devastated lives, destroyed properties, major sources of livelihoods and have driven countless victims to the edge of uncertainty and anxiety for the future. The series of typhoons or tropical cyclones that hit mostly the central parts of the country, the Visayan islands only last December (2019), along with the continuing powerful earthquakes mostly in the island of Mindanao, and then the deadly eruption of the ever-active Taal volcano in Luzon, have each left large swathes of destruction in the three major island groups.⁶

With super typhoons becoming more regular in their destructive visits to the country, powerful earthquakes shaking up the ground every now and then, and volcanic eruptions driving people away from their homes, it is as if the whole environment is in a state of uprising. The deterioration of environmental conditions due to climate change all over the world has left the country among the most vulnerable to its destructive and deadly effects. There has been a lot of instability and a lack of peace in the lives of the people affected by such major calamities. Clearly, most Filipinos now are experiencing much of the absence of *shalom* in their living conditions, especially those who had already been suffering from endemic poverty and powerlessness due to the given historical and structural conditions already described.

What may be considered as lack of *shalom* here relates directly to the heart of the biblical meaning of the term. For the generalised and encompassing meaning of *shalom* as peace can be more appreciated and grasped in its absence and in the visioning of people who long for it.

Peace as *Shalom*

Peace as *shalom* in Hebrew covers a wide range of meanings in the Old Testament. Its meaning depends on one's angle of view or the kind of illumination with which it is to be understood.⁷ It depends largely on the context where the term is being used. However, in general, the range of meanings would mostly refer to a

⁶ News reports on the last two destructive typhoons that has hit the country, Tisoy (international name: Kammuri) and Ursula (international name Phanfone) and the series of powerful earthquakes that had hit the southern island of Mindanao, along with the reports on the powerful eruption of the Taal volcano in the province of Batangas in Luzon and the extent of damage and destruction each had caused are all available in the internet news sources.

⁷ William M. Swartley, *Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2006), p. 27.

state of well-being, wholeness, completeness, where there is not just absence of war or conflict but the presence of prosperity, abundance, harmony and good relations.⁸

The term could also refer to the concept of a correct order of life, stability and the ethical norms and expectations that ensures the continuity and unity of the created order. In this way, shalom is also to be understood as having a moral quality that demands to be upheld and respected for basic order and peace in the society. It has its own demands for righteous living and obedience to the righteous and just will of God.⁹

The Greek term for peace, *eirene* may have its own parallel meanings with that of *shalom*. It also covers both the material and physical well-being of individuals, living in harmonious relationships with each other in the community. It is living the life that is *peaceable*.¹⁰

A society suffering for centuries of colonial domination and economic exploitation even of its own environmental resources and now being victimised by a series of major and highly destructive natural and human-made calamities cannot be regarded as a society living and enjoying *shalom* in its full range of meanings. Neither can this current situation of the people be considered as a life that is being lived with justice.

Justice as *Mishpat*

The Hebrew term for justice is *mishpat*, and, as *shalom*, has a range of meanings. In the specific Philippine context, the meaning with a broad socio-ethical implication that is closest to the message of both the prophets and Jesus is to be adopted in this paper. Justice (*mishpat*) has always been mentioned by the prophets in relation to the acts of so much injustice and abuses of the poor by the rich ruling elite of Samaria and Jerusalem, including the king. We can then consider that this term refers mainly to the protection and upholding of the rights of the poor and marginalised, such as the widows and orphans, against the abuses of the rich and powerful.¹¹

This understanding of justice may be seen as being derived from the very nature of God which is justice, righteousness and love. He is a God whose righteousness is strongly opposed to all forms of injustice as perpetrated by the pharaohs of this world against their powerless subjects.¹²

The prophetic appeal for justice then applies more directly as a covenant responsibility of the powerful in relation to the weak, or the responsibility of the rulers towards their subjects. Failure on the part of the rulers to carry out this responsibility creates a rising atmosphere of injustice and a serious “crisis of justice” even in the present.¹³

In the case of the Filipino experience and that of many other third world nations, the crisis of justice may be seen more in the manner in which the environment, that has been sustaining the basic livelihood of the people, but has become impaired if not permanently destroyed because of the greed and irresponsible destruction of the ancestral lands, mountains, forests and water resources of the people by the powerful. Such destruction of the basic resources has now clearly contributed to the worsening of the environmental crisis

⁸ Swartley, *Covenant*, p. 27.

⁹ Swartley, *Covenant*, p. 27; see also, Perry Yoder, *Shalom: The Bible's Word for Salvation, Justice, Peace* (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1987), pp. 10-23.

¹⁰ Yoder, *Shalom*, pp. 19-20. Swartley, *Covenant*, pp. 37-40 however provides some precautions related to the possibility that *eirene* as a concept of peace in the New Testament may have actually been understood also as referring to the kind of peace offered by *Pax Romana*, the peace imposed and maintained by the power and military might of the empire.

¹¹ Isaiah 1:15-16, 61:1-3; Jeremiah 22: 13-16; Amos 2:6-8; 4:1; 5:7, 10-12; 8:4-6; Micah 2:1-2; 3:1-4, 9-12.

¹² Levi V. Oracion, *Intimations of Divinity in Creation, History and Human Beings* (Quezon City, Ph.: Levi Oracion and New Day Publishers, 2013), 116-117.

¹³ cf. Naim Stifan Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1989), 116.

but in a far more destructive manner for the poor people living in the third world nations such as the Philippines. The connection between acts of injustice against the people and the corresponding destructive effects on the environment has been noted much earlier already by the prophets such as Hosea. The land and sea perish and then everything that dwells therein suffers (Hosea 4:1-3).

This prophetic understanding of justice is essentially what Jesus of Nazareth took upon himself in the proclamation of his ministry (Luke 4:18-19). This can be clearly observed in the kind of diaconic model of service that Jesus demonstrated for his disciples to follow.

Conclusion: The Challenge for the Church in its Diaconic Ministry

The advocacy of the church for peace and justice is a broad and comprehensive ministry of providing faithful witness and service to the people identified by the prophets and Jesus as the main objects of God's concern for justice. It is justice which will uphold and protect the rights of the poor and marginalised to access the life-giving benefits from the rich resources of their land even in the face of the aggressive, destructive and irresponsible acts of the rich and powerful. This kind of justice, once realised, is the one that will usher in the era of an authentic reign of peace in the land. This will, however, be a mission that will never be easy for the church. The church will have to be fully committed to this kind of diaconic ministry for the people who are longing and crying for justice and peace for themselves as well as for their environment.

This means that churches in the Philippines will need to set up concrete, sustainable programmes of action that will address the need of the suffering people.

This implies firstly a continuing justice advocacy program both for the marginalised sectors of society as well as the renewal of the deteriorating environment. It also means the church will need to engage in cooperative endeavours with existing non-government organisations (NGOs) concerned with the advocacy for justice and human rights for the poor and the marginalised and those who advocate for environmental renewal and preservation.

This thirdly also implies that the church, being an ambassador of God's peace, will also need to express active support to all efforts of both government and non-governmental sectors to put an end to the persisting armed conflict between the communist rebels and the government. The church must join and support the call of the other peace-loving sectors and organisations in the society for the warring parties, the government and the rebels, to renew their peace negotiations and arrive at some concrete terms for a peaceful settlement of the decades-long conflict in the country.

A lot of efforts, resources and sacrifices of time, energy and commitment will be needed in making this twin advocacy for justice and peace a reality in the country. This is where churches and other faith communities would really be tested as they also seriously consider the risks involved in obeying the call of Jesus for obedience. Nevertheless, this is where the church truly becomes the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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46. DIAKONIA IN A WORLD OF VULNERABILITY – SOME PUBLIC THEOLOGICAL PARAMETERS

Nico Koopmann¹

Introduction

This essay strives to explore some theological parameters for a fresh understanding of the ecclesial calling and mandate of diakonia. Diakonia as one of the practices of the church is discussed first. Thereafter, the notion of the threefold of Christ is considered. The proposal is made that the priestly office of Christ informs the diaconate to which the church is called. The Confession of Belhar, adopted in 1986 by the former Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa, provides contours for developing a public diaconate of social proximity amidst so-called social distancing, of social embrace amidst social polarisation, of compassionate justice amidst intensified socio-economic inequality. This essay attempts to show that these three sets of theological wells might widen and deepen our understanding of diakonia.

Diakonia and the other church practices that are referred to are portrayed as public practices. This means that these ecclesial practices are practised in and impact upon all parts of public life from the most intimate to the most social, global and cosmic; from civil society with all its individuals and institutions to the domains of political, economic and ecological life, as well as to the public sphere of public discourse and public opinion-formation. The public nature and impact of these practices also imply that appropriate cooperation and partnerships are established by churches with other institutions in society.

This essay is written against the backdrop of the Coronavirus pandemic. This pandemic has exposed and intensified existing concerns for the diaconate of the church. Some of these concerns are poverty, unemployment, inequality, and social pathologies as well as various particular social, political, economic and ecological issues, challenges and concerns. This context is described as a context of vulnerability.

The essay is structured as follows. The context of vulnerability is briefly sketched in the first section. Thereafter, the themes of diakonia and ecclesial practices, diakonia and the threefold office and diakonia and the Confession of Belhar are discussed.

A World of Vulnerability

The Coronavirus pandemic has shown how vulnerable human beings are. Corona has revealed and intensified current vulnerabilities.

The notion of vulnerability can be used in at least two ways. Vulnerability firstly means that we are at risk and under threat of suffering. We are predisposed to various forms of suffering. We are frail and fragile and can easily be wronged and hurt. American theologian, Thomas Reynolds,² refers to the root meaning of vulnerability to illustrate this point. Vulnerability derives from the Latin word *vulnerare*, to injure and harm, and to be open to be wounded; in my words, to be under the threat and risk, to be predisposed and susceptible to be hurt and wounded. Secondly, vulnerability refers to our actual and concrete suffering in a variety of forms.

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² T Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion. A Theology of Disability and Hospitality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008), p. 108.

Vulnerable beings are always at risk and under the threat that our basic needs for dignified living might not be met. Three types of needs need to be addressed in order to avoid severe suffering and to experience a life of dignity. Psychologist Abraham Maslow and, in line with his thinking, Dutch social scientist Rob Buitenweg, identify three sets of basic human needs to be addressed in order for humans to flourish.

The first set of needs pertains to our physical needs, namely the need for goods like housing, food, water, clothing, medical care and education. Our vulnerability with regard to the fulfilment of these needs might be called physical vulnerability.

The second set of needs refers to our need for safety and security, and also our need to participate in different spheres of life, including the political and economic domains. Living in communion with others and not being alienated and excluded is a central aspect of the fulfilment of this second set of needs. The predisposition to the non-fulfilment of these needs might be phrased as social vulnerability.

The third set of needs refers to our quest for the freedom to actualise our potentialities and to render meaningful service to others. The fragility that we experience with regard to the fulfilment of these needs can be termed teleological vulnerability, since it has to do with the meaning-giving *telos*, purpose and aim of our lives.

Where these sets of needs are not met, we experience suffering in a variety of forms. The famous Dutch theologian, Bram van de Beek,³ discusses the various faces of human suffering, i.e. physical, psychological, social, political and economic. Suffering takes the form of homelessness, hunger and famine, dehydration, nakedness, illness, death, assault, violence, alienation, exclusion, political oppression, and poverty. Suffering is intensified by the powerlessness to overcome forms of suffering like severe poverty, illness and death. Van de Beek states that all forms of suffering, also the suffering of animals and perhaps also plants, constitute the violation of wholeness and *shalom*.

In South Africa, vulnerability is manifested in our persistent high levels of poverty, unemployment and inequality. In this context, various social pathologies flourish, like violence, crime, drug and substance abuse, as well as various particular social, political, economic and ecological issues, challenges and concerns.

Diakonia as Indispensable Public Church Practice

Over the centuries, churches engaged in various interdependent practices, including diakonia.⁴ Practice is used here in the sense that Alasdair MacIntyre⁵ employs it:

Any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.

These communal, coordinated, consistent, coherent, chronological practices that we engage in for the sake of the inherent good that they embody and for the sake of the good that they bring forth in us and through us, consist of the following: *leitourgia* (public worship), *kerugma* (preaching), *kata-ekhein* (catechesis),

³ A Van de Beek, *Waarom? Over lijden, schuld en God* (Baarn: Nijkerk: Uitgeverij G.F. Callenbach BV, 1984), pp. 24-26.

⁴ For some helpful discussions of ecclesial practices, see N Murphy, Using MacIntyre's method in Christian Ethics, in N Murphy, BJ Kallenberg and M Thiessen Nation (Eds) *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition. Christian Ethics after MacIntyre* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1997), pp. 33-38; CR Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith. Education and Christian practices* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005); DC Bass, *Receiving the Day: Christian practices for opening the gift of time* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2019); DC Bass (Ed), *Practicing our faith. A way of life for a searching people* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2019).

⁵ A MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), p.187.

marturia (witness), *oikodome* (home, church and society and world building), *poimene* (pastoral care), *koinonia* (communion) and *diakonia* (service, comfort, offer, heal).

These practices are distinguished, but are at heart complementary, interdependent and interwoven.

Liturgy refers to the worship (*litos ergos*/public work) of the church in worship services, that becomes the liturgy, the public work, in home and all spheres of society. Liturgy refers to the public service and celebrations, praise and worship of faithful disciples on Sunday, that become the faithful public service of responsible citizens on Monday. It refers to the gathered church of Sunday that becomes the dispersed church of Monday. Part of the liturgy is the invocation, the call to God that enables us to fulfil our vocation, our calling in the world.

Kerugma, preaching, proclamation of the Word, are done in all the mandate areas to which God calls us, namely in church, at work, in broader society and in the intimate circles of marriage, family and friendship. In an appropriate manner, we bring the insights of theology, of the logic of God, of the Word of God, into play in all spheres of life. To achieve this, we continuously learn to speak, as British ecumenical theologian, Keith Clemens, prompts us to do.⁶

Catechesis (*kata* = thorough + *ekhein* = sound) refers to the teaching and instruction mandate of the church, especially the oral instruction. The sound of the Word should be heard in various forms – unspoken word, thought, written word, oral word, electronic word, lived word.

Koinonia, communion, life together, is another crucial church practice. The communion of the church is the Trinitarian communion where the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the love of God and the friendship of the Holy Spirit is richly experienced by humans and the whole cosmos (2 Cor. 13:13).

Poimenics (poimen/shepherd), or shepherdly care – pastoral care is a much-needed practice in the church. In a time of so many cares and concerns, of so much carelessness, of so many people, animals and plants as well as the rest of nature left uncared for, the practice of pastoral care for all needs to be revitalised.

Oikodome refers to the practice of building up the *oikos*, the whole inhabitant earth, our communal habitat, the whole world, all spheres of society, the church, every household, even the bodies in which we live. The task of nurture, development and upbuilding of individuals and institutions, of persons and the planet, is such a holy mandate in a world of destruction, apathy and non-involvement.

Marturia refers to the costly, sacrificial witness mandate in diverse forms of the church. The church is called to participate in God's mission in the world, in God's Trinitarian mission and work of electing, imagining, designing, creating and calling us, and caring and providing for us as Heavenly Parent; of redeeming, forgiving, reconciling, justifying, saving and liberating us as Messiah; of sanctifying, renewing, accompanying, perfecting and fulfilling us as Spirit.

Diakonia refers to the mandate of the church to concretely serve, offer, sacrifice, assist, comfort, heal, feed, alleviate need and suffering, building solidarity amongst all especially with the most vulnerable and wounded, healing wounds, materialising compassionate justice.

These practices are distinguished but not separated. They function in complementary, supplementary, interdependent and an interwoven manner.

Diakonia as Priestly Calling of the Church

In this section of this paper,⁷ *diakonia* is discussed in terms of the priestly office of Christ. One of the most helpful contemporary works in Christology that focuses extensively upon the threefold office of Christ is the

⁶ K Clemens, *Learning to Speak. The church's voice in public affairs* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995).

⁷ This section of the paper draws extensively upon an earlier essay of mine. See N. Koopman, "Human Dignity, Human Rights and Socio-economic Exclusion?" in W Grab and L Charbonnier (eds) *Religion and Human Rights. Global challenges from intercultural perspectives*. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), pp. 131-148.

work of Methodist theologian Geoffrey Wainwright.⁸ Wainwright describes the threefold office as both a Reformed and ecumenical notion.

The Threefold Office as an Ecumenical and Trinitarian Notion

Wainwright discusses the use of the threefold office in the early church, and mentions that one of the first firm and explicit uses of the threefold office was that of Eusebius of Caesarea in the fourth century. Eusebius's aim was to illustrate that Jesus Christ was the fulfilment of the Old Testament and in fact of all religions.⁹

Wainwright helpfully cites the perspectives of theologians of the early church, like John Chrysostom (fourth century), who argued that Abraham embodied the dignities of prophet and priest, and David the dignities of king and prophet. Jesus, the son of both, has all three dignities of King, Prophet and Priest.¹⁰ Wainwright also discusses the perspectives of Peter Chrysologus, 5th century bishop of Ravenna, who calls Christ the King of kings, Priest of priests and Prophet of prophets.¹¹

Wainwright¹² cites Erasmus' work on the threefold office as another example of a scattered fore-runner and anticipation of the eventual systematic development of the doctrine of the threefold office by Calvin. Erasmus described Christ as the prophet of prophets, the priest who gave Himself as victim to purge all the sins of those who believe in Him, and the ruler to whom all power was given. Before this ruler returns as judge, He kindly offers peace, and through his teaching He dispels all darkness.

Wainwright¹³ identifies Martin Bucer as the most direct inspiration for Calvin's use of the doctrine of the threefold office. For Bucer, Christ is the king (*rex*) who will govern us, provide all good things for us, and protects us against ill and oppression. As prophet or teacher (*doctor*), He teaches us the whole truth. As priest (*sacerdos*), He reconciles us with the Father eternally.

Wainwright¹⁴ affirms that Calvin laid the foundation for the extensive and systematic use of the threefold office in the Reformed tradition. He states that the royal, priestly and prophetic functions among the people of God for the sake of salvation have been united under a single Head, Jesus Christ. Based on Calvin's work, the Reformed confessions and catechetics (amongst others the Heidelberg Catechism and Westminster Confession) and Reformed dogmatics (amongst others Friedrich Schleiermacher, Heinrich Hepppe, Charles Hodge, Emil Brunner and Karl Barth) gave a prominent place to the threefold office.

Wainwright explains that, after Calvin, the notion of the threefold office was, despite some criticism that it does not cover all the work of Christ, also used by some theologians in the Lutheran tradition (amongst others Helmut Thielicke and Edmund Schlink),¹⁵ the Roman Catholic tradition¹⁶ (Vatican II and amongst others Walter Kasper), to some extent by the Methodist tradition,¹⁷ the Orthodox tradition (amongst others Alexander Schmemmann)¹⁸ and by the Anglican tradition (especially John Henry Newman when he was still an Anglican).

⁸ G Wainwright, *For Our Salvation. Two approaches to the work of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 97-186.

⁹ G Wainwright, *For our salvation*, p. 110.

¹⁰ G Wainwright, *For our salvation*, pp. 110-111.

¹¹ G Wainwright, *For our salvation*, p. 111.

¹² G Wainwright, *For our salvation*, p. 103.

¹³ G Wainwright, *For our salvation*, p. 104.

¹⁴ G Wainwright, *For our salvation*, pp. 99-103. For a helpful contemporary discussion of Calvin's systematic use of the threefold office of Christ, see S Edmondson, *Calvin's Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹⁵ G Wainwright, *For our salvation*, p. 105.

¹⁶ G Wainwright, *For our salvation*, pp. 106-107, 118.

¹⁷ G Wainwright, *For our salvation*, pp. 107-108.

¹⁸ G Wainwright, *For our salvation*, p. 113.

Wainwright¹⁹ argues in favour of a Trinitarian understanding of the threefold office of Christ. This office is Christo-centric, but not Christo-monistic. He²⁰ refers to Calvin's view that it is the Father who anoints Christ with the Holy Spirit to be king, priest and prophet. Wainwright²¹ formulates as follows: "[...] the Holy Spirit is the Father's gift by which Christ Himself, Christians, and the church and its ministers are all anointed."

The Trinitarian framework also helps us to understand that all three offices are involved in both the state of humiliation and state of exaltation of Christ, and in both his divine nature and his human nature. Wainwright²² opts for the exchange of properties (*communicatio idiomatum*) between Christ's divine and human natures in both states of humiliation and exaltation. In the light of this unity in Christ we need not be too tense about the order in which to reflect upon the three offices.

Wolfhart Pannenberg²³ cited some points of opposition to the threefold office. Objections include that it describes the work of Christ inadequately and that it does not make room for other offices besides prophet, priest and king that were also recognised in the Old Testament. He doubts whether the name Christ can be linked to all three offices and questions the idea that the Spirit anointed Jesus for these offices. He is of the opinion that none of these three offices, except, to some extent, the priestly office, existed consistently in Israel's history. He also does not adhere to the idea described earlier that the three offices function in both the states of humiliation and exaltation of Christ. He feels the notion over-emphasises the earthly work of Christ. Despite these points of criticism, there are reason to explore the significance of this rich and classical notion of the ecumenical Christian tradition.

The Threefold Office as Model and Mandate for the Church

Because we were baptised into Christ by the Spirit,²⁴ and since we are also anointed by the Spirit,²⁵ and because of our redemption and restoration in Christ,²⁶ we participate in the prophetic, priestly and royal-servant work of Christ. Wainwright therefore suggests baptism into Christ, anointing by the Spirit, redemption and restoration in Christ as the pathway to our participation in the threefold office of Christ. Thereby, he brings Christology, ecclesiology and ethics together.

In what he calls a contemporary hermeneutic, interpretation and understanding of the prophetic office, Wainwright²⁷ argues that the ongoing discernment of the will of God might illuminate the quest in contemporary societies, which are experiencing an information explosion, to develop *sapientia*, wisdom, amidst so much *scientia* and information. Furthermore, in a context of meaninglessness and purposelessness, the ongoing discernment of God's will provides *telos*, purpose and meaning. In the prophetic discourse of Public Theology in South Africa, we might view our prophetic practices as witness about and participation in the life of Christ, the Prophet, who reveals the truth, the will of God, as a truth of our justification by Christ, and as a truth that entails our calling to seek justice in the world. The prophetic quest is therefore a quest for the truth of our justification and salvation in Christ, which is expressed in justice in the world, and which is served by *sapientia* and discernment.

¹⁹ G Wainwright, *For our salvation*, pp. 118-120.

²⁰ G Wainwright, *For our salvation*, pp. 99, 106.

²¹ G Wainwright, *For our salvation*, p. 118.

²² G Wainwright, *For our salvation*, pp. 118-119.

²³ W Pannenberg, *Jesus. God and man* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977/1968), pp. 212-225.

²⁴ G Wainwright, *For our salvation*, p. 114.

²⁵ G Wainwright, *For our salvation*, p. 99.

²⁶ G Wainwright, *For our salvation*, p. 113.

²⁷ G Wainwright, *For our salvation*, p. 133-135.

Wainwright²⁸ argues that the royal servant office teaches contemporary societies about authority, freedom, power and hope. In a world that seeks autonomy and, in the process, aims to become deistic and eliminate any idea of divine action and rule, the plea is not to burn down the house of authority, and not to bring down the Scriptures, creeds, liturgies and institutions of the admittedly imperfect historic church. In a society hungry for cultural freedom and an absolute right of self-expression, this office calls for recognition that my neighbour is, negatively put, the limit of my freedom, and, positively put, a personal call to service. He lastly mentions that this office assures us of ultimate hope in the exalted Lord and King.

In the South African context, this office might be employed to decontaminate imperialistic notions of power that seem to threaten the idea of the servant power that is characteristic of power in the democratic vision with its central words like *minister*, which literally means servant, and the word *president* which means the one that presides, that one serves as an example amongst the servants, the servant *per excellence*. More than that, the *Christocracy* tells of a Lord, a King who is Shepherd, and the humblest of servants. Simultaneously, this office calls disciples to fulfil their calling as citizens to a public life of respecting authority, and living responsibly, in the church and in all walks of life.

The royal-servant calling also entails that the life of freedom be defined as a life of freedom from bondage and freedom for a life of service. The royal-servant office also prompts a life of hope. Hope can be described in a threefold manner. Hope is realistic hope because it is founded in the biggest reality of all, namely the cross and resurrection, ascension and *parousia* of Jesus Christ, which is the fulfilment of the promises of God. Against this background, hope is responsive hope. Hope therefore pays attention, functions pro-actively, and is expressed in concrete involvement in the matters of life. Hope is resilient hope. Despite the most difficult circumstances, Christian hope perseveres with patience and fortitude.

Diakonia and the Priestly Office

The practice and mandate of Diakonia is clearly illuminated by the priestly office of Christ in which the church shares. In his contemporary hermeneutic for the priestly office, Wainwright²⁹ argues that Christ the Priest replaces our pain and suffering, which are expressed in alienations, with reconciliation, and He replaces our sin and guilt, which are expressed in estrangement, with atonement. Christ restores us to divine communion and to communion with each other. Wainwright³⁰ spells out the concrete and public forms that cry out for this reconciliation, atonement and restored communion:

[...] oppression is political alienation, for the disenfranchised are deprived of the privileges and responsibilities that go with the human vocation to live in society; poverty is economic alienation, for the impoverished are cut off from their share in the fruit of the earth that humankind is charged by God to cultivate; sickness is physical alienation, and a troubled mind is psychological alienation, and both remove the sufferers from the flourishing existence which God envisioned for his human creatures; slavery is alienation of identity, the profoundest infraction of the dignity of every child of God; bereavement displays death as the alienation of humankind from the life of communion for which it was made.

Jesus Christ, the Public Priest, entered into this human condition of alienation and estrangement. This estranged humanity is the humanity that Christ consumed, and in the words of Hans Urs von Balthasar,³¹ “what had not been assumed would not have been healed.”

²⁸ G Wainwright, *For our salvation*, p.169-171.

²⁹ G Wainwright, *For our salvation*, pp. 150-153.

³⁰ G Wainwright, *For our salvation*, p. 150.

³¹ Quoted by G Wainwright, *For our salvation*, p. 151.

For South African churches who seek to develop priestly public theologies, the recommendations offered by Wainwright might be very helpful in our context of so many manifestations of alienation and estrangement.

The priestly mandate challenges, invites and inspires churches to overcome political alienation. The young South African democracy has a good democratic vision and relevant policy documents in place. We, however, need to work for social solidarity, social cohesion and the joint building of social capital. We have sound macro-economic policies and practices in place, but the benefits do not reach the poor, and we still have the biggest gap between rich and poor in the world. Besides our noble human rights principles of access to basic necessities, millions still are excluded from physical and mental health care. We still hurt each other on the basis of racial, national, tribal, gender and socio-economic identities, and on basis of identities of sexual orientation, age and disability. We even hurt nature.

The priestly office calls us to work for overcoming these alienations, hurts and violations of dignity, and to work, therefore, for the actualisation of dignity, health, healing and for restitutive reconciliation and reconciliatory justice. This portrayal of the priestly office provides building-blocks for a fresh understanding of the diaconal calling of the church. The priestly office suggests a diaconate of presence and of comprehensive caring, curing and healing.

In churches in the so-called Dutch Reformed tradition, three specific offices are identified in congregational and broader denominational life, namely the teaching elder or minister of the Word who is fulfilling mainly the prophetic office, the elder of governance who is mainly fulfilling the royal-servant office, and the deacon (*diakonos* = slave) who is mainly fulfilling the priestly office.

Diakonia and the Confession of Belhar

The Confession of Belhar 1986 is one of the most important documents on African soil to articulate faith in the triune God. This Confession also sheds light on the diaconal mandate of the church and of Christians in contemporary contexts, specifically also in the context of COVID-19. The three articles of Belhar on faith in God as the God Who unites God's people (article 1), Who reconciles God's people (article 2), and Who brings justice amongst God's people, especially to the most vulnerable and marginalised (article 3) provide a framework for understanding the diaconal calling of the church today.

A Public Diakonia of Social Proximity amidst Social Distancing

Article 1 of Belhar³² prompts the development of a diakonia of social proximity, nearness, engagement, involvement, solidarity amidst so-called social distancing.

[...] unity must become visible so that the world may believe; that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted; [W]e share one faith, have one calling, are of one soul and one mind; have one God and Father, are filled with one Spirit, are baptised with one baptism, eat of one bread and drink of one cup, confess one Name, are obedient to one Lord, work for one cause, and share one hope... we [therefore] need one another and upbuild one another, admonishing and comforting one another; that we suffer with one another for the sake of righteousness; pray together; together serve God in this world; and together fight against everything that may threaten or hinder this unity... this unity can take form only in freedom and not under constraint; that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the diversity of languages and cultures, are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God [...]

³² See *The Confession of Belhar 1986* (Belhar: LUS Publishers, 1986).

A public diaconia of social proximity is needed desperately, especially in the time of COVID-19. We need to muster all of our emotional resources, economic resources, ecological resources, cultural resources, intellectual resources, moral resources and spiritual resources to overcome the Coronavirus pandemic, as well as the pandemic of poverty, unemployment, inequality and societal destruction.

A Public Diaconia of Social Embrace Amidst Social Polarisation

One of the sad developments during COVID-19 is the growing signs of polarisation along socio-economic, colour and gender lines. Mostly black and poor persons are infected and affected by the virus. Gender-based violence is on the increase during the lockdown period. There are also signs of the stigmatisation of people who are positive. Racist essentialism exists, which suggests that merely because of your colour-based inferiority, and not because of socio-economic neglect, you are more susceptible to infection by the coronavirus. There are even political and ideological divides within some major political parties, like the governing African National Congress. All these divides complicate the quest during COVID-19 for appropriate attention to the apparent opposing appeals for both physical health and economic recovery, for both life and livelihood.

Amidst this social polarisation and threatening social enmity, Article 2 of Belhar³³ confesses faith in God as the God of reconciliation:

We believe that God has entrusted to his Church the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ; that the Church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that the Church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, that the Church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells. That God by his lifegiving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity that God, by his lifegiving Word and Spirit will enable His people to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world; that the credibility of this message is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity; that any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the gospel, and is not prepared to venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation, but rather, out of prejudice, fear, selfishness and unbelief, denies in advance the reconciling power of the gospel, must be considered ideology and false doctrine.

This confession of healing reconciliation provides building-blocks for the construction of a public diaconia of social embrace amidst social enmity.

A Public Diaconia of Compassionate Justice Amidst Social Inequality

COVID-19 exposes and intensifies the existing injustices and inequalities in our societies on national, continental and global levels. A fresh commitment to compassionate justice (*tsedakah* and *mishpat*) is cried out for. Moreover, to address the plights in the context of COVID-19 diaconially, we need to accelerate the quest for justice, rather than delay it. A faithful diaconate, according to the Belhar Confession,³⁴ is one that seeks concrete justice in concrete situations of despair and destitution. In these quests for justice, the most vulnerable enjoy primary, albeit not exclusive, attention.

We believe that God has revealed himself as the One who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among humans; that in a world full of injustice and enmity He is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the

³³ See *The Confession of Belhar 1986* (Belhar: LUS Publishers, 1986).

³⁴ See *The Confession of Belhar 1986* (Belhar: LUS Publishers, 1986).

wronged and that He calls his Church to follow Him in this; that He brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry; that He frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind; that He supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, helps orphans and widows and blocks the path of the ungodly; that for Him pure and undefiled religion is to visit the orphans and the widows in their suffering; that He wishes to teach His people to do what is good and to seek the right; That the Church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the Church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream; That the Church as the possession of God must stand where He stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the Church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.

This sketch of compassionate justice prompts the notion of a public diaconia of compassionate justice, of social justice amidst inequality.

Conclusion

COVID-19 exposes and intensifies our communal concerns and cries. The current pandemic also reveals and intensifies our communal commitment to intensify our practices of diaconia; to intensify our prophetic, royal-servant and priestly callings; to intensify our commitment to a public diaconate of social proximity amidst social distancing, of social embrace amidst social polarisation, of social justice amidst social inequality. As an ecumenical church on local, continental and global levels, we believe that a fresh commitment to this diaconia is the acid test for faithful discipleship and responsible citizenship in a vulnerable world. We so desperately need this diaconal ministry of presence, healing, caring, curing, helping, serving, sacrificing, offering, uniting, reconciling and materialising compassionate justice, compassionate justice as dignity, compassionate justice as freedom, compassionate justice as equity.

I suggest that in drawing upon some of the insights in this contribution, we might succeed in avoiding a reductionist understanding of the diaconate, but rather jointly move toward a more ecumenical, comprehensive and richer understanding. In such an understanding, the diaconate is distinguishable from the other church practices, and simultaneously interdependent upon them and interwoven with them.³⁵

Suggestions for Further Reading

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The Confession of Belhar 1986 (Belhar: LUS Publishers, 1986).
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 Wainwright, G. *For our Salvation. Two approaches to the work of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1997).

³⁵ In this regard we can note the plea of Kjell Nordstokke regarding the understanding of diaconate in the World Council of Churches. See K Nordstokke, Diakonia and diaconate in the World Council of Churches, in *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 13(4), 2013, pp. 286-299.

47. DYNAMICS OF DIACONIA AND PUBLIC THEOLOGY IN THE POST-PEACE SOCIETY OF SERBIA

Rastko Jovic¹

Introduction: Historical Context

In order to understand the role of Diakonia in the Orthodox Church, it seems necessary to know the historical background in which the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC), in particular, found Herself in the last century. This short historical introduction is necessary in order to avoid simplifications and prejudice. Often it is the case that the Orthodox Church has been understood as disinterested in the social work and concerned more with mysticism, detached from the troubles of the world. It is my task to show specific historical circumstances that contributed unjustly to this prejudice.

In the last one hundred years, Serbia had nine war conflicts from which the most tragic has been the First World War in which Serbia lost more than 25% of its population.² After the Second World War, communism took over the state and was harsh, especially to the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC). After 1945, the Church had been violently pushed into the privacy of one's household with no broader relevance. That was the primary goal of persecution, which was the harshest from 1945-1961 but continued silently until 1989. Religious Education was expelled from the school curricula in 1952,³ and Church Seminaries have been closed, the property was violently taken and nationalised, Theological Faculty were banned from the University, many priests were arrested, murdered, or recruited for a new government.⁴ With such repressive measures, the Church in Socialist Yugoslavia vegetates away under the strict control of the regime.⁵ At the same time, Yugoslavia as a socialist country, at least theoretically took care of all the social needs of its inhabitants, and did not tolerate social activism of the Church even if it was humanitarian.⁶

The turbulent times of the late 80s found the Church unprepared for any active public role. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 was too unexpected to prepare anybody for the coming years. When civil war broke out in Yugoslavia (1991), political circumstances deteriorated quickly. This culminated in the bombardment of Serbia in 1999, by NATO and the subsequent declaration of Kosovo for independence in 2008. After decades of silence and isolation, the Church was not ready for the wars, sanctions, the destruction of the country, extreme poverty, refugees, and new political figures.⁷

The last two decades, unfortunately, did not bring any more extended periods of harmony and rest in Serbian society. Some things changed for the better. The Faculty of Orthodox Theology has been rebuilt at Belgrade University and Religious Education was reintegrated into the public schools. Since 2000, we have

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² Kosta Nikolić, *Jedna izgubljena istorija – Srbija u 20. veku*. (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2016), p. 375.

³ Rastko Jović, "Istorijat verske nastave u Srbiji," in *Verska nastava u beogradskim školama* (eds) Slobodanka Gašić-Pavišić and Slavica Ševkušić (Beograd: PBF ITI, 2011), pp. 78-89.

⁴ Radmila Radić, "O nekim metodama delovanja Službe bezbednosti u verskim zajednicama do polovine 60-ih godina 20. veka," in *Srpska teologija danas 2012*, ed. Radomir Popovic (Beograd: PBF ITI, 2013), pp. 52-66.

⁵ Radmila Radić, *Država i verske zajednice 1945-1970*. I-II (Beograd: INIS, 2002).

⁶ Similar was the case in other Socialist countries at the time, DDR is a good example of this practice.

⁷ Milorad Tomanić, *Srpska crkva u ratu i ratovi u njoj*. (Beograd: Medijska knjižara Krug, 2001).

been experiencing a new age of de-secularisation⁸ or, as some are naming it, religious renewal.⁹ In such a new situation, it becomes challenging for the Church to gain freedom in a public space and show the readiness and responsibility which that freedom entails.¹⁰

At the moment, Serbia is a country without fixed borders or a clear European future. Each year, Serbia has a negative birth rate and many are leaving the country in hope of a better future.¹¹ These grim facts speak for themselves, contributing to uncertainty over life in Serbia. The fluid and turbulent history influenced the mentality, the Church's role and position in such an environment.

After this introduction, it perhaps becomes more apparent why I named this period as a time of post-peace? Because in the last century Serbia has been involved in 9 war conflicts, this period of relative peace for the last 20 years looks like an interlude before new conflicts, as a continuation of well-known dynamics from our recent past.

Theological Context: Serving the World

The glimpse of historical disturbances in which the Church operates today needs to be reconciled with our theology in order to get the proper direction of Her (the Church's) role. It is imperative that we are constantly reminded of the Gospel in order to develop a correct relationship between the Church and social reality.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him (John 3:16-17)

Already, this passage clearly and convincingly gives the proper context to the whole work of Christ, which is, above all, about love. Thus, the frame of reference for Christ's activity in the world is the love that has led Him into the turbulence of public space and social action. If Christ did not interfere in the current world through His criticism and the offer of an alternative world – there would be no crucifixion. The crucifixion is a recapitulation of the sacrificial love for the world that Christ showed in his earthly mission, and without love, such sacrifice would not make sense, but instead, it would turn itself into an act of masochism.

The Church, without love for the whole of creation, turns into Herself, i.e., passive and with a careless attitude for the surroundings. Irresponsibility for creation, which is contrary to God's love for the world, clearly represents an indifference to the Creator and Christ's sacrifice. Likewise, by creating humanity, God commands us to master creation and care for it. Thus, the world is left to the synchronous care of God and of the people. It is inconceivable, therefore, to imagine an indifferent Church, concerned only with Herself and Her special interests, in perpetual danger of slipping into a self-sufficient community. The call to take care of the world as a meeting place between people and God, and the essence of this meeting is about nothing else

⁸ Peter L. Berger (ed), *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999).

⁹ Sergej Flere, "Mogućnosti sociologije u predviđanju sudbine hrišćanstva," in *Hrišćanstvo u 21. veku*, ed. Dragoljub B. Đorđević, Predrag Stajić, Dragan Todorović (Novi Sad, Leskovac, Niš: Prometej, Leskovački kulturni centar, JUNIR, 2014), p. 111.

¹⁰ Religiosity in Serbia: *Religioznost u Srbiji 2010: Istraživanje religioznosti građana Srbije i njihovog stava prema procesu evropskih integracija*, Radovan Bigović (ed) (Beograd: Fondacija Konrad Adenauer, Hrišćanski kulturni centar, Centre for European Studies, 2011), pp. 201-253. Cf. *[Post]sekularni obrt: religijske, moralne i društveno-političke vrednosti studenata u Srbiji*, Mirko Blagojević, Jelena Jablanov Maksimović, Tijana Bajović (eds) (Beograd: Centre for European Studies, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju, 2013).

¹¹ *Demographic Yearbook 2016* (ed) Snežana Lakčević (Belgrade: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia 2017), p. 49.

but love. Therefore, our starting point regarding the Church's Diakonia in today's world is precisely the question of love, however, this can look trivial and unconvincing to some.

The Context of Love

The commercialisation of love today, apart from the feeling that love must be exclusively a pleasure, paradoxically leads a person to the negation of their own body. Through the cybernetic world, we present ourselves as more beautiful than we are, trying to virtually overcome our infirmities in order to gain some feeling of pleasure which "love" promises. Hollywood films brought to the fore a notion of love emptied of almost every ontological meaning. The mass media profanation of love has led to the understanding that the term "love" in itself has been identified only with pleasure, fun, romance, or the moral pattern that everything is allowed in love, because "love is god."

Christ, in his love for the world, goes beyond such an idealised image of love in which only pleasure, fun, and romance matters. In a violent act, such as the expulsion of merchants from the courtyard of the Jerusalem Temple (Mt. 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17; John 2:14-17; Luke 19:45-47), Christ invites us to reconsider our views on love, tolerance, and respect. The love of Christ towards human beings has been shown all the time as a specific "violence" in the Gospel, violence against religious elites: of the cultural or religious types. For example, He is eating with sinners, He breaks the rules of the religious purity, works on Sabbath,¹² His apostles do not fast, and as a peak of His religious and cultural confrontation with the old world, He dies on the cross as those who have been cursed, according to the Law of Moses (Dt. 21:23).¹³ Love and "violence" somehow overlap in this event of the expulsion of merchants from the Jerusalem Temple.¹⁴

Nevertheless, it is Christ's "violence" that relativises world powers, causing rulers to react sharply against Him. Provoking the elites, he simultaneously liberates the weak and the oppressed, rendering the power of the powerful in relation to the omnipotence of God. The ultimate value becomes the human being itself. Authenticity and abundance of life for one individual but also for society as a whole become the main criterion which indicates when it is necessary to act publicly. This is in accordance with Christ saying, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly," (John 10:10).

Unfortunately, we can notice that society expects love from the Church, but a love understood in a manner of "Hollywood" movies, i.e., that the Church should build an image in which she is responsible, in the name of love, to offer peace, serenity, rest, joy. Paradoxically, often believers in the Orthodox context lead the Church to "distance" Herself from Christ. Most of the time, the Church's struggle to be a Body of Christ for each time and each space have been seen as unnecessary unrest and "violence" over traditional values that should be kept under all costs. Any change in the historical existence of the Church causes unnecessary insecurity and a sense of unease. Misunderstanding of the term love in a Christian comprehension leads into the passivation of the Church and Her transformation into a therapeutic association which promises "pleasant and joyful emotions." Unfortunately, there is another extreme that reduces love only to obedience and suffering in the name of Christianity. Such an understanding makes obsolete the very expectation of the Kingdom of God. If love is identified only with suffering, then the eternal Kingdom of promised love becomes eternal suffering and distress, which then is nothing else but hell.

¹² If you do not follow the Law, you are cursed according to the Old Testament (Dt. 27:26).

¹³ The same has been repeated by Apostle Paul in Galatians 3:13, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree."

¹⁴ Rastko Jovic, *Dinamika hrišćanskog identiteta*. (Beograd: Institut za teološka istraživanja, Pravoslavni bogoslovski fakultet, 2018).

The Witness of the Church: Expectations of the Church's Love

The need for a proper understanding of love is to care for the Church's mission and witness in the world today. "Witness in the biblical understanding of the word *martyria* is the result of Christ's Diakonia rendered to his Father on behalf of the whole human race which has been called to be One in him (St. John 5, 36)."¹⁵ Diversity and inconsistency in the conception of love and its Christian character also lead to unequal expectations of the Church and Her activities. Individuals sometimes expect a particular humanitarian activity from the Church, but no political or significant public social role. It seems that in Serbian society, the Church is not allowed to play a more conscious and conscientious role in the public space through its critique of political and social realities. If the Church does so, then it unmask peace and becomes a disruptor, i.e., "an enemy" of a secular society.¹⁶

However, humanitarian activism brings some dangers for the reason that, through this kind of work, the Church covers the failures of a political system, hiding its shortcomings. Paradoxically, humanitarian activism in the Serbian context could also be seen as an essential expression of "impotence" in a society, because it leaves the Church trapped in a struggle to fix the unjust system and its economic and political injustices, rather than acting against its cause. In other words, the Diaconia of the Church in this way, in the long run acts as nothing more than an instrument for maintaining and supporting a crippled political system, covering up its mistakes in the name of love.

Diakonia: The Context of the Church's Identity

When the Church provides a new identity for its members, then its members also build a new identity for the Church in Her relationship to the world. Because of different historical and social reasons, believers in the Orthodox Church often have been perceived as objects that need to be governed, but which do not play a more significant role in the theological sense when it comes to the identity of the ecclesial community itself.¹⁷ Without relational dependence within the Church members, there is a disruption in the understanding of Church identity¹⁸ who over-identifies Herself with the hierarchy only.¹⁹

"The mission of the church is the Diakonia of man. Just as Christ did not come to be served, but to serve man and to give His life as a ransom for many (Mt. 20:28 and Mark 10:45), so the church as the body of Christ does not exist for any other reason than to serve man and to help him to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven."²⁰ With this and similar definitions, some orthodox theologians point out the importance of public Diakonia for those in need "by founding philanthropic institutions, such as nursing homes, orphanages, and hospitals."²¹ It seems that the quotation beginning this paragraph acquires our definition of the role of ecclesiology. In the realisation that Christ's action was the proclamation of the Kingdom of God, the Church

¹⁵ Nikos Nissiotis, "The Witness and the Service of Eastern Orthodoxy to the One Undivided Church," *Ecumenical Review* 14(2) (1962), pp. 192-202.

¹⁶ Rastko Jovic, "Veronauka i mediji u Srbiji," in *Srpska pravoslavna crkva u štampanim medijima 2003-2013 tom 3* (ed) Vladimir Vukasinovic (Beograd: Mons Hemus, 2015), pp. 203-224.

Sergej Flere, "Mogućnosti sociologije u predviđanju sudbine hrišćanstva," in *Hrišćanstvo u 21. veku* (ed) Dragoljub B. Đorđević, Predrag Stajčić, Dragan Todorović (Novi Sad, Leskovac, Niš: Prometej, Leskovački kulturni centar, JUNIR, 2014), p. 111.

¹⁷ Cf. Nikolaj Afanasjev, *Služenje mirjana (laika) u Crkvi*. (Kraljevo: Manastir Žiča, 2008).

¹⁸ Rastko Jovic, "Theology with a Human Face," *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 69(1-4) (2017), pp. 167-180.

¹⁹ Church structure must be understood as a relational, not ontological, and this is something that Nick Crossley calls "relational sociology", revealing the relational character of the social system, cf. Cyril Hovorun, *Scaffolds of the Church Towards Poststructural Ecclesiology*. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), p. 196.

²⁰ Miltiadis Vantsos and Marina Kiroudi, "An Orthodox View of Philanthropy and Church Diaconia," *Christian Bioethics* 13(3) (2007), p. 251.

²¹ Vantsos and Kiroudi, "An Orthodox View of Philanthropy and Church Diaconia," p. 252.

as the Body of Christ becomes the bearer of that Kingdom.²² Theology in the function of the Church, which aims to iconise the Kingdom of God here and now, leads the Church to the necessary criticism, to care, and to a new appreciation of the society in which we live.

Where Orthodox theology today emphasises the importance of eschatology and the Eucharist as its foundation, this belief needs to have severe consequences in its historical existence. Eschatology implies the unity of all in the future Kingdom of God, as expressed through the Eucharist. This would also mean that the clergy is called to be established in the event of Eucharist, and not through the power that arises from economic relations, bringing in a whole new dynamic of relations. The Eucharist, on the other hand, is the event of the resurrected Christ; it makes Christ present in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit thus plays the role of communitarianism and eschatology, for it constitutes the Eucharist as the eschatological community of all in Christ.²³ Such a broad-based theological foundation of Orthodox theology aims to protect the Church from slipping into everyday politics and co-operation with the powerful of this world.

If the Church takes theology seriously, then the Church should be in the service of the Kingdom of God in the world.²⁴ Thus understanding theology, we see that it belongs to different sectors of life – politics, culture, economy, ecology.²⁵ In other words, Church theology is public theology because it is concerned with the common good. To express the values of the Kingdom of God and to strive for its realisation within the limitations of history is an inherent concern for the world and concern for the relevance of theology itself. The church is not here only to help people *to inherit the Kingdom of God*, it would be more precise to define the church as a sign and witness of the Kingdom of God, through each and every human being, here and now. Consequently, the church's Diakonia widens its horizons, going beyond humanitarian aid and turns into something different encouraging self-consciousness of the human person, strengthening its communal and individual nature through all possible means.

Diakonia in the Motion within the Church: Self-Consciousness

Repressive social systems throughout the century in the Serbian context endeavoured to convert human beings from ultimate personal value to the collectivistic entity. The regimes that rejected the value of the human person at the same time rejected the possibility of the emancipation of one's society in the long run. All of the above confirms that the Christian faith and the activities of the Church cannot and should not be reduced to a private matter, but every Christian must know their responsibility for the public space. Christianity is hospitality, and being a good host means "limiting yourself to the listening of your guest, giving voice to the guest."²⁶ Responsibility for the world also arises from the new identity that Christians receive from the time of their very entry into the ecclesiastical community. This new identity invites every individual to make radical changes to their world views. Developing the self-consciousness of the believer builds a precondition for unlocking the Church's role in the broader society and successful Diakonia, moving away from the idea that church identity is identified by hierarchy only.

²² Jürgen Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), p. 251.

²³ Aristotle Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), p. 110.

²⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology*, p. 252.

²⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology*, p. 252.

²⁶ Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity*. (New York: Columbia University, 2002), p. 101.

Direct Negotiations and Work with Those in Power

Some Orthodox theologians emphasise the need for the Church to be more closely connected to public space and other actors in civil society, not just the state and its apparatus of government.²⁷ Civil society is primarily understood as an arena of public life that operates between the state, economical and private spheres.²⁸ Daniel M. Bell warns, perhaps rightly about the nature of the civil society which can easily be applied to the Serbian society today, “In this era of global capitalism, when Coca-Cola and Nike find their way into every nook and cranny of the earth well ahead of clean water, roads, and life-sustaining diets, far from furthering the cause of liberation and life, civil society can only be a means of discipline, an instrument of the regnant capitalist order for overcoming resistance and forming desire in its own image.”²⁹ Cooperation with other actors in society, nevertheless, contributes to a certain kind of pressure on government structures. However, the weakness of colonial democracies, as some describe Serbian society,³⁰ is that all significant decisions are often made in direct negotiations by representatives of the authorities in the government and those in power. Therefore, we must not be naïve about the mechanisms of how our own society functions, which implies that Diakonia needs courage and effectiveness in the negotiations with governments.

The same is the case, we would say, with the Church and its operation. For the common good, the Church needs to be consulted at certain times when the government is drafting certain laws.³¹ What matters is the consensus on the common good. The Church then has the opportunity to defend human values, not just the privileges of the hierarchy. Starting from the apparent theological assumption of creation, that God is the father of all people, the Church must live in history with a view of the broader society as *catechumens*, i.e., potential members of the Church for which we must never lose hope and care. This demonstrates more significant concern for the condition of the entire society, baptised Church members, and the *catechumens*. Society is thus viewed as a *potential and emerging Christian community*. This is perhaps the critical point in which to view Diakonia in a society from the Church’s perspective.

Diakonia in Motion to the World

The theological understanding that Diakonia represents the very nature of the Church’s being³² has many profound consequences. The church that is sign and witness of the Kingdom of God needs, through its Diakonia, to express this truth of Her being which goes beyond just humanitarian aid, and it can be summarised in order to care for the common good:

- a) **Self-consciousness for the world:** If the Church is the *parousia*, i.e., the presence and manifestation of God’s Kingdom in history, then it is necessary for it to be a prophetic voice that reflects this experience. By its nature, it is evident that the Church is called to be an active participant in the struggle against a type of politics, which is against the common good. The cost of not questioning either the performance of the Church in the world or the rapidly changing structures of the world is human suffering and alienation.
- b) **Philanthropia** is an obligation and an apparent norm for our Church, and for all those that constitute the Church community. In today’s Serbia, the Church tries to bring humanitarian aid on the level of

²⁷ Pantelis Kalaitzides, *Orthodoxy and Political Theology*. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012), p. 81.

²⁸ Vasilios N. Makridis, *Kulturna istorija pravoslavlja i modernost*. (Beograd: Hrišćanski kulturni centar, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2014), p. 228.

²⁹ Daniel M. Bell, *Liberation Theology After the End of History: The Refusal to Cease Suffering*. (London/New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 70.

³⁰ Aleksandar Zinovjev, *Zapad: fenomen zapadnjaštva*. (Beograd-Laussane: Naš Dom, L’Age d’Homme, 2002), pp. 307-308.

³¹ Aristotle Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy*, p. 78.

³² Nikos Nissiotis, “The Witness and the Service of Eastern Orthodoxy to the One Undivided Church,” pp. 192-202.

- dioceses or through the few organisations.³³ It would be more plausible to have also a one central organisation in order to synchronise and make humanitarian work all over Serbia more transparent.
- c) **Education:** Many people have a greater interest in education than ever before, primarily through the tools provided by the state. Religious Education (RE) in the public schools, which was reintroduced in 2001, could be a good starting point for the Church's Diakonia.³⁴ The theological self-understanding of the Orthodox Church in general needs to provide us with the ability to produce a dynamic program of RE in our contemporary society. The program should be confessional, respecting our specific context, but also open to others showing a comprehensive understanding and cooperation between confessions and religions. It means that RE should be both confessional but also *multi-religious faced*, i.e., fostering "multi-religious education."³⁵ At the same time, RE needs to be interested in applied dogmatics, dealing with bioethical challenges, genetic engineering, and consumerism, breakdown of the family, alcoholism, drug addiction, dignity of life for older people, transsexuality, and many others. These subjects represent neuralgic spots that interconnect religious communities, state institutions, and society in general.³⁶
- d) **Progress of Relationships:** The Church cannot contribute to the progress of science if it does not accept this as its task. Nevertheless, the Church could be able to provide and facilitate progress in the quality of human relationships. Our theological framework of the Body of Christ as Church – community – means much effort to help people to re-establish their broken relationships in fighting against alienation.
- e) **Human dignity:** In Serbia today, another significant issue is the situation of the elderly population, especially in the villages. Because of older people in rural parishes, Diakonia needs to be expressed through pastoral care, which needs to be more centred upon issues of human dignity and dignity of dying in particular. This mainly involves care for bioethical issues and work on the new laws within governmental structures.
- f) **Diakonia of Peace:** After so many conflicts and wars which have been fuelled by religion many times, a new Diakonia of peace is more than necessary. The violent history of the region invites the Church in Serbia to make one of Her priorities securing peace and inter-religious dialogue. We need the support of all believing people regardless of their religious affiliation, promoting cooperation, and religious plurality. In the name of our future, we have to avoid globalisation of conflicts in our uncertain area.

Diakonia: A Conclusion

The social activity of the Church these days, if She renounces Her prophetic role, makes the Church an instrument of anesthetizing social injustices. In some parts of the world, the conflict between religion and secular society is waning as religion itself enters the horizon of the consumerist civilisation, becoming itself a commodity in the spiritual market. Unfortunately, without a prophetic role, the Church builds peace on an unjust basis, nourishes the hungry and quiets them, helps the sick, thus masking the state's inability to govern and operate the state apparatus and social services. At the same time, the Church should criticise those who believe that poverty can be solved by sporadic actions of private entrepreneurs and charities rather than government activities. Therefore, in addition to social work, it is necessary to preserve and retain a prophetic voice against systematic injustice, which is the basis for Church Diakonia. Diakonia, in terms of self-

³³ Humanitarian organizations in the Serbian Orthodox Church: "Philanthropy: Charitable Foundation of the Serbian Orthodox Church," <https://www.covekoljublje.org/en> and "Faith charity Stewardship (VDS)," <https://starateljstvo.rs/>.

³⁴ Rastko Jovic, "Religious Education-Challenges and Perspectives in Contemporary Society: Western Balkans/Serbia," *Astra Salvensis* 5(9) (2017), pp. 11-21.

³⁵ Riegel, U. & Hans-Georg, Z., "Religious Education and Values," *Journal of Empirical Theology* 20(1) (2007), p. 55.

³⁶ Dragomir Sando, "Imperativ korelacije," *Pravoslavni katiheta* 3(9) (2009), pp. 44-47.

consciousness, is essential in order to lead towards the emancipation of faith, which delivers the Church from the yoke of self-isolation and social disability.

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48. MUTUAL LEARNING ON SUSTAINABILITY: ECO-DIACONIA IN SCOTTISH – HUNGARIAN PARTNERSHIP

Tamas Kodacsy and Adrian Shaw¹

Churches across Europe are exploring what it means to care for creation. For some, this may be part of their ancient traditions but for most it is part of a process of rediscovery, embodying theology, practical action and advocacy. Brought together by the European Christian Environment Network (ECEN),² this represents one of the most exciting developments in contemporary Christian action and a new theme of eco-diaconia.

There are at least two main reasons why this new concern for the environment has taken root in churches. The first are the stories brought to us from partner churches and Christian development agencies around the world. In Scotland, Christian Aid, Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund (SCIAF) and Tearfund have all come to prioritise climate change as the biggest challenge facing partners in developing countries around the world. Church of Scotland partner churches in developing countries have also called upon us to take action to respond to climate change pointing to Europe's high levels of emissions, its profligate use of resources and the damage this is causing globally. Similarly, in Hungary, the Ararat Group of Lutheran Church, Naphimnusz Catholic Association and Eco-Congregation Movement of Reformed Church have been working together to promote care for creation.

The second reason is the response to environmental concerns identified by campaigners and scientists, and recognition that churches may have ignored the natural world for too long. While organisations such as Friends of the Earth Scotland have been campaigning since the 1970s, it is only in this century that churches in Scotland have actively become involved in environmental action. This slow awakening of concern for all of God's creation goes beyond the human impacts of climate change (as catastrophic as they are likely to be) and considers how we care for other species and habitats; for rainforests or oceans and how we promote conservation and reduce our environmental impact.

Diakonia is a Greek term for serving the poor, the oppressed, the marginalised. In an ecological context, it means that we are responsible for our neighbours whether near us or far away, and for the creatures that depend on our actions, lifestyles, and attitudes. Eco-diaconia reminds us that we were not the first created living beings, that many other animals and plants preceded us in creation. We do not rule the world, nor are we superior, rather we serve the Creator as stewards. It is our great pleasure and responsibility to maintain the biodiversity of the space we live in on earth and which we share with other living creatures.

How Has This Developed?

In this brief introduction, we profile developments in Hungary and Scotland.³ We do this to show how similar movements can develop in quite distinct settings and different political environments. Across Europe, churches in most if not all countries have developed eco-congregations or other green church initiatives.

Eco-congregations in Scotland started in 2001 as part of a UK pilot project to encourage churches to become beacons of environmental activity. Since that time, the number of registered eco-congregations in Scotland has risen to over 500 or nearly 15% of all churches in Scotland. The movement is ecumenical with

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² <https://www.ecen.org/about-us>.

³ See also: <https://www.ecen.org/articles/hungary-toward-cooperation-between-university-and-eco-congregation-council>.

Church of Scotland, Scottish Episcopal, Catholic, United Reformed and other denominations represented. Registration is easy and a range of resources are available on the Eco-Congregation Scotland website. All registered congregations are encouraged to work towards an award: bronze, silver or gold, and to date 140 churches have succeeded in gaining awards.

To achieve one of these awards, an eco-congregation must demonstrate activities under three headings: spiritual living, practical living, and global living. These themes are repeated in other church environmental movements around Europe under different titles and broadly represent worship, action and advocacy. Caring for creation through worship includes Creation Time, an annual event stretching from 1st September to the feast of St Francis on 4th October. Creation Time was originally suggested by the Ecumenical Patriarch in 1989 and churches across Europe have been encouraged to celebrate it by ECEN since 1999. It was endorsed by the third European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu, Romania in 2007, which recommended that the period “be dedicated to prayer for the protection of Creation and the promotion of sustainable lifestyles that reverse our contribution to climate change”. Worship resources for Creation Time are available on a range of websites, including those of Eco-Congregation Scotland and ECEN.

The involvement of churches in environmental advocacy varies according to national circumstances. The Church of Scotland and other denominations are active participants in the Stop Climate Chaos Scotland (SCCS) campaign along with Eco-Congregation Scotland, environmental NGOS, trade unions and others. SCCS has been extremely effective in pressing the Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament to take action on climate change including adopting challenging targets for the reduction of emissions of greenhouse gases. Members of church congregations have been prominent in the work and frequently make up a substantial number of those lobbying and taking part other climate protest events. In 2015, in preparation for the UN climate conference in Paris, churches in Scotland and Hungary were active in promoting in climate pilgrimages. In Scotland, this took the form of a baton made of recycled oak wood carrying the message ‘Time for Climate Justice, churches in Scotland demand a deal in Paris’ which was passed in a relay between over 200 churches, schools and other local community groups. It was well received in its travels and helped raise awareness in church congregations across the country.

Practical action can be challenging for churches. Heating large church buildings can be difficult and expensive and with the high cost of replacing old heating systems, declining numbers in congregations, and a range of architectural and historic protections in place, it is not easy for church managers to bring church buildings up to modern standards of energy efficiency. There are good examples of new heating technology being applied to old buildings successfully – for example the Cowal church heating project which won an ECEN Roman Juriga award and there are impressive national schemes like the German ‘*Der Grüne Hahn*’ standard that encourages people to measure and manage their energy use.

Churches in Scotland are involved in practical conservation measures through a programme called Faith Action for Nature which has been set up with support from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. It has published seasonal resources online to encourage church members to get involved in practical conservation in their area. In partnership with Hungarian churches, eco-congregations in Scotland have joined a twinning project ‘Church and Community Orchards’ encouraging churches to plant and care for fruit trees in their grounds.

Ökogyülekezet, a Product of Twinning between Scotland and Hungary

The European Christian Environmental Network Eco-Management group has promoted bilateral partnerships between European churches. These twinning partnerships have involved churches in Sweden, Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic, Romania and the United Kingdom. A partnership between the Church of Scotland and the Reformed Church in Hungary led to the creation of a voluntary scheme in Hungary to offer opportunities to individuals and church groups to help protect God’s creation. The experience of Scottish

churches and Eco-Congregation Scotland helped the Hungarian Reformed Church and its congregations establish a nationwide network and encouraged new innovations and projects. The Eco-Congregation Movement (*Ökogyülekezeti Mozgalom*) of the Reformed Church in Hungary was thus established to promote and to coordinate the environmental activities of Reformed congregations and schools in Hungary.

Since then, several programmes have been launched and delivered to care for creation. Creation Time has been celebrated together with churches of Hungary since 2007. An ecumenical working group of Catholic Church (Naphimnusz Association), Lutheran Church (Ararat Group), Reformed Church (Eco-Congregation Movement) has prepared materials and projects for the last week of September as a joint Week of Creation. In 2015, during the Paris Climate Summit, Hungarian churches joined the Ecumenical Pilgrimage to Paris in Europe with the project of “Cycling for Your Neighbour”, an east-west relay from Berehove, Ukraine to Sopron, Hungary. Cyclists visited local communities and at each stop, the pilgrims took a handful of soil from the ground and added it to a small flask. The flask was handed to brothers and sisters in Austria at Sopron from where it was carried through Germany and France to Paris. Pilgrims from across Europe, including Scotland, met in Paris, the Scottish pilgrims carrying the afore-mentioned baton made of recycled oak with a message of hope for the COP.

Recently, Hungarian protestant environmental groups (Eco-Congregation and Ararat) have campaigned successfully in Hungary on the EU proposal to adopt a target of carbon neutrality by 2050. At the European Council Summit in June 2019, the government of Hungary along with the Czech Republic, Poland and Estonia sought to veto the proposal. Subsequently, the environmental organisations of the Lutheran and the Reformed Churches in Hungary wrote to the President of Hungary, János Áder, to ask him to support the EU 2050 climate goal. The letter received a positive response and Hungary now supports the proposal for carbon neutrality in the EU by 2050.

Two Projects Highlight the Work of Eco-diaconia in Hungary

In the year of the financial crisis, 2008, the Eco-Congregation Movement launched the church-based farmers market project “*Egyháztáji*”. At that time, local farmers could not sell their products because of very low prices offered by supermarkets. By creating church farmers markets, urban consumers and rural farmers have been linked directly allowing farmers to charge a better price for their produce without supermarkets or other intermediaries. Since then, several congregations have become involved in organising markets where farmers and customers can meet, share and trade directly, building trust and contacts.

On 5 September 2011, state and church representatives signed an agreement to collaborate in planting and conserving native fruit species. “Planting Native Trees in Church Gardens” promotes long-established regional varieties native to the Carpathian Basin and helps maintain the genetic variety of domestic agricultural crops, an essential part of the national natural heritage. In this programme of cooperation, church gardens and estates receive saplings and propagating material from the Hungarian Research Centre of Agrobiodiversity (RCAT). The project helps maintain the ancient skills and knowledge associated with traditional fruit-growing and processing and by adapting it to current circumstances helps keep the practice alive. This project won the ECEN Roman Juriga Award in 2018 and, to date, more than 8000 trees have been planted in 185 gardens. It has also inspired a new twinning project to grow Church and Community Orchards in Scotland.

Ecumenical Assemblies and Care for Creation

Joint church action to care for creation was promoted at three European Ecumenical Assemblies: Basel (1989), Graz (1997) and Sibiu (2007). The European Ecumenical Assembly held in Basel in May 1989 suggested that churches make a commitment for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. The second

European Ecumenical Assembly in Graz, Austria, in 1997 strengthened these efforts and urged the creation of a Christian environmental network. In response, the European Christian Environment Network was established in October 1998 at the Orthodox Academy in Vilemov in the Czech Republic. The Third European Ecumenical Assembly in 2007 in Sibiu, Romania followed on by recommending the adoption of Creation Time each year from the 1st September to the 4th of October, a time to be dedicated to prayer for the protection of Creation; and to promote a sustainable lifestyle to reverse our contribution to climate change.

ECEN was created to share information, experience and expertise in environmental work across the European Christian traditions and to encourage a common witness in caring for God's creation – a role in which it works closely with the Conference of European Churches. It hosts an assembly every two years to bring together European churches, most recently at Bad Herrenalb, Germany in 2020. Further details are available on the ECEN website.

Conclusion: Can We Talk of Eco Diaconia?

Eurodiaconia is a European network of churches and Christian NGOs providing social and healthcare services and advocating social justice. Its membership is drawn from over 50 organisations in 32 countries. It describes diaconia as “service for and with people in need”.

How does the range of activities to care for creation relate to this tradition? In origin, there is a close link to diaconial concerns for social justice. The worst effects of climate change tend to fall on those living in the poorest countries in the world, particularly in the tropics, and the message that our neighbours elsewhere on earth are suffering because of our actions is a powerful one. Climate justice is therefore closely linked to social justice. However, care for creation goes beyond this; it is not limited to caring for ourselves but is a commitment to care for all of creation, including other species and habitats and indeed the earth itself: our common home without which we cannot survive.

The activities we describe above are a tiny proportion of the work of caring for creation now taking place in denominations across Europe and beyond. This rediscovery of nature and our place within it has been inspiring both theologically and practically with potentially transformative consequences for faith. Caring for one another and caring for creation are not in opposition, they are closely related and can be properly addressed together. Eco-diaconia points to the strength of the relationship and connects care for creation to an ancient and vital Christian tradition.

Suggestions for Further Reading

<https://www.ecen.org/>

<https://www.ecocongregationscotland.org/>

<https://www.okogyulekezet.hu/>

49. TOWARDS AN ECO-DIACONIA IN A CONTEXT OF DISPLACEMENT: THEOLOGICAL IMPULSES FROM ADIVASI COMMUNITIES IN INDIA

Christ Sumit Abhay Kerketta¹

Introduction

The perception of diaconia differs from one person to another. Many seem to confine the meaning of “diaconia” to only human affairs and thus present diakonia from an anthropocentric perspective. Any perspective confined solely to the interests and needs of humankind can become a hegemonic discourse concerned only for our human theological narratives and articulations. As a result, ecological concerns have become a neglected dimension of diaconia. In other words, in our walk, talk and work, eco-diaconia perspectives (ecological concerns) have not been a primary concern. Instead, eco-diaconal concerns have been pushed out into the margins. The negation of *eco-diaconia* is the result of the underside of our theological narratives. In general, theology as a type of God-talk has to serve and protect life as its ultimate purpose. Life for all which lives in the cosmos can be established only when we affirm the other’s subjectivity and share the “commons” equally with each other without any prejudice.

The Adivasi² people of India, particularly the Jharkhandi Adivasis live very close to nature and nature lives among them. To put it in other words: for the Adivasi, *culture* and *nature* are interrelated and interdependent. Known as the “people of soil,” “earth community” or “*Dharti putras*” (sons of soil/land), they believe that if anything happens which is wrong with nature they themselves will be its immediate and direct victims.³ Those Adivasi people who have a rich cultural heritage based on land and nature can therefore provide a strong basis for addressing the issues of our current ecological crises. This pressing world issue is the outcome of our neglect of *eco-diaconia*. Therefore, we need to understand that the problem of the ecological crisis is very much a theological-ethical problem. This study proposes a relevant theology based on Adivasi perspectives as a relevant option for modern Indian theology and a new development pattern which is inspired by our *consciousness, concerns* and *commitment* in relation to the environment.

The Adivasi Situation – A Brief Analysis

The present situation of Adivasis is still that of a person which is treated as *subjugated other* under colonial rule. This colonial experience of otherness by the Adivasis in the present situation led them to engage in social

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² There are 32 Adivasi tribes in Jharkhand. Etymologically, the term ‘Adivasi’ is a combination of two Sanskrit terms: *Adi* and *Vasi*. The term *Adi* means “beginning” or “of earliest times”, and *Vasi* means “inhabitant/resident of”. The central idea behind the term *Adivasi* is the Adivasis were the original inhabitants of India. The term Adivasi is an equivalent term for indigenous, tribal, aborigine people of India. Nirmal Minz reveals the fact that tribals do not call themselves tribal, rather they call themselves Adivasi, Munda, Kharia, Oraon, Ho, Santhal, etc. The term Adivasi underlines the earliest inhabitants of the Indian soil, while the term “tribe” remains just to be an undefined constitutional reference to denote the “Scheduled Tribes” which can be “de-scheduled” any time if the government machinery wants to do so. Cited in C.S.A. Kerketta, *Adivasi Theology*, op.cit., pp.3-4, Nirmal Minz, “Dalit-Tribal: A Search for Common Ideology,” in *Indigenous People: Dalits* (ed) James Massey (Delhi: ISPCK, 1994), p. 136; A.S. Hemrom, “Adivasi/Tribal Heritage,” in *Theologizing Tribal Heritage: A Critical Re-Look* (ed) Hrangthan Chhungi (Delhi: CWM/ISSET-ECC/PCI/ISPCK, 2008), p. 128.

³ Prem Xalxo, *Current Ecological Crisis and its Moral Dimensions: A Tribal Perspective* (Ranchi: Xavier Publications, 2008), p. 11.

movements for resistance and freedom. They are searching for an alternative option which stands in contrast to modern theology and traditional development models. Modern theology tends to neglect the traditional Adivasi resources, and the traditional development model plunders their rich natural resources. They are the victims of the liberal project of exclusion, that is, to add and to stir.⁴ This shows both a hegemonic attitude of theology and an oppressive development model meant to use and abuse Adivasi people and their resources. An Adivasi eco-theology and the related Adivasi eco-diakonia try to re-visit the Other. This theology enables them to understand the very otherness of the earth, and to see how the otherness of nature and the otherness of the subordinated are correlated. It describes how the subordinated others perceive the realities that continue to make them powerless in their everyday lives, and how these structures reduce all life forms into commodities to be plundered and exploited. This theology envisions the interconnectedness between social justice, economic differences and environmental degradation. It unmask the brutal face of development and globalisation. In other words, this theology underscores the reclamation of the moral agency of the Adivasis as foundational to their political praxis *to interpret* the reality and *to change* it radically from their standpoint so that a different world may become a contemporary reality.

The Adivasi integrated lifestyle itself can expose the methodological standpoint of Adivasi eco-theology. Here, Pramod Parajuli's observation is important. He termed Adivasis as "ecological ethnicities" because they maintain the rhythm of circularity and regenerative cycles of nature's economy by cultivating appropriate cosmovisions.⁵ He further says:

[...] among them, nature cannot be distinguished from everyday life. What is in nature is directly experienced and lived through plants, crops, and other sources of sustenance, an interaction mediated through rituals associated with production, collection, preparation, and distribution of food. In the most primal sense, it is through the search for food, nutrition, and medicine that ecological ethnicities communicate with nature."⁶

Thus, Adivasi people can be identified as *eco-friendly* and *ecological communities* because such a notion locates them with definite units of the natural world that create a specific impression i.e., cultures of habitat. The culture of habitat shows that each place fosters enduring habits and worldviews among its inhabitants. In other words, this notion refers to the depth of interaction and interdependence between the human and the non-human worlds within a widely defined eco-region. Hence, an Adivasi eco-theology proposes a "community development model" as relevant for an Adivasi approach to development. Thus, both Adivasi theology and their development model are constantly related to their community life. For them, community life is not a life of human affairs alone, but it is a life of interrelationship between God, Humankind and Nature. These three entities comprise a *community life* in a real sense. This means that the Adivasi understanding of life is not based on a hierarchy, is not anthropocentric or dualistic, but is, instead, based on *integrity* i.e., open ended – without boundary. This holistic understanding of life always persists as a close bond between Adivasis and their land which enables them to nurture respect and honour for nature. This aspect of Adivasi life-patterns offers us a relevant paradigm from human community to earth community, from stewardship to kinship, from common good to the good of the earth, from harmful and destructive development to sustainable development. All these paradigms are rooted in their culture which is based in the lap of nature. The concept of holistic life contains interconnectedness, interdependence and oneness with nature and with one another. Furthermore, Adivasis assume that the creation is the crucial locus for the

⁴ George Zachariah, *Alternative Unincorporated: Earth Ethics from the Grassroots* (London: Equinox Publishing Ltd. 2011), p. 73.

⁵ Pramod Parajuli, "Learning from Ecological Ethnicities: Toward a Plural Political Ecology of Knowledge," in *Indigenous Traditions and Ecology: The Interbeing of Cosmology and Communities* (ed) John A. Grim (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 560.

⁶ Parajuli, "Learning from Ecological Ethnicities", p. 560.

meeting of the Divine and humanity. To this point, planet earth and the entire universe are the primary epiphany of the Divine.⁷ In other words, nature and world itself are also a theological text for them. In brief, the Adivasi life-patterns provide us with a required methodological framework for addressing the issues and destructive trends against the eco-systems.

Eco-theology for Holistic Diaconia: A Theology from Below. Perspectives from Adivasi Communities

As stated above, we reconfirm that Adivasi and ecology (nature/land) are interrelated and interdependent. When dominant theologies treat ecology (nature) as the Other, the Adivasis have also been treated as the Other. They were in the same side of the same coin. George Zachariah opines that when the Other is destined to die before their time, it raises a problematic question about the very vocation of doing theology in our times.⁸ In his observation, the idols of death are becoming the presiding deities and have unleashed a hegemonic war against the movement of life. Death by starvation increases in spite of food surpluses. Rainforests are denuded, rivers are dammed, and ocean beds are destroyed. The commons are being snatched away from the communities, and are now on sale for corporate plunder. For the sake of “common good” and “national interest”, millions of people have been uprooted from their abodes. Suicide seems the only dignified option in life for those who used to live in communion with nature. Pre-emptive killing has become the doctrine of the day where collateral damage has only statistical relevance.⁹

Soul-Soil-Society: A New Trinity

However, in the midst of this reign of death, we also see a new celebration of life in the affirmation that another world is possible. The *way of Adivasi* (culture) is one option for building this movement for ecological and social transformation and reconstruction. Eco-theological resources to provide solid grounding for Adivasi eco-diaconia come from the Adivasi worldview, a holistic worldview emphasising that nothing is only in the outside (margin) or only in the inside (centre), but everything is interrelated and interdependent. Adivasi thinking and their *way of life* does not contain any binary oppositions (dualisms) or hierarchical notions of life. Adivasi Christians believe in and practise the basis of a God-Human-Nature continuum which inspires us to construct an Adivasi eco-theology. The church is called to maintain the integrity of creation. Without this, creation will return to the primeval *chaos*. To maintain creation (*cosmos*), the human active participation with responsible love, *karuna* (compassion) and justice is necessary. As there is a link between poverty and ecology, the mission of the Church has to take seriously both the concerns of the earth and of the poor. This marks a shift in our understanding of the problem. The well-being of both humans and nature must be the *preferential option* for our diaconia, i.e. the social mission of the church. K.C. Abraham says, “The ecological crisis is urging us to affirm our inter-relatedness with nature and to commit ourselves to honour the integrity, to learn from the ecosystems and to orient our theology and ethics to embrace values.”¹⁰ In order to address the current ecological crisis, we need to recognise that the ecological crisis is also a religious issue and not just an economic issue – all the dimensions of sustainability need to be taken into consideration and be related to each other within the theories. As mentioned above, the Adivasis were described as “ecological ethnicities” and as a community of *soul-soil-society* (which could be called a new “trinity” of our time). This provides a space to move towards a paradigm shift for the church’s mission, i.e., from *soul* winning to saving and healing both the *soil* and the *society*. In other words, if the church wants to save the Adivasis, the church

⁷ Hilary D’Souza, “Man-Nature-God: An Ecological Perspective”, *Sevartham* 34 (2009), p. 113.

⁸ George Zachariah, *Alternative Unincorporated*, op.cit., 1.

⁹ Zachariah, *Alternative Unincorporated*.

¹⁰ K.C. Abraham, “A Theological Response to Ecological Crisis”, in *Ecotheologies: Voices from South and North* (ed) David G. Hallman (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), p. 13.

has to also save and heal nature i.e. *jal-jungle-jamin* first (not the *soul* of Adivasis in a spiritual sense, because all these entities are itself their souls), because it contains the integrity of life as a kind of “spiritual compass”.

The Creation, Not the Church, is Now the Body of Christ

In present ecclesiology, the church is affirmed as the body of Christ. This affirmation is based on a dualism which brings a division between the church and world. Because of this division, the whole of creation is groaning (Rom. 8:19-24). Jay B. McDaniel insists that “we would not feel the pain of Other people, of animals, of the earth, if we were not so connected.”¹¹ That means when we are connected with creation, we can feel the pain and suffering (pathos) of the Other (the earth and the poor). In other words, the church has to hear the cry of the earth and the cry of poor today. The church’s concerns must be the ecological concerns of today. Leonardo Boff once stated: “If we have an ecological concern, that means, we embrace the world. In embracing the world, we shall be embracing God.”¹² It is said that although the earth is without words, yet it groans and cries: “Why, all people, do you pollute me with so many evils? The Master spares you but chastises me entirely: understand and propitiate God in repentance.”¹³ Boff talks about the present era as the era of life. That means that the church must have an ecological concern to enter into *the era of life*.¹⁴ Institutions such as the church tend to propagate the notion that “the *church* is the body of Christ”. However, postmodern theologians, like Altizer, say: “It is *creation*, not the *church*, which is now the body of Christ.”¹⁵ In other words, postmodern theology questions the hegemony of modernism and its *representation* of *other*. This can help us to construct our own subjectivity as well as an Adivasi ecclesiology.

Adivasi Eco-Diaconia as Affirmation that Another World is Possible

The *way of life of Adivasis* (culture) provides a vital and living option for *another world* which is based on the *values* of their culture *in harmony with nature* as a tool and foundation for a “social movement” in personal and community life. As the *dominant* world which is based on Liberalisation-Privatisation-Globalisation (*LPG*) seems to suggest that there is no space for the *Other at all*, no room for the individual’s or community’s “own choice”, the life of Adivasis is based on the conviction that alternatives are possible within this world. While the main policy of globalisation is on how to colonise nature and land for more production (and find

¹¹ J.B. McDaniel, *With Roots and Wings: Christianity in an Age of Ecology and Dialogue* (New York: Orbis Books, 1995), p. 74.

¹² Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), p. xii.

¹³ Bishop Irineos Pop, “Orthodox Liturgy and the Care for Creation,” in *Orthodox and Ecology: Resource Book*, ed., Alexander Belopopsky & Dimitri Oikonomou (Bialystok, Poland: Syndemos, 1996), p. 72.

¹⁴ Three eras: era of the spirit, the era of body, and the era of life. Boff connects these three eras with premodern, modern and postmodern in terms of human nature relationship. However, the Adivasis cannot be compartmentalised with these categories since they have a holistic worldview. Nevertheless, Boff’s analysis can be helpful to understand how the earth is made without spirit and life by the *era of body* (modern body). The modern man/self manipulates the reality in dualism for his advantage. It was the scientific era and the founding masters of the modern paradigm were Galileo, Copernicus, Newton, and Bacon. They feel like gods, or at least demiurges, capable of transforming creation. By this point, human beings have the impression that they can refashion the lost paradise of happiness. However, focusing on the body and its controllable power created a world without spirit. God has been placed outside the world. The humanity came into the centre. Earth as a whole has begun to lose its immunity and become ill. Hence, a new revolution of civilisation was imperative. Now, we are entering into *the era of life*. Life connects body and spirit. Life assumes the web of interdependencies throughout the universe and objectively reveals the connectedness of living and nonliving being, of biosphere and hydrosphere, atmosphere and geosphere. Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, op.cit., p. 76, 77.

¹⁵ Thomas J.J. Altizer (ed), *Towards a New Christianity: Readings in the Death of God Theology* (NY: NP, 1967), p. 14; cited in Graham Ward, “Postmodern Theology,” op.cit., p. 328.

out more market places in the globe) in order to become an economic superpower, the concern of eco-diaconia is how to protect the common treasures of nature and to overcome an ideology that does not see any alternative – a kind of TINA (There is No Alternative) ideology. Adivasi churches provide hope to respond to and to resist the unjust *system*. Adivasis reject the negative identity *given* by the colonial powers or by the outsiders. In the words of Dussel, social movements insist on “the dignity of the negated historical subject.”¹⁶ The native has been known as a functional part of the system, reduced to the status of a thing. It is the social movement that proclaimed the native as a person oppressed within the *system*. This ethical affirmation of the Other’s personhood is also an affirmation that the Other is *different* from the system.¹⁷ This insight into social movement as a struggle (*Life is struggle*) helps Adivasis in their process of self-awakening. Self-awakening is the affirmation of Adivasis’ sovereignty over their own lives. This is an attempt to reclaim their own moral agency.

Examples for Reclaiming Agency as Adivasis – Eco-Diaconia in the Context of Forced Migration and Displacement

The displacement of Adivasis from their land has become a daily phenomenon in India today. There are many examples of movements of unrest for Adivasis to protect their own land. For Adivasis, land is their life and identity: no land means no people, meaning no personhood. Alex Ekka narrates this ethos of the Adivasi people of Jharkhand with a real story. A dam which is commonly known as Subarnrekha Multi-Purpose Project (SMP) was constructed in 1978 at Chandil. About 38 villages were fully submerged due to the dam project and about 12,872 families were displaced. Alex Ekka visited the rehabilitation colonies at Chandil in 1995 and expressed their situation as follows:

The name of my son is *Ujru* and daughter’s name is *Jharia*” – the father introduced them. “*Jharia* is very beautiful name, but *Ujru*...it is very strange name. What does it mean?” I asked. “Brother, you see how the government has colonised and taken our village and land and pushed us out in the desert land. During that time my son was born, therefore his name is *Ujru*.” “But this name is not a respectable name; the people will laugh at his name. How shameful it will be.” I said with sympathy. On this he said – “Now, what is remained still, my brother. When our land is taken away, our family is broken, our future is broken, there is no place for us in the society and no respect for us at all. Therefore, his name *Ujru* is right.”¹⁸

The story contains both situations (pre- and post-dam construction situation) of Adivasi people at Chandil. The villagers lived happily and peacefully before the project. During such happy atmosphere, a girl child was born and she was named as *Jharia* (ever flowing small river), related to the beautiful and singing river Subarnrekha which is known as the lifeline of Jharkhand. *Jharia* became a symbol of *nature* and her father lived very close to her, just like Adivasi *culture* and *nature* live together and co-existed. But, today, where *Jharia* reminded him about his past happy life, *Ujru* became a symbol not only for the *destruction* from displacement, but also the symbol of *Vinas* (destruction) in the name of *Vikas* (development).

A similar example of eco-diakonal action is the protests surrounding the proposed 719-megawatt Koel-Karo Hydroelectric Project which was a multi-million project to produce electricity in the late 1970s. The project was supposed to be realised on the rivers of Koel and North Karo in Gumla, Khunti and West Singhbhum, the present districts of Jharkhand. The central place of operation was Tapkara/Torpa of Khunti

¹⁶ Enrique Dussel, “Ethical Sense of the 1994 Maya Rebellion in Chiapas,” in *Beyond Philosophy: Ethics, History, Marxism and Liberation Theology* (ed) Eduardo Mendieta (NY: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), pp. 167-83, cited in George Zachariah, *Alternative Unincorporated*, op.cit., p. 94.

¹⁷ George Zachariah, *Alternative Unincorporated*.

¹⁸ Alex Ekka, *Jharkhand: Visthapan Aur Punarvash* (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 2003), p. 3.

district. If the project had been realised, it would have displaced nearly 5,000 families. The local Adivasi people stood-up together to oppose the project under the umbrella of *Koel-Karo Jan Sangathan*/KKJS (Koel-Karo Peoples' Organisation). The main slogan of the movement was: "*Jaan Denge Par Jamin Nahin Denge*" (We will give our lives, but we will not give our land). The moment that Jharkhand became a new state of India in 2000 (November), the BJP-led government at the centre and the state wanted to re-start the project again after 26 years. On the 2nd February 2001, the situation turned violent. The police force broke the road-blockade made by the KKJS at Tapkara. The KKJS immediately demanded the government rebuild the blockade as well as a punishment for the police who were involved in dismantling the supposedly peaceful protest through violence. The people of 26 villages came together and surrounded the Police Outpost at Tapkara and made a strong demand to fulfil their demand within 24 hours, because they know what the land means for them. The crowd increased moment by moment. Seeing this, a large squadron of police opened fire from rifles for a full hour on almost 5000 peaceful protesters. Nine people died on the spot and hundreds were seriously injured. The protesters and the police present conflicting reports on the firing; however, it is clear that the firing was an effort to break the resolve and unity of the Adivasi communities, who were adamant in their opposition to the project. In fact, the incident strengthened the determination and unity of the Adivasi people. Rejan Guria, the Secretary of the KKJS, said, "For hundreds of years we have lived without electricity, but we are not in darkness. It is obvious that the government is in darkness."¹⁹ This thought provoked them to take a radical shift. Until recently, the main slogan of the movement was: "*Jaan Denge Par Jamin Nahin Denge*", but after the firing, they started saying with greater emphasis and confidence: "*Na Jaan Denge, Na Jamin Denge, Bandh Nahin Banega*" (We will give neither our lives nor our land, the dam won't be built). After years of struggle, the Adivasi peoples' movement finally yielded the desired fruits. On the 29th August 2003, the government officially terminated the Koel-Karo Hydro-electric Project.

A final example of eco-diaconia from Adivasi churches is related to the interconnectedness of Adivasis with a branch of ecology popularly known as interconnectivity of *Jal-Jungle-Jamin-Jan* (water-forest-land-people). This connectivity relates Adivasis to nature as being *stewards* of nature, rather than masters and owners of nature, keeps their *identity* closely related to nature and their land and informs their *community life* as closely connected with other life forms in nature. Before the entry of the outsiders (Aryans, Muslims, British), Adivasis lived a harmonious and peaceful life. It is said that the Adivasi population and the forest covering areas in Jharkhand in Pre-Independent India presented more than 60 per cent of the whole territory and, after the fifty years of independence, both the Adivasi population and the forest areas have been reduced to up to only 27 percent. A critical question therefore emerges here: what will happen to them in the next fifty years? The people like *Padmashri* Simon Oraon (known as a *Water Man* of Jharkhand), Dayamani Barla, Gladson Dungdung, Sunil Minz, Sanjay Basumullick, etc., are engaging in a social movement for saving *Jal-Jungle-Jamin-Jan*. The churches in Jharkhand are also actively participating in this movement and engagement for eco-diakonia. The Lutheran Church (known as Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Church or GELC) has a programmatic concern for planting trees or saplings every year during its celebration of *Autonomy Day* on 10th July. Each family is called to plant at least one tree on this occasion.

Conclusion

The above-mentioned examples for eco-diakonia underline two important points: firstly, the churches' involvement in eco-diakonia can help us to stop further degradation and exploitation of the earth. It invites and creates a space for a communitarian and ecumenical effort to save the ecology. If the local communities and ecumenical bodies come together and join hands against the causes of ecological crisis, the changes can immediately take place and become visible for many. Secondly, a shift is necessary in the peoples' mind-sets.

¹⁹ Ratnakar Bhengra, "Development Not Destruction," *Sevatham* 30 (2005), p. 67.

The ideology of peoples' movement also needs to be shifted from a colonial mind-set to a postcolonial mind-set; i.e., from "We will give away our life but not our land" to "we will give away neither our life nor our land". In other words, an Indian eco-theology has to respond to the Adivasi struggle properly. A postcolonial theological endeavour is necessary today to rediscover the community life of Adivasis as well as their traditional values. Unless theology rediscovers Adivasi traditional values and applies it in the task of interpretation, theology becomes irrelevant and useless. There is a need for a paradigm shift in theology which can already be seen in the postcolonial theological endeavour. A postcolonial reading of the Bible can help us affirm the revelation of God in and through *nature* rather than just in human *history*. This can be used as a model for interpreting biblical text from an ecological perspective.

In order to re-visit the Other or Adivasi people, a model of Adivasi eco-theology is essential which re-defines *diaconia* and re-claims it to be shifted *towards eco-diaconia*. However, a theology based on eco-diaconia is always accompanied and needs a social movement in a holistic way. An Adivasi eco-theology considers the social movements of Adivasis as important theological texts. The Adivasis are anxious to protect their land today. They affirm that *they* and their *land* are not assets to be commodified but, for them, land is everything. This affirmation led them to take part in resistance in the villages and small towns where people gather together to resist the reign of death. In summary, Adivasi eco-theology can be an option to create a new awareness of the need to protect the environment from decay and destruction. All its theological articulations are attempts to make sense of the distress that we face and to inspire the faith communities to the care of creation i.e., to invite and engage people and churches for the task of eco-diaconia.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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50. ECO-DIACONIA IN SOUTHERN AFRICAN CONTEXTS – SAFCEI AS AN EXAMPLE FOR A MULTI-FAITH ECO-JUSTICE RESPONSE

Kate Davies¹

Roots of the Contemporary Earth Keeper Movement in South and Southern Africa

The breath-taking image of our planet afloat in space, taken from the moon in 1969, caught us on a cusp of history. While in awe of Earth's beauty, the human family was embarking on an unprecedented earth-plundering growth trajectory. In Southern Africa, another layer of drama played itself out. While some countries in the region were loosening the shackles of colonial domination, South Africa was institutionalising apartheid oppression. The land and what could be extracted from her bounty became an obsession for the ruling class. The voice of the planetary household was gagged.

Where was the church? It was caught up in the human struggle. The powerful white, Afrikaans-speaking Dutch Reformed Church used faith to justify racial separation and with it, economic and social oppression. In opposition, some outspoken leaders from a variety of Christian denominations and Muslim and Jewish faith traditions worked collectively to oppose this domination. The ecumenical community of resistance was held together by the South African Council of Churches (SACC). Theirs was a strong social justice agenda.

Thirty years later, at the turn of this century, South Africa was in a state of euphoria, still celebrating her young democracy. Although the country was armed with a new Constitution which enshrined environmental protection, in the faith sector concern for the earth and human life support systems remained largely absent from any agenda. The energy of the multi-faith co-operative resistance to Apartheid had dissipated. Faith leaders refocused their attention on human rights issues and the escalating socio-economic problems, especially those associated with the HIV/AIDS pandemic, unemployment, alleviating poverty and growing allegations of corruption by government officials and corporate leadership. Against this backdrop, small pockets of greening actions sprung up in some religious centres in South and Southern Africa. These initiatives were often led by local faith champions and related to food, gardening and nutrition. They were not becoming mainstream. Few people were making the connection between human and ecological injustice.

SAFCEI Origins

After several decades of campaigning for eco-justice work within the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, and recognising the need for greater collective action, a new initiative began to emerge through the efforts of Bishop Geoff Davies and a few likeminded colleagues. In 2005, with endorsement from the SACC, a conference bringing Christian leaders together was planned to discern the need for an ecumenical environment organisation. With encouragement and support from the UNDP GEF Small Grants Programme,² leaders from all the major faiths were invited to participate alongside the diverse Christian representation.

South Africa had called itself a Christian country during the Apartheid era with little official recognition or honouring of the variety of religious traditions. Delegates from other faiths expressed gratitude and appreciation for their inclusion in the conference. It was a diverse group. Many participants had been sent to attend the conference by their institutions and did not know what they were letting themselves in for. Because

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² UNDP GEF SGP United Nations Development Programme, Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programmes. <https://sgp.undp.org/> [Accessed 10th June 2020].

the Abrahamic faiths are steeped in patriarchal practices and religious conventions, expanding the concept of ecumenism to embrace the “whole inhabited world” (derived from the Greco-Roman term *oikoumene*)³ was an unfamiliar and challenging concept. Calling for justice and rights for mother earth was an entirely new narrative for some attendees.

After three days of specialist input, intense deliberations and shared worship and prayer, it was agreed that environmental responsibility was a serious and important concern. The delegates endorsed a proposal to establish, not only a South African, but a Southern African Faith Communities’ Environment Institute, SAFCEI.⁴ Twin agendas were identified, to promote eco-justice action (emphasising both economic and ecological justice) and through this, co-operative peace-building for all life. The time was ripe to expand the challenge beyond the Christian community and to include all people of all faiths and broaden its reach into the whole of Southern Africa.

Multi-faith Approach to Earth Keeping

Fifteen years on, this pioneering organisation, which is led by a Board with diverse faith affiliations, has become a significant leader in the faith and eco-justice landscape in the region. Members are appreciative of the different faith perspectives, discovering that earth keeping can be a collective and life-affirming action. It is an enriching endeavour that promotes tolerance, bridge-building and peace-keeping. At its inception, a conscious decision was made to describe SAFCEI as a multi-faith, rather than an inter-faith organisation. There was no intention to come to any unifying theological synthesis between the representative faiths. The work of the organisation has always been deeply respectful of all faith traditions. SAFCEI’s unifying purpose is collectively to protect and restore planetary systems that ensure the wellbeing of the community of life on Earth. The underpinning values of the golden rule are common to all major faith traditions. “*Treat others as one would like to be treated oneself*”, is an ethic of reciprocity that needs to be extended to all life, not just humankind. There is so much more that unites the living Earth community, the web of life, than divides it.

SAFCEI’s Vision

At the heart of SAFCEI’s vision is a call to all faith communities to care for the living earth. Through its mission as “an institute of people of many faiths that are united in diversity through a common commitment to earth keeping,” SAFCEI strives to increase awareness and understanding, and to encourage faith leaders and their communities throughout Southern Africa to take appropriate eco-justice action.

SAFCEI’s objectives have guided a multi-pronged approach to support and promote earth keeping amongst all faith communities. “Through collaboration, networking, research and action, SAFCEI seeks to:

- Raise environmental awareness
- Engage in formulating policy and ethical guidelines within faith communities
- Facilitate environmental responsibility and action
- Confront environmental and socio-economic injustices
- Support environmental training and learning.”

Africa is a region where faith congregations meet together regularly in cities, towns, villages and across the countryside. They are the most widely networked communities of any civil society organisation and their religious leaders are often better trusted than their political counterparts. With underpinning moral values of

³ E. M. Conradie, “Notions and forms of ecumenicity: Some South African perspectives”. In: E. M. Conradie (ed) *South Africa perspectives on notions and forms of ecumenicity*, 19 (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2013), pp. 13-76.

⁴ SAFCEI, The Southern African Faith Communities’ Environment Institute. www.safcei.org.

justice and equity along with compassion and generosity, faith communities, acting individually and collectively, are the most appropriate institutions for growing the emerging earth-keeper movement.

SAFCEI's Modus Operandi with Faith Leaders and Grassroots Champions

SAFCEI started with a two-pronged approach. A small passionate team met with a wide variety of faith leaders, from Christian denominations and many of the main faiths represented in Southern Africa, including from Islamic, Hindu, Jewish, Baha'i, Buddhist and African Initiated/Independent Church traditions. They were provided with background information and learning materials. They were encouraged to include eco-justice in their mission and responsibilities, in their worship and in their decision-making bodies, so that creation care became integral to the life of each faith community. They were called upon to take a lead in faith-based earth-care policy-making, to 'walk the talk', to speak publicly and write about eco-injustice. They were urged to encourage their communities to pray, teach and act for the whole Earth community, not just for humans. The growing presence of faith leaders at climate talks and parliamentary hearings was one of the visible responses to this call.

The second approach was to establish a network of eco-congregations. Led by both lay and ordained faith champions, local congregations were encouraged and supported to become centres of sustainability and good practice. Recognising that most African faith traditions honour a creator God or powerful life-giving spirit, SAFCEI believed that centres of faith practice could re-invent themselves as vibrant hubs of transformation by building a groundswell of community eco-agency. The organisation envisioned not just community minded 'eco-friendly' churches, mosques, synagogues and temples, but clusters of actively engaged congregations springing up and working together everywhere. They would be passionate not only about sustainability but eco-justice action, advocacy and agency.

Building Grassroots Agency

The day to day lived experiences of increasingly frequent and catastrophic weather events, prolonged droughts and devastating fires is building concern about climate disruption and human suffering amongst faith-based communities in Southern and Eastern Africa. In spite of growing scientific knowledge and consensus, there remains limited understanding of how humans are fuelling climate change amongst grassroots communities in Africa. SAFCEI's vision of involving the faith sector in earth keeping activities has taken time to become rooted. While senior faith leadership make statements and call for action,⁵ the teachers, preachers, imams, rabbis, gurus and spiritual leaders working amongst communities on the ground do not always share or act on the information due to the competing priorities. Immediate socio-economic challenges, not the longer-term environmental threats, continue to be their main concern and preoccupation.

Eco-congregations

Early on, SAFCEI pioneered an eco-congregation programme modelled on the work of eco-schools and similar emerging green church initiatives around the world. Champions from individual congregations took up and led the challenge with a variety of contextual responses. Green liturgies and prayers were developed

⁵ Statements emerging from the African region:

SACC Climate Change Committee 2009. *Climate Change – A challenge to the churches in South Africa*. Marshalltown: SACC. Anglican Eco-Bishop's statement 2015. <https://anglicanalliance.org/anglican-alliance-welcomes-statement-from-anglican-eco-bishops/>. (Accessed 15 September 2019).

African Bishops call for ecological justice, 2018. <https://www.anglicannews.org/news/2018/09/african-bishops-call-for-ecological-justice-to-top-agenda-at-2020-lambeth-conference.aspx>. [Accessed 15th September 2019].

and outdoor services and retreats were hosted. Some undertook energy, water, waste and land-use audits and footprinting exercises. Vegetable and water-wise gardens were established and recycling projects were started. Some set up ‘green teams’ who developed environmental management plans and policies, hosted eco-faith seminars and shared SAFCEI information leaflets. There were clean-up campaigns, petitions signed and climate-justice protests.

SAFCEI hosted regular eco-congregation workshops but with such a variety of geographic, socio-economic, cultural, literacy, linguistic and religious contexts, it was not possible to provide ongoing support for individual congregations. Among a few faith communities, eco-actions became deeply rooted and flourished but responses were largely dependent on committed local champions. Mandated by senior leadership and encouraged by policy statements and resolutions, the Green Anglicans⁶ have been mainstreamed and are now a thriving regional movement, particularly amongst the youth. Without institutional support, however, eco-agency in other congregations was often stifled. Some faith leaders lacked the content knowledge, training and confidence to integrate earth-care into the life of their communities and showed reluctance to take on new responsibilities that were not seen as core business. Evangelical churches were disinclined to collaborate with a multi-faith institution or to acknowledge responsibility to promote justice in the here and now.

Faith Leader Environmental Advocacy Training

In 2014, SAFCEI re-envisioned its approach to building faith-based grassroots eco-action through FLEAT, a Faith Leader Environmental Advocacy Training⁷ initiative. In line with SAFCEI’s policy of building multi-faith dialogue and cooperation, participants were selected from a variety of faith contexts, as well as for gender parity and to achieve representation among other demographics. These lay and ordained faith leaders needed to provide evidence of their commitment to develop and promote faith-based eco-actions within their communities. There are now 125 “FLEATers” from thirteen different faith groups from 10 countries in Southern and Eastern Africa. Diverse cohorts of up to twenty, originally met together once or twice a year but are now communicating virtually through Zoom and WhatsApp and sharing challenging and inspirational stories on social media.⁸

The FLEAT programme strives to enhance the capacity of faith leaders to respond to contextual socio-ecological challenges and to develop advocacy tools for eco-justice in order to build community resilience. Training includes specialist areas like input on agroecology and food sovereignty, climate change, eco-foot prints, water and energy auditing, consumerism, waste management, deforestation, animal justice, and the extractive industries. Practice-based learning underpinned by ethics and faith values involves dealing with gender issues, peace-building, the media and communication. Faith-based eco-actions from Muslim-Christian collaborative tree-planting in Malawi to global climate advocacy are evidence that diverse faiths can work individually and in partnership to address common challenges. There is now a supportive network and flourishing camaraderie amongst FLEATers who do the work of eco-congregations in their own communities and communicate across faith and country boundaries with other champions.

⁶ Green Anglicans <https://www.facebook.com/GreenAnglicans/> [Accessed 10th June 2020].

⁷ Faith Leader Environmental Advocacy Training SAFCEI: <https://safcei.org/project/fleat/>. [Accessed 10th June 2020].

⁸ FLEAT <https://www.facebook.com/groups/SAFCEIFLEAT/> [Accessed 10th June 2020].

Eco-justice Advocacy

Over the past fifteen years, SAFCEI developed a vibrant eco-justice advocacy component. In South Africa, environmental work had for long been perceived as an exclusive White colonial conservation concern.⁹ Interpreting ecological challenges as issues of justice and human rights has helped to change this perception. SAFCEI, in partnership with a number of civil society organisations, has taken a lead in confronting a variety of politically and economically charged eco-justice issues. Faith-based civil society and advocacy work has had a particular focus on energy, food and climate justice.

A significant milestone was SAFCEI's successful high court challenge, in partnership with Earthlife Africa Johannesburg,¹⁰ over a secret, corrupt and unconstitutional nuclear energy deal agreed between the South African government and Russia. The economic, social and environmental implications of this April 2017 court decision have been enormous.¹¹ SAFCEI staff, alongside faith leaders and their representatives, held a silent vigil in front of parliament for four years, in order to hold government and cabinet ministers to account as they arrived for their scheduled meetings every Wednesday morning. A member of parliament was once heard to complain: "*Pastors should be theologising, not interfering in energy matters!*" Civil society took a different view. They were encouraged by the outcome of this David and Goliath struggle and grateful for this act of witness and sustained call by the faith sector for ethical governance.

Energy and advocacy work have not been confined to stopping the secret nuclear deal. Plans and decisions about future nuclear aspirations and climate damaging energy choices are currently being monitored and challenged.¹² Over the years, SAFCEI has had staff and volunteers investigating and helping to build resistance to proposed fracking operations and open-cast uranium mining in the Karoo, a fragile, water-scarce ecosystem known for its arid adapted sheep farming. This work went hand in hand with awareness raising, capacity building and participatory learning experiences for local faith, school and farming groups. Isolated communities exposed to threats of radiation at the nuclear waste dump site in the northern Cape were trained on how to lodge official objections. SAFCEI has also been a long-standing partner with other civil society organisations in the struggle against extractive industries that threaten sensitive ecosystems and communally owned land. Notable amongst these has been the iconic resistance to an application by an Australian company to mine titanium at Xolobeni on the Pondoland Wild Coast.¹³ Since its inception, SAFCEI has supported the local community in their struggle to retain the rights to their land and supported agroecology and eco-tourism efforts. This unique landscape is a centre of endemism, a biodiversity hotspot and a cultural heritage site.

SAFCEI's work extended beyond South Africa's borders. Many Southern African states have low levels of resilience, aggravated by weak, corrupt or authoritarian political leadership, limited financial resources and a changing and unpredictable climate. A new wave of colonialism and the vested interests of multi-national corporations that promote industrial food systems and extractive industries are a constant challenge. Biodiversity and habitat loss, land degradation and depleted human health, nutrition and wellbeing, alongside the erosion of cultural practices leave many remote communities vulnerable. It is against this backdrop and exacerbated by the recent COVID-19 pandemic, that faith leaders live and work. Believing it essential to share a message of hope, SAFCEI strives to offer positive alternatives to unsustainable policies and practices.

⁹ De Gruchy, S, "An olive agenda: First thoughts on a metaphorical theology of development". *Ecumenical Review* 59 (2&3) (2007), pp. 333-345.

¹⁰ Earthlife Africa, Johannesburg. <https://earthlife.org.za/> [Accessed 10th June 2020].

¹¹ Corrupt government nuclear deal court challenge by SAFCEI and Earthlife Africa Johannesburg. <https://safcei.org/knowledge-base/nuclear-deal-legal-documents-and-media-resources/>. [Accessed 10th June 2020].

¹² <https://ewn.co.za/2020/06/11/activists-warn-gwede-mantashe-over-nuclear-plan> [Accessed 26th June 2020]. and <https://safcei.org/safcei-calls-on-parliament-to-provide-rigorous-oversight-of-proposed-energy-projects/> [Accessed 26th June 2020].

¹³ <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2019-01-15-mining-will-not-bring-jobs-to-xolobeni/#gsc.tab=0> [Accessed 26th June 2020].

Supporting faith leaders and in partnership with food, energy and climate specialists, SAFCEI promotes healthy and nutritious agroecological food systems and a “just energy transition.” These practices will not destroy or poison life-sustaining ecosystems, the atmosphere or the climate and will help communities build their resilience to current and future shocks including climate change.

Conclusion

The challenge to engage faith communities in eco-justice work is enormous. Because of the dominant anthropocentric approach of Abrahamic faiths, leaders have long believed their primary mandate is to be concerned with human rights, social justice and human wellbeing. Growing global inequality, unemployment, hunger, inadequate education, poor health services, corrupt political leadership and vested interests of corporate power, and now the COVID-19 pandemic, makes eco-justice action ever more urgent and daunting. The planetary crisis has reached such serious proportions that the very web of life is unravelling. The whole household of God needs to act together in search of a more sustainable future.

All faiths uphold ethical principles and values. Sacred texts are infused with ecological wisdom. Many academics and theologians are now writing about eco-theology. Eco-ethics is being taught in a growing number of institutions. Eminent and senior faith leaders are calling for climate change action and planetary justice. Grassroots congregations are celebrating the *Season of Creation*,¹⁴ growing food gardens and recycling. However, these initiatives are not enough, there are missing links. Earth-care and eco-advocacy needs to be more deeply embedded in the praxis of all faith institutions working together.

SAFCEI provides advocacy training, support and encouragement to leadership and eco-champions. It shares accessible and contextual resource materials and information. Guided by collective wisdom from the Earth Charter,¹⁵ the Charter for Compassion¹⁶ and the People’s Charter for Africa,¹⁷ and its own vision of all faith communities cherishing living earth, the organisation strives to grow the groundswell of a movement for an ecological reformation.

If we are to establish planetary wellbeing, a flourishing web of life and a peaceful earth community, we must heed both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.¹⁸ Statements from faith leaders are not enough. Sacred texts from every faith persuasion need to be read and re-viewed through green spectacles. If earth-care thoughts and actions are to flow from our hearts, eco-ethics must be infused into our value systems and deep consciousness, and every day actions.

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¹⁴ The Season of Creation <https://seasonofcreation.org/> [Accessed 10th June 2020].

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51. DIACONIA AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA – TRENDS AND CRUCIAL CONCERNS

Chad Rimmer and Julia Brümmer¹

The goal of this essay is to highlight trends or crucial concerns within the field of diaconia. From the perspective of the Lutheran World Federation,² it specifically highlights connections between the United Nations Agenda 2030 and the theology that has informed decades of diaconal work among the global communion of Lutheran churches. Recent experiences from the LWF project *Waking the Giant* will illustrate the synergies and opportunities for churches to faithfully engage in the global agenda towards sustainable development.

The Logic of Agenda 2030

The concept of development has been evolving for decades. Churches constantly critique these trends and theologically assess their own methods of engaging in the public sphere.³ Ideally, each generation learns from the unintended consequences of prior approaches to development, and strives for increasingly sustainable, holistic methods of serving people that respect their full, inherent dignity.⁴ To that end, the Agenda 2030 may be more than just another development theory that churches may choose to affirm or reject.⁵

The Agenda 2030 offers a technical approach to transformation. At its centre are 17 Goals and 169 targets for monitoring progress towards those goals. However, beyond individual indicators, the Agenda calls for an extremely strong political commitment by the 193 member states of the United Nations who have underwritten this sustainable development agenda.

For that reason, the Agenda is demonstrating an unprecedented global significance and scope. Its ambition is universal in the sense that the targets apply to all countries, whether ‘developed’ or ‘developing’. The focus on sustainability challenges the old perceptions of power between ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ countries, by calling all countries to meaningfully contribute to three dimensions of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental. In order to achieve sustainable equity, the Agenda calls for new Global Partnerships. The Agenda states that:

We are determined to mobilize the means required to implement this Agenda through a revitalized Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity, focused in particular on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people.

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² See: <https://www.lutheranworld.org/>.

³ The Lutheran World Federation *Church in the Public Space* (Geneva: LWF, 2016); The Lutheran World Federation, *Mission in Context* (Geneva: LWF, 2009); The Lutheran World Federation. *Diakonia in Context*. (Geneva: LWF, 2009).

⁴ The Lutheran World Federation *Serving the whole person: the Practice and Understanding of Diakonia Within the Lutheran Communion* (Palo Alto, CA: Lutheran University Press, 2010).

⁵ See also the EKD Study Paper on Agenda 2030 and the Role of the churches from 2018, “Lent to us is the Star on which we live –The Agenda 2030: A Challenge to the Churches”, in: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/ekd-launches-resource-for-churches-to-engage-on-sustainable-development>.

The global partnership required to achieve the kind of sustainable development envisioned by Agenda 2030 requires the commitment of all nations. However, discourse in political spaces reveals the growing consensus that non-state and religious actors also have a special role to play in development.

Today, political and governmental bodies often recognise that local religious authorities and institutions are fully part of their communities. In times when NGOs come and go, and governments may change, religious institutions remain enduring sources of hope and shared purpose. Faith-based organisations often reach deep into inaccessible or remote populations. In many places, communities trust religious authorities who have credibility, strong moral influence, and the ability to influence how people think and act. Based on this trust and credibility, religious leaders and institutions have a strong convening and mobilising power among communities, which is critical for education and promoting social cohesion.

This acknowledgement of the special role of religious actors in development indicates a significant trend in recent development discourse among state actors and governmental organisations. This shift began around the time the UN shifted its focus from the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals. Discourse shifted from religion as ‘development taboo’ (*at best irrelevant, and at worst an obstacle to development*), to religion playing a central role in people’s lives at the levels of beliefs and values, and thus in development. Agenda 2030 seems to recognise that engaging with people’s belief, values and ideas provides a foundation for sustainable change.

This trend provides a special opportunity for churches to engage the global sustainable development movement. There are also several significant synergies between the SDGs and the theology of diaconia that underwrites our churches’ development work. We will outline three such synergies.

Holistic Approaches to Development and Diaconia

One of the most significant trends affirmed by the Agenda 2030 is that the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are ‘integrated and indivisible’.

Reflecting the integrated approach that we have decided on, there are deep interconnections and many cross-cutting elements across the new Goals and targets.

This affirmation represents one of the crucial aspects of development discourse today, which is the recognition that no economic, social or environmental transformation is sustainable without addressing significant development in all areas including gender, poverty, education, climate, governance, etc. The ambition of the agenda can only be realised through a commitment to effect change in each sector. This holistic vision affirms that the SDGs are not an end in themselves. Rather, the SDGs are pathways navigating within a larger horizon. Theologically, this is significant because the SDGs provide pathways for churches to engage in meaningful development work without losing sight of the fact that our diaconal service exists within a horizon that is much larger than the development agenda.

Faith is not merely a set of beliefs about God. Faith is trust in who we are as human beings before God. Theologically, that trust is a framework for understanding what we ought to do and how we can faithfully do it. For that reason, a faith-based approach is not only a set of commitments. A faith-based approach is a cosmology that has the capacity to explain the role of human beings in caring for and sustaining creation in light of God’s Mission. A faith-based approach to diaconia always remembers that God’s Mission is the horizon that orients and gives meaning to any other approach (e.g. Rights Based Approach) that we discern serves or synergises with God’s mission of reconciliation of the whole inhabited earth, which in Greek is *oikoumene*. This is also the root of the word ‘ecumenical’ and implies an integrated or unified theological approach to economy, society and ecology.

A theology of *oikoumene* sets the stage for articulating diaconia in a holistic way. The *oikoumene* (whole inhabited earth) is the *oikos*, or household in which life flourishes. If this household is to be sustained, it must follow certain laws (*nomos* in Greek). The law of this house is *oikonomos*, or economy. And if this economy (*oikonomos*) is going to serve the wellbeing of the household (*oikos*), then it must respect the logic of the household (*oiko-logos*), or ecology. Even the Biblical Greek language preserves this theological cosmology where economy, society and ecology are integral parts of one holistic creation.

Therefore, the notion of an integrated indivisibility of the SDGs resonates very well with the holistic notion of diaconia. Cultivating that wholeness is part of the human vocation to serve creation and civil society. The faith-based approach to diaconia maintains that God's Mission is the ultimate horizon within which we find pathways to join others in seeking the common good, justice and peace. By maintaining a focus on the ultimate horizon of the Mission of God, people of faith can also keep a critical distance from time bound ideologies of "progress" that are not sustainable, or that serve unjust economic, social or political ends.

The trend towards integrated indivisibility affirms that the SDGs can be a pathway for people of faith to live out their vocation in civil society within the horizon of shalom, or sustainable peace.

Leave No-one Behind

As a communion of churches in the Lutheran tradition, the LWF affirms that diaconal service is a central aspect or mark of Christian life. For Lutherans, serving the needs and well-being of the neighbour is part of a two-fold ethic of Love (to love God and to love your neighbour as yourself). Without needing justification of what is commonly understood to be right or legal, love frees and compels us to meet the needs of our particular neighbour, that which they need to thrive. The motivation to serve the holistic needs of the other is rooted in a deep recognition of the inherent dignity of creation, and of each particular creature. For Christians, the incarnation (*birth, life, death and resurrection*) of Jesus signifies the inherent dignity of each creature. In this way, Christian faith grounds the universal motivation to satisfy the needs of particular beings, especially those that exist on the margins of society.

In this light, it is significant that the slogan of the Agenda 2030 is "leave no one behind". The preamble states:

As we embark on this great collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind. Recognizing that the dignity of the human person is fundamental, we wish to see the Goals and targets met for all nations and peoples and for all segments of society. And we will endeavour to reach the furthest behind first.

This commitment to begin with those that are "furthest behind" harmonises well with a diaconal theology that prioritises needs of particular creatures, and those who are most marginalised. In the Gospels, Jesus tells the parable of the lost sheep. This teaching affirms God's holistic mission begins by prioritising the one who is left behind. Until that one is restored, the flock cannot consider itself whole or healed. This is just one example among many Biblical texts which affirm the inherent dignity of every creature as a primary concern and feature of any just and sustainable transformation.

Attention to particular needs of the marginalised is also a feature of Liberation theology, which has strongly shaped diaconal theology in recent decades. The preferential option for the marginalised and vulnerable begins with experiences of people and prioritises real needs. Daily experiences are also the "data" which inform our theological critique of the unjust systems and power structures that create or perpetuate unsustainable conditions. Seeking to transform these systems into sustainable partnerships depends on the full and meaningful participation of affected individuals and communities, and their wisdom.

Reformation and transformation of unjust structures is a legacy of Protestant traditions, for better and for worse. Reformers have always sought to transform injustices within the ecclesial, social, economic and political spheres. While the focus of reformation continues to evolve, theologians and leaders of the Lutheran

tradition have historically maintained a sharp focus on structural questions regarding the relationship between the church and the state. Specifically, a theology of diaconia provides a framework for constructively critiquing the roles of the church and the state in caring for the needs and welfare of their citizens.

In that tradition, the LWF's theological approach to diaconia has always been informed by contextual experience of our member churches and the realities in which they live. For instance, beginning in the 1990s, the theology of diaconia was shaped by experiences of poverty, violence, gender, and the relationship between the cries of the poor and cries of creation.⁶ In light of these experiences, the LWF maintains that we participate in diaconia out of hope in God's Mission to transform and reconcile creation. Therefore, Lutheran churches engage fully with the world in the public space.

The Agenda 2030 expands the discursive and operational space for churches to engage as faith-based diaconal actors. This is a welcome trend. However, engagement requires that churches maintain a critical relationship to power within the church and to political structures, and constantly evaluate the common but differentiated roles of the church and state. While the diaconal role of the church is primarily to serve the needs of individuals and communities, it must continue to critique the systems that perpetuate injustice. This prophetic aspect of diaconia is a second crucial aspect to churches' engagement with the SDGs.

Prophetic Diaconia

The Agenda 2030 has been criticised for not calling into question the systems that perpetuate social and economic injustices, ecological destruction, and disrupt social cohesion. As mentioned above, FBOs can fulfil this critical and prophetic role within civil society and to governments. In recent years, the LWF has chosen to articulate this role in terms of "prophetic diaconia".⁷ But churches must be careful not to confuse the prophetic witness with proselytism. Churches who instrumentalise diaconal services as a means to conversion exploit the vulnerability of fellow human beings, rather than respecting their dignity.⁸

In the same way that churches must not see diaconal service as an instrument for conversion, governments must be wary of instrumentalising the competencies of FBOs. The sustainable partnerships envisioned by Agenda 2030 should be organic partnerships that are dialogical and creative.⁹ In seeking to create sustainable, organic partnerships that offer sustainable alternatives that reflect the beliefs, values and ideas of FBOs, churches and civil society sector donors can resist the temptation to chase numerical indicators (and therefore justify funding), and rather establish sustainable alternatives that model justice.

While the SDGs do provide a special opportunity for churches to engage in our diaconal vocation in the public space, FBOs must first attend to their primary concern, which is an honest, internal evaluation of their credible, operational capacity to engage in current trends of sustainable development. This is especially important as the global consensus grows around the definition of sustainability in all of its social, economic and ecological integrity. The LWF has recently launched an initiative called 'Waking the Giant'. The initiative aims to enhance churches' capacities for engaging various SDGs. Initial feedback highlights some of the synergies discussed in this essay, and provides a snapshot of the capacity of churches to live out their prophetic diaconia and engage the work of creating sustainable partnerships that contribute to transformative development, beginning with the furthest behind.

⁶ *Prophetic Diaconia: "For the Healing of the World"*, 2002.

⁷ *Diakonia in Context*, 81.

⁸ *Serving the whole person*.

⁹ *Mission in Context*, 54.

Experiences from Waking the Giant

‘Waking the Giant’ is a global, ecumenical initiative of the LWF to build the awareness and capacity of churches and church-related actors to engage with the Agenda 2030 in their respective countries. Since its inception in 2018, Waking the Giant has worked at the global level to provide tools and materials to help churches relate their ongoing work to the SDGs. In specific target countries (currently Liberia, Tanzania, Colombia and the United States), the initiative brings ecumenical partners together in jointly planning a strengthened implementation of and advocacy for areas related to specific goals of the Agenda 2030. Waking the Giant does not present the Agenda 2030 as a “new area of engagement” for churches, but rather as an opportunity for strengthening and raising the profile of their existing diaconal engagement. The first step is to increase the awareness among church-based actors that they “have been working on the SDGs long before the UN was created”. It also implies documenting evidence on the importance and distinctiveness of churches’ (and more generally faith-based actors’) contributions to sustainable development – in terms of reach, quality of the services provided and depth of their engagement with communities. While the values underlying the UN Agenda and the churches’ Mission can easily be aligned, a divide between both sides persists, partly based on misconceptions and the use of distinct (technical vs biblical) languages.

In the light of *SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals*, Waking the Giant tries to bridge the divide by taking the role of a translator. To that end, a series of SDG self-assessment tools have been produced.¹⁰ These are simple questionnaires about activities commonly carried out by church-based actors, which are then related to specific targets and goals of the Agenda 2030. In some target countries (starting in Liberia and Tanzania in 2019), Waking the Giant has conducted SDG mapping studies involving field-based data collection among Christian and Muslim organisations. These studies are a first attempt at establishing an overview of the manifold activities that faith-based actors carry out in those countries, which directly contribute the achievement of specific SDGs. In addition to building an evidence base on churches’ existing engagement with areas of work under the Agenda 2030, the mapping studies have proven to be valuable processes of raising awareness on that agenda among the involved actors. In fact, religious actors engaged in social services and advocacy do not typically frame their engagement in relation with the UN SDGs.

Conclusion

The response of churches, church-related diaconal actors and even actors of other faith communities to the Waking the Giant initiative so far has been overwhelming. The response clearly shows that faith-based actors find it easy to relate to the UN Agenda 2030 under the motto of “leaving no one behind”. This experience illustrates that, within current sectors of sustainable development, people of faith want to discover constructive pathways to live out their baptismal vocation to serve in the public space, while maintaining the critical qualities of a prophetic diaconia that is theologically rooted in God’s holistic mission.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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¹⁰ These tools, and other material produced by the initiative, can be accessed under <https://wakingthegiant.lutheranworld.org/resources>.

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52. DIACONIA AND POVERTY REDUCTION IN NAMIBIA: THE ROLE OF THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH IN NAMIBIA (ELCRN)

Janine Van Wyk¹

Introduction

Namibia, as any other country in Africa, is not free from poverty. Across all regions of the country, people are living in poverty. Numerous efforts have been undertaken by the Namibian government as well as the private sector and civil society to improve the standard of living for all Namibians. In Namibia, the country and its people are seen as the Namibian House, and the belief that “*no one should feel left out*” is the Namibian dream! It is a dream where everyone would have enough food to eat, a house to live in, access to land, education, and proper health services. With this dream in mind, the Namibian government recognises that the fight against poverty is real and needs to be addressed. This fight should be inclusive and coordinated in such a way that all Namibians can achieve prosperity, because all Namibians deserve a dignified life, in which employment, adequate housing, water, sanitation and access to good health is restored.²

Hence every stakeholder, be it individual Namibians, the government or the Church, has a shared responsibility to partake in these efforts to reduce poverty in the country. This article aims to discuss these efforts and interventions and with particular attention given to the response of the Evangelical Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN) towards poverty reduction in Namibia.

Methodologically this article will focus on providing background information about poverty in Namibia, as well as the approach followed by the Namibian government. Secondly, it will discuss diaconia and the approach of the Church in its response to poverty. Thirdly, the different interventions by the ELCRN will be highlighted. Different literatures regarding the challenge of poverty and the initiatives by the government and the ELCRN have been researched in order to produce this article.

Background and Context

Poverty in Namibia varies across different regions of the country and across rural and urban areas. It is estimated at 28.7 per cent of the population with more women than men living under the poverty line. About 37.4 per cent of the poor live in rural areas while 14.6 percent living in urban areas are poor. These indicators show that most subsistence farmers and pensioners are living in poverty, with lower levels of education and lower access to services. When thinking about poverty in Namibia, the three most important areas of focus are food, shelter and clothing. The Namibian president, in a statement at the National Chamber of Commerce in November 2015, reiterated that “We need to house our people, we need to ensure that they don’t go hungry, and we need to provide them with opportunities to participate in a dignified manner in the economy and in society”.³

Causes of poverty can be traced back to the social and economic imbalances of the apartheid system, introduced into Namibia in 1964 under South African rule, which left a deep divide in Namibian society. In order to address the situation, the Ministry of Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare was established in 2016, with the aim of focusing on actively pursuing the war on poverty in Namibia. Apart from providing

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² Blueprint on wealth redistribution and poverty eradication, 2016, Windhoek, p. 9.

³ Republic of Namibia: Republic of Namibia Statement by his Excellency Dr Hage Geingob, President of the Republic of Namibia, at the special dinner in honour of the president hosted by the Namibian Chamber of Commerce and Industry [NCCI], Windhoek, 2016.

conditional social grants, the ministry has launched, for example, a blue print on poverty eradication, as well as a National Food Bank programme with the aim to alleviate hunger and address the nutritional needs of poor urban families who cannot sufficiently meet their nutritional needs.⁴ Furthermore, the ministry has started drafting a Social Protection Policy.

Diaconia and the Poor: Different Contexts, Different Approaches

Diaconia was first understood as a charity service of the Church based on Christian mercy. Christian Oelschlägel (2010) emphasised that diaconia has evolved and has had different focuses during the history of the Church. He states that, during the Reformation, diaconia became a response of gratitude towards one's suffering neighbour (the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37), by the whole community with the support of the local government through the ministry of deacons or deaconesses. For example, institutions such as hospitals, orphanages, schools, special services for marginalised groups were founded and individual aid was given to the poor. He further states that, during the 1970s within liberation theology, the emphasis shifted to the oppressed people (Ex. 2:24-25; 3:7-10; Mic. 6) and to emphasising the messianic vision of the kingdom of God giving motivation, orientation and hope (Mic. 4:3-4; Isa. 61:1-2).⁵ Churches thus moved from a church-centred perspective to a politics-centred perspective. Thus, focusing on the advocacy of justice and independence.

In Namibia, diaconia has also broadened its perspectives from church-centred to include advocacy with the aim of fighting for justice of the disadvantaged. Hence, diaconia as a service of the Church is operated on two different levels: on a congregational level and on a national level. Diaconic projects such as soup kitchens or drought relief, etc. are carried out on congregational level within all circuits of the ELCRN.⁶ These efforts show that it is imperative for the ELCRN, to take care of those in need, to stand with the poor and powerless by committing herself to their needs. To commit to their needs, means not just recognising that there are those in need and trying to help, but actively seeking ways to better others' lives, taking care of them, and advocating for dignity and justice.

Diaconia and Poverty Reduction: ELCRN Initiatives

On a national level, the ELCRN has also embarked upon different initiatives. These initiatives enabled the Church to not only create a platform for advocacy but also to actively participate in the sharing of responsibility of poverty reduction in Namibia. One such initiative, is the establishment of the building of nineteen hostels through the Department for Hostels and Kindergartens. The aim was to develop hostels with the purpose of providing opportunities for primary education for the children of farm workers living on farms.⁷ These hostels are believed to play an important role in alleviating extreme child poverty in Namibia, because they offer shelter, nutrition and the opportunity to attend school to poor and marginalised children.⁸ By providing accommodation, meals and life skills education, the hostels relieve the burden of care that otherwise would go to overburdened extended families. Furthermore, the hostels are able to provide a home for some of Namibia's orphans.⁹

⁴ *Zero Hunger Magazine*, National Planning Commission. (Windhoek, 2016), p. 5.

⁵ C. Oelschlägel, *Diakonia and human rights- building a house of justice*. (Hannover: United Evangelical Mission, 2010). p. 42.

⁶ ELCRN, 2008. Constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Republic of Namibia (Windhoek: ELCRN, 2008), p. 3.

⁷ C. Haarmann, and D. Haarmann, Final Report: Feasibility Study – ELCRN Hostels (2003), p. 4.

⁸ Haarmann, Final Report: Feasibility Study – ELCRN Hostels, p 16.

⁹ Haarmann, Final Report: Feasibility Study – ELCRN Hostels, p 18.

A second initiative, through the Desk for Social Development, was the launch of the Basic Income Grant Coalition and the introduction of a basic income grant in Namibia. The BIG Coalition started operating on 27th April 2005, with the aim to work together with the government on introducing and implementing a Basic Income Grant (BIG) in Namibia. The BIG Coalition consists of stakeholders such as the Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN), the National NGO Forum (NANGOF), the Namibian Network of Aids Services Organisations, the Legal Assistance Centre (LAC) and the Labour, Resource and Research Institute. The Coalition members agree that Namibia faces problems of poverty and inequality and believed that the BIG would help lift people out of poverty and enabling them to become economically active.¹⁰

The BIG is a universal cash grant of N\$100.00 to be paid out by the Namibian Government to every Namibian citizen every month. Money paid to people not in need would then be recuperated through the Namibian tax system.¹¹ The BIG Coalition advocates that the BIG would improve everyone's life by reducing poverty and inequality, and all Namibians would benefit.¹² People would have a reliable source of income, which would enable them to make their own decisions. It also would lessen the burden on the working poor who must support relatives and friends with their limited income. BIG, therefore, is seen as a tool to reduce dependency, freeing resources for economic investment. It has the highest developmental potential as the people can count on it and better plan their economic activities.¹³

A pilot project in Otjivero settlement in the Omitara District was established, with the hope of government leaders transforming BIG into a national programme. Otjivero was chosen as it was an area where unemployment, hunger and poverty were very high with 86% of people living under the lower poverty line classifying them as severely poor.¹⁴ All residents of Otjivero under the age of 60 years received N\$100.00 every month from January 2008 until December 2009. After one year of the pay-outs, it was found that severe poverty decreased from 86% to 68% of households. People started their own businesses in areas such as brickmaking, bread baking and making clothes. 21% of respondents started saving after receiving the BIG and debt has decreased. It was also discovered that, after the launch of this pilot project, unemployment decreased from 60% to 45%. School fees were paid, and school dropouts reduced.

The ELCRN spearheaded efforts and the Coalition took their advocacy role very seriously in their mission to ensure that all Namibians can benefit through a universal cash grant. Through this initiative, a theology of sharing based on the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand (Lk. 9:10-17), has been expounded. It emphasises the concept of sharing rather than looking at how many bread and fish could be used to feed all. Bishop Z. Kameeta explains it as: "The miracle lies in the sharing! It lies in the breaking of bread together." There was an unconditional sharing, whether one is seen as deserving or not, everybody was provided for, thus creating a culture of sharing amongst the community, a mindset of sharing and a basic principle of giving. The miracle is that if you break bread together, people start to open and to share what they have. This then creates a community who collectively take ownership and responsibility. Even though the efforts of the BIG Coalition to introduce a basic income grant in Namibia have not been accepted by the Namibian government, the BIG initiative is still seen as a powerful example to lay a strong foundation for economic empowerment, responsibility and ownership taking, while restoring the human dignity of people and creating proud members of society.¹⁵

¹⁰ Haarmann, *The Basic Income Grant in Namibia Resource Book*, p. 17.

¹¹ Haarmann, *The Basic Income Grant in Namibia Resource Book*, p. 13.

¹² Haarmann, *The Basic Income Grant in Namibia Resource Book*, p. 14.

¹³ Haarmann, *The Basic Income Grant in Namibia Resource Book*, p. 16.

¹⁴ T. Rathgeber, *The Basic Income Grant in Namibia*, Summary of Assessment Report (2009) p. 62.

¹⁵ J. Motte, T. Rathgeber, A. Veddeler, *Think BIG*, Hannover: United Evangelical Mission, 2010. p. 8.

Conclusion

Different initiatives on a variety of levels have been undertaken in Namibia. All relevant stakeholders have committed themselves towards fighting the war on poverty. However, these efforts are often done in isolation or in competition with another sector. While it needs to be appreciated that the concern and commitment level of all stakeholders are in a high regard, there is still a lack of understanding of the value of combining efforts and resources, taking hands and working more effectively in order to reduce poverty in the country. Through diaconia, the ELCRN can continue to strengthen her role in the reduction of poverty, assist in the provision of spiritual and daily needs in order to improve the standard of living of all Namibians. Policies are in place as determined by the government, but without a common understanding of the theology of sharing and that the BIG initiative can be an important model for eradicating poverty, some people within the Namibian house will still be left out or behind.

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53. DIACONIA AND POVERTY REDUCTION: DIACONIA AND THE POOR IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN RWANDA

Mathilde Umuraza¹

Introduction

In a country like Rwanda, where poverty is widespread, a good proportion of people are living in dire poverty.² Ideally, nobody would ignore the reality of poverty especially in such societies. Individual people, public and private organisations including the Christian Churches, therefore, participate in relieving the sufferings of the poor and support them to cope with deprivation either through direct donations to meet their basic needs or by empowering them to fight against the causes of poverty.

Such interventions are known especially among the Christian communities and Churches as Diaconia. The Presbyterian Church in Rwanda (Eglise Presbytérienne au Rwanda-EPR)³ among others carries out some interventions which mainly cater for poor people and poor communities. This article discusses in detail some interventions carried out by EPR congregations and the diaconal office of the Church and how they respond to the needs of the poor in this particular context.

The information presented in this article has been compiled using data from the existing literature on Churches, Diaconia and poverty in Rwanda and especially documents and reports from EPR. The article presents, firstly, the context and challenges of poverty in Rwanda. The second section discusses how Diaconia responds to the needs of the poor in context, and finally the last section presents the types of diaconic interventions carried out by the EPR.

Background and Context

Poverty in Rwanda is not a new phenomenon. Poverty has been predominant in rural areas as well as in urban areas for at least the last four decades.⁴ In addition to the general features of poverty, some particular factors are associated with the poor such as area of residence (urban or rural area, remote or non-remote);⁵ the size and composition of the household (big or small, dependants and active members)⁶ and the status of head of the households (age, education, gender, type of occupation, etc.).⁷

In spite of those individual factors, poor people nevertheless face similar challenges. They encounter difficulties in putting food on the table; their children are less likely to complete twelve years of basic education,⁸ they own little or no land, they live in less than a full house or they are hosted by others.⁹ They

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² National Institute of Statistics in Rwanda (NISR) 2018, according to the current data more than a third of Rwandans are living under the national poverty line. Moreover, the latter is underestimated when compared to the global poverty line set at 1.25\$ per day-versus 0.54\$ in 2018.

³ Eglise Presbytérienne au Rwanda-EPR 2020.

⁴ National Institute of Statistics in Rwanda (NISR) 2018, p. 24. The poverty rate according to the latest official data is estimated at 38.2 per cent.

⁵ World Bank Group 2015, pp. 65-66.

⁶ Bizoza et al. 2018, pp. 12-14.

⁷ National Institute of Statistics in Rwanda (NISR) 2018, p. 48; p. 50-52 and p. 57.

⁸ Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) 2012, p. 59.

⁹ Ministry of Local administration- MINALOC 2/3/2015 see also National Institute of Statistics of National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR) 2015, p. 13.

depend on others – individuals, government and private organisations – to access healthcare services.¹⁰ In other words, they are suffering from absolute poverty and live under the national poverty threshold.¹¹ Those people are not likely to be able to escape poverty without external support.

Indeed, most of the Christian churches in Rwanda direct their diaconic interventions in helping the poor to cope with the situation of deprivation on one hand, and at empowering them to raise themselves out of poverty on the other.¹² Before discussing in detail the actual diaconic programmes of EPR, the following section will briefly explore the concept of Diaconia in context.

Diaconia and the Poor: Different Contexts, Different Approaches

It is difficult to imagine Church without Diaconia. On this point, Nordstokke argues that Diaconia is more than just a mission of the Church, rather it defines what the Church is and does.¹³ Notwithstanding the new evidences that reveals a deeper and wider meaning of Diaconia beyond the caritative work,¹⁴ still Diaconia in practice is dominated by direct support to the poorest and reflects to some extent the humble service to the suffering people and among the poorest.¹⁵ Motivated by faith in Christ and neighbourly love, Diaconia is the Christian response to the suffering of the “poor”.¹⁶

Contextually, that response follows the course of the human development in society. The latter dictates the kind of interventions, for whom and how they are done. In Germany, for example, the institutional and professional Diaconia dominate the practice. The interventions cover a broad range of general and special services to the sick, the elderly, the youth, single parents, refugees, the homeless, etc.¹⁷

Comparatively in Rwanda, such institutions are quasi-non-existent. Most diaconic interventions within the Protestant Churches happen at a congregational level and are administered by non-specialised volunteers. The beneficiaries of such interventions are mainly recruited based either on their absolute poverty or on their vulnerability.¹⁸ However, although they are not so many, there exist small diaconic institutions such schools for people with disabilities and rehabilitation centres for street children and youth, such as those operated by EPR in Kigali.¹⁹

Diaconia and Poverty Reduction: Individual and Group Support

This section will give a brief account of the diaconic programmes of EPR and how they are performed at an organisational level as well as at a congregational level. EPR is the oldest protestant denomination in the

¹⁰ Ministry of Local administration- MINALOC 2/3/2015 see also National Institute of Statistics of National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR) 2015, p. 13.

¹¹ National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR) 2015, the current poverty line is established based on the average calorie consumption per adult. It is set at RWF 159,375 and RWF 105,064 per year and at r poverty and or the extreme poverty respectively.

¹² Protestant University of Rwanda (PUR) 2017, pp. 124-34.

¹³ Nordstokke 2015, p. 46.

¹⁴ Collins 2009.

¹⁵ Latvus 2017, p. 76.

¹⁶ Habarurema and Ndikumana 2012, p. 10-11 The authors explain that, the word “poor” – in biblical texts – has different meanings besides being materially poor. Meanings are dependent on how it is written and the context in which it is used. It may be translated as the afflicted, the oppressed, the weak and the needy, etc.

¹⁷ Diakonie Deutschland, p. 12, Eurich et al. 2011, Ruddat and Schäfer 2005.

¹⁸ Protestant University of Rwanda (PUR) 2017, pp. 120-5 and 167-72.

¹⁹ Le Centre Presbytérien d'Amour des Jeunes (CPAJ) 2020.

country. Founded by Bethel mission, it is now 113 years.²⁰ Her mission is twofold: Evangelism and Diaconia.²¹

Diaconia in EPR targets the poorest. The EPR Diaconia office is in charge of coordinating the support to the poor in general. It trains deacons and deaconesses.²² The office also manages projects that support the most vulnerable and poor to meet their basic needs. For example, it pays schools fees for poor children, youth and the disabled. Reports show that more than 2000 people are being assisted.²³ The Office donated 857 livestock animals such as goats, rabbits, pigs and cows to poor families in 2016. They also donated fifteen wheelchairs to children with physical disabilities and supported their schooling in special schools.²⁴

The support to the indigent people is not carried out exclusively by the diaconic office in EPR. Rather, it cuts across almost every department and office. According to EPR annual reports, it consists mainly of donations of food, of household goods, of agricultural inputs – seeds and fertilisers, of community health insurance premiums payments, of livestock, of scholastic materials as well as school fees.²⁵

Similarly, congregations regularly collect funds to support poor in meeting their needs. Additionally, congregations organise visits to the poor, the elderly and the sick. Occasionally, they organise community work to support the needy, especially the sick and the elderly on farm work or in the house.²⁶

Apart from individual assistance, EPR engages the poor through community development. The development department was initiated in the early seventies.²⁷ However, as reported by Twagirayesu and Van Butselaar, the concept of “community development” has been attached to the Church since its creation.²⁸ Before the genocide against the Tutsi of 1994,²⁹ “community development” was synonym with “rural development”. Therefore, most of the efforts focused on improving the agricultural techniques for more productivity. For instance, in *“Histoire du Christianisme au Rwanda”*, Tharcisse Gatwa lists at least five similar major projects that were run by EPR within less than two decades.³⁰

Currently, the programmes under this department focus mainly on community development and community empowerment. The latter has become an approach for poverty reduction, rather than a department in itself. In all parishes and communities where EPR operates, the Church organises its members and beneficiaries, trains them and mentors them, so that they may possibly solve their problems themselves through mutual support and solidarity. Poor and non-poor in the communities and parishes are encouraged to come together in groups, cooperatives or simply associations. EPR counts tens of thousands of such community groups. There exist groups for youth, for women, for HIV affected and infected people, for former

²⁰ Musabyimana 2007, p. 26 & Gatwa 2014, p. 64.

²¹ Republic of Rwanda: Office of the Prime Minister 2/12/2013, p. 79 – Literally her mission is as follows: “The organisation’s mission is to proclaim the Good News of salvation among its beneficiaries (members and other Rwandans in general) and the manifestation of his love through actions to promote the welfare of all creatures.” Currently, EPR operates countrywide with an estimated membership of 350 000 people dispatched in 163 parishes managed by more than 200 pastors and evangelists. Those parishes are organised in seven presbyteries. Besides, EPR runs 117 schools and eight health facilities in partnership with the Rwandan government. EPR has mainly three programmes departments: the Department of Church Growth, the Department of Health and the Department of Education and Development.

²² Deaconesses and/or deacons are not a profession. They are, rather, members of a congregation selected by their fellows to carry out the charity work of their behalf.

²³ Eglise Presbytérienne au Rwanda-EPR 2019, p. 27.

²⁴ Eglise Presbytérienne au Rwanda-EPR 2017, pp. 17-8 and 62-63.

²⁵ Eglise Presbytérienne au Rwanda-EPR 2019, pp. 34-6.

²⁶ Protestant University of Rwanda (PUR) 2017, pp. 120-125 and 167-171.

²⁷ Gatwa and Karamaga 1990, p. 94.

²⁸ Twagirayesu, M., van Butselaar, J. 1982, p. 35.

²⁹ Here is the official name given to the killings that happened between April and July 1994 and which mainly targeted people of the Tutsi ethnic group but also included Twa and some moderate Hutus.

³⁰ Gatwa 2014, p. 85.

street dwellers, for vocational training graduates, for mothers of malnourished children, etc.³¹ Those groups work in agriculture, farming, handcrafts and small trading amongst other activities.³²

It is worth noting that the above mentioned diaconic initiatives have contributed to poverty alleviation in Rwanda considerably and have permitted the members of EPR as well as the beneficiaries of her diaconic interventions to cope with adversities such as sickness and droughts as well as positively changing their lives which would not have been achieved otherwise.

Conclusion

Diaconia for poverty reduction in Rwanda and in EPR specifically might have been dominated by service provision, but this review has revealed other aspects of Diaconia in EPR. Indeed, the poverty reduction initiatives from congregations focus mainly at relieving the pain of poor individuals or poor communities. This might be associated with limited resources and infrastructure as well as the volunteering character of the congregational Diaconia.

However, at organisational level, Diaconia in EPR is more organised and professional. Henceforth, the interventions at this level demonstrate a paradigm shift in terms of supporting and caring for the poor. Whereby, the programmes promoted are those aiming at building the capacities of the poor and their communities, enabling them to become agents of their own destiny. This enables the poor and their communities to participate in their liberation and sustainably transform their communities.

All the above suggests that EPR actively plays a key role in poverty reduction in Rwanda and yet more prominently at microlevels. However, the discussions of the programmes above show some weaknesses as far as advocacy and partnership are concerned. EPR strives to support the maximum number of people; nevertheless, those interventions as good as they might be, reach only a handful number of people and are geographically limited. For bigger coverage – hence for a “bigger witness to Jesus” – non-traditional resourcing, such as partnerships with other religious and non-religious organisations including public and private organisations are to be encouraged. Even though in doing so, compromises will have to be made.³³ After all, Diaconia is about the “little people”³⁴ and not about “us”.³⁵

Lastly, as per results of the review, it is hard to ascertain whether EPR involves in advocacy as part of their diaconic interventions. However, the authors of the “Diaconia in protestant churches in Rwanda, 2017” express a need to support congregational and institutional Diaconia by advocacy work.³⁶ It is only through advocacy that Churches can hold the Government accountable to their citizens, including the least privileged. Hopefully, EPR will include advocacy in their diaconic interventions in the near future.

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³¹ Eglise Presbytérienne au Rwanda-EPR 2019, pp. 12, 26, 38, 42, 43, 45, 117, 136, 142, 156, 157.

³² Eglise Presbytérienne au Rwanda-EPR 2019, p. 142.

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³⁵ Churches and, in this specific paper, EPR.

³⁶ {Protestant University of Rwanda 2017 #208}, pp.172-173.

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54. POVERTY IN THE MIDST OF WEALTH AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION AS A DIACONAL CHALLENGE – REFLECTIONS ON RESPONDING TO HOUSEHOLD-DEBT IN THE UK

Andrew Orton¹

The contemporary international context for diaconia includes extremes of wealth and poverty, both between and within countries. Globally, whilst half the world's population lives on less than \$5.50 per day,² the world's 2 153 billionaires have more wealth than 4.6 billion people.³ Whilst there are stark wealth and income inequalities between countries, these inequalities also exist between individuals within countries, regions, cities and even within local areas.⁴

As Tsang has discussed elsewhere in this volume, poverty and social exclusion are multi-dimensional concepts, within which these differences in wealth and income play an important part. For those experiencing poverty, awareness of their limited resources and opportunities compared with others may affect relationships within particular communities, contributing to their experiencing a heightened sense of social exclusion. Furthermore, despite local, national and global efforts to tackle poverty, data clearly shows that the risks and impacts of poverty continue to fall disproportionately on some groups rather than others, further heightening the ways in which these inequalities can divide communities.⁵

This chapter reflects on how these themes present a diaconal challenge to which Christians can respond by drawing on related research into Christian responses to financial exclusion and debt in the UK. In an international context, the UK is comparatively wealthy, but also relatively unequal.⁶ This includes not only differences between individuals and households, but also significant patterns of inequality between regions and localities.⁷ The human impact of poverty and inequality is profoundly challenging, whether measured in differences in life expectancy, health, life chances, its impact on children, or any of a wide range of other dimensions of life.⁸

Debt plays a significant but complex role within these dynamics of poverty and inequality. Rising levels of household debt and over-indebtedness are prompting widespread concern, with those in the UK collectively

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² P. Espinoza Revollo *Time to Care: Methodology note*, Oxford, UK: Oxfam International, 2020) <https://dx.doi.org/10.21201/2020.5419>, Coffey, C. *et al. Time to Care: Unpaid and underpaid care work and the global inequality crisis* (Oxford, UK: Oxfam International, 2020) p. 9.

³ The World Bank *Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2018: Piecing Together the Poverty Puzzle*, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/poverty-and-shared-prosperity>; Coffey, C. *et al. Time to Care: Unpaid and underpaid care work and the global inequality crisis* (Oxford, UK: Oxfam International, 2020) p. 9.

⁴ United Nations Development Programme *Human Development Report 2019: Beyond Income, Beyond Averages, Beyond Today: Inequalities in Human Development in the 21st Century* (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2019) available at: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/2019-report>.

⁵ UNDP (2019).

⁶ E.g. see the summary of related data at: Equality Trust *The Scale of Economic Inequality in the UK* (2020) available at: <https://www.equalitytrust.org.uk/scale-economic-inequality-uk>. Also see the latest comparative Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development data: OECD *Income inequality (indicator)* (2020), available at: <https://doi.org/10.1787/7f420b4b-en>.

⁷ For example, these local differences are reflected for England in the governmental 2019 Indices of Deprivation figures, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019>. A broader analysis of inequality in wealth and income between people and regions is available via Equality Trust (2020) *op cit*.

⁸ For example, see M. Marmot, *The Health Gap: The Challenge of an Unequal World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016) especially chapter 1.

owing £1, 680 billion at January 2020, an average of £60,363 per household.⁹ Churches and Christian charities working with those in poverty have been amongst those who have highlighted how debt (especially individual over-indebtedness in relation to income and assets) has a particularly negative impact on those in poverty. As well as highlighting such issues, Christian agencies and churches in the UK have sought to develop a wide range of different practical responses to support those struggling specifically with debt, as well as wider poverty and social exclusion. These responses include crisis support with essential food and utilities, individual debt advice, mentoring, credit unions, financial education, community organising for campaigning to challenge exorbitant rates of interest charged by short-term ‘pay day’ loan providers, and many more. A detailed analysis of these different initiatives and their relationships to each other is available separately.¹⁰

This chapter focuses on illustrating some of the ways in which our understandings of the causes and impacts of poverty are important and instrumental when developing Christian responses to issues of debt and poverty in the midst of wealth, drawing on our research. This research involved organising Money Talks with diverse groups of local Christians across two contrasting regions within England. These Money Talks provided an opportunity for attendees to discuss the impact of debt in their locality and explore options for supporting change with those who were interested in responding.¹¹

In terms of the impact of debt, as well as affecting financial health, participants in these Money Talks highlighted how debt can interact with and reduce mental, physical and social health. In particular, debt can exacerbate people’s feelings of isolation and loneliness, as relationships with others become affected (and families may break down) when debts spiral out of control. Participants discussed how the mental health impact of poverty and debt can be exacerbated in the context of a consumerist society where others seem to be able to do more, buy more, and be attributed social status according to what they own and have. Some participants also discussed how this impact can be exacerbated where historically-high availability of credit and levels of debt (including on credit cards, mortgages and student loans) are becoming normalised. They also referred to how increasingly-insecure employment for many, combined with increasingly-conditional welfare systems, have added to unpredictability of income for those needing to meet repayments.

Those participating in these discussions generally recognised that Christians occupied a range of current positions in terms of their experiences of relative wealth or poverty within their particular contexts. They also expressed different political perspectives on related issues. Moreover, whilst they were not asked to comment on their own financial situation, individual Christians nevertheless highlighted how they (and their families and friends) had experienced different positions and levels of financial exclusion and debt across their own life course (e.g. when in or out of work, when retired, when experiencing a particular life crisis). We found that recognition of issues of poverty, debt and financial inequalities in their area had led our research participants to ask questions about *why* such poverty, debt and stark differences between people’s income and wealth existed. This included questioning whether these differences were just down to individual behaviour, and/or patterns of relative advantage and disadvantage. In turn, this discussion raised questions about whether debt and related inequalities are culturally-embedded, and also whether they are issues of social justice and oppression. For example, whilst some respondents focused on how issues such as addiction and individual

⁹ *The Money Statistics*, March 2020, London: The Money Charity, available at: <https://themoneycharity.org.uk/money-statistics/march-2020/>.

¹⁰ See: A. Orton and D. Barclay, “Why networks matter in faith-related community development work: learning from diverse Christian responses to debt in England”, *Community Development Journal* (2019) open access online advance publication, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsz002>. Also see the broader multi-faith report on finance more widely: T. O’Toole and E. Braginskaia, *Public Faith and Finance: Faith Responses to the Financial Crisis*, Bristol: University of Bristol, 2016), Available at: <http://www.publicspirit.org.uk/assets/PubFaithFin-Report-Final.pdf>.

¹¹ A more detailed account of the methods and methodology can be found in: D. Barclay and A. Orton, *Money Talks: Christian Responses to Debt in the North East and London* (Durham: School of Applied Social Sciences, Durham University, 2017) Available at: <http://dro.dur.ac.uk/21939/1/21939.pdf>.

expenditure choices contributed to debt, others recognised that such choices were made in a context of wider social opportunities, norms and expectations. Examples given included parents not wanting their children to be socially excluded by their peers at school if they were unable to afford particular clothes or take part in particular activities. Some respondents referred to initiatives by Christian charities to work with others to highlight the “poverty premium” as an example of structural inequalities which exacerbated poverty and debt. This “poverty premium” term refers to the higher prices paid by those in poverty for many essentials (such as higher fuel costs on pre-payment utility meters, higher fees to withdraw cash locally from some cash machines, higher costs of having to shop at local stores due to limited transport, higher credit costs, etc.).¹² Other participants reflected on the connections between rising personal debt levels and broader economic debates about employment and cuts to public expenditure (including on welfare benefit levels and public services). This included discussing how these public expenditure cuts had affected individuals’ income levels and how governments had justified such changes in the interests of reducing the national deficit that is adding to national debt. Some recalled wider international initiatives calling for the cancellation of impoverished countries’ debt internationally on the grounds of justice, including linking these to Biblical notions of Jubilee and forgiving debts. Some also made connections with issues of ethical investment of wealth in ways that did not further exacerbate debt and inequalities.

In our research, when asked about biblical passages that might relate to these issues, it was clear that the Christian participants held a range of “ordinary theologies”¹³ about money and debt. They often cited a range of biblical passages that dealt with these themes, but typically found it challenging to put these together more systematically in ways that might inform practical actions. Some of the most interesting dialogue arose when those participating in the group explored different interpretations of particular passages from church teachings or their own reflections, and discussed tensions between their understandings of different passages within the Bible. Passages which were frequently the subject of such debates included (for example) Jesus’ words to “give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s”,¹⁴ and that “you will always have the poor among you”,¹⁵ when understood in context, as well as Jesus’ related parables and actions.¹⁶ Broader prophetic calls for justice, including in lending, and related examples of Biblical situations (e.g. in Nehemiah 5:1-13), were also important parts of these discussions.

What principles can be drawn from their reflections for diaconal responses to debt, poverty and inequality in the midst of wealth? Whilst there is not space for a comprehensive response here, the following reflections provide some potential starting points, drawing on the analysis above.

- a) A diaconal response to these issues involves recognising how poverty, debt and inequality can adversely affect relationships between those living within the contexts where we are engaged in diaconal practice. For example, in our churches, it may involve encouraging critical reflection on whether those who are rich and those who are poor are valued equally, or whether poverty is stigmatised and those who are poor are avoided.
- b) Practically, it may involve considering whether practices in our churches and Christian organisations help include those with different levels of financial resources, or whether they contribute towards their exclusion. For example, whilst participants in our “Money Talks” recognised occasions where support

¹² S. Davies, A. Finney and Y. Hartfree, *Paying to be Poor: Uncovering the Nature and the Scale of the Poverty Premium* (Bristol: University of Bristol, 2016) available at: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/geography/pfrc/pfrc1615-poverty-premium-report.pdf>, or in summary form at <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/geography/pfrc/pfrc1614-poverty-premium-key-findings.pdf>.

¹³ J. Astley, *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening and Learning in Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

¹⁴ Matthew 22:21; Mark 12:17; Luke 20:25.

¹⁵ John 12:8; Matthew 26:11; Mark 14:7.

¹⁶ See Barclay and Orton for a fuller discussion of these different passages and interpretations as they featured within the “Money Talks”.

had been offered through various church initiatives and Christian projects, they also highlighted occasions when their inability to contribute financially to church collections or activities had led to them being excluded or feeling unable to speak about money-related issues they may be having. Indeed, some went so far as to say that the main time they had heard money being mentioned in church was when they were being asked to contribute financially. Others highlighted and critiqued the ways in which aspects of “prosperity Gospel” teachings in some churches made those without money feel excluded.

- c) Within Christian social service agencies, we may need to consider whether the power dynamics of inequality in relation to charity are shaping our actions, and if so, how. These dynamics include where those receiving charity are comparatively reliant on the generosity and decisions of those who are giving it, and where those giving the resources get to decide to whom they give support, and on what basis.

Conclusion

Diaconal callings to tackle social exclusion are expressed in how we as a Church deal with these inequalities, and how we build relationships between those who have different levels of wealth and poverty, including helping those who are financially rich to understand the daily life experiences and issues faced by those in poverty. The attitudes of diaconal workers, and how these become represented in the policies and practices of particular responses in specific organisations, matter here. For example, do diaconal workers see those in poverty and debt as primarily being dependent recipients of charity, or as people who can contribute differently (e.g. in time rather than money, or if not now, perhaps at other points in their lifetime)? Moreover, they involve engaging critically in discussions about what causes debt when considering how to respond. This includes considering questions of how we respond to aspects of individual and structural sin that may contribute to people ending up in debt. Furthermore, do we recognise the structural inequalities and injustices that may have differentially affected the life chances of those in poverty and their likelihoods of ending up with reduced financial resources or in debt? These include the global inequalities in financial resources described at the beginning of this chapter, within which people are born into different social and geographical positions, and with different levels of financial capital and life chances. Are we involved in directly challenging those stigmatising attitudes expressed towards those in poverty which blame them for their situation, and related myths?¹⁷ If we do take these structural inequalities seriously, how can we combine practical interventions that provide everyday support those who are in poverty and financially excluded with co-ordinated action to change the injustices which contribute to putting and keeping them there? And how do we see beyond the outward economic situations of particular individuals to see the true and fundamentally-equal value of all human beings, whether rich or poor, creditor or debtor? How might the ways in which Christians deal with these issues represent the reconciliation of people with God and each other that is at the heart of the Christian Gospel?¹⁸ These are big questions, but ones that our research findings indicate are vitally important to consider when seeking to develop diaconal responses to debt and poverty in the midst of economic wealth.

¹⁷ E.g. see Martin Charlesworth and Natalie Williams, *The Myth of the Deserving Poor: A Christian Response to Poverty in Britain Today* (Surbiton, Surrey: Jubilee+/Grosvenor House Publishing, 2014). Joint Public Issues Team of the United Reformed Church, Church of Scotland, Methodist and Baptist Churches, *The Lies We Tell Ourselves: Ending Comfortable Myths about Poverty*, www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/truthandliesaboutpoverty.

¹⁸ E.g. see A. Morisy, *Beyond the Good Samaritan: Community Ministry and Mission* (London: Continuum, 1997).

Suggestions for Further Reading

Barclay, D. and A. Orton, *Money Talks: Christian Responses to Debt in the North East and London*, Durham: School of Applied Social Sciences, Durham University, 2017. [Available at: <http://dro.dur.ac.uk/21939/1/21939.pdf>].

If you are interested in starting a discussion about money and debt in a diaconal organisation or church setting, there is a short guide on this and links to related resources and examples from the UK context at: bit.ly/Money-Talks-Guide.

For a broader illustrative discussion of how some of these issues and dynamics might shape related ministry by incorporating theological reflection and dialogue between those who have different experiences, one interesting starting point is: Morisy, A. *Beyond the Good Samaritan: Community Ministry and Mission*, London: Continuum, 1997.

55. SOCIAL EXCLUSION OF THE POOR AMID A WEALTHY SOCIETY – DIACONAL CHALLENGES IN HONG KONG

Kenneth Tsang¹

Introduction

Undoubtedly, poverty is the major diaconal challenge that the Church must tackle. Moreover, it is also primarily accepted that poverty is not only about economic deprivation, but also involving different dimensions of deprivation.² Highly related to this multi-dimensional perspective, the “social exclusion” experienced by poor people has been getting increasing amounts of attention from scholars and services practitioners in recent decades. Ruth Levitas and her project team, after exploring a wide range of social exclusion definitions, have worked out a composite working definition of this phenomenon:

Social exclusion is a complex and multi-dimensional process. It involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole.³

In other words, poor people experience social exclusion when their economic deprivation makes them unable to participate in the relationships and activities available to most people in a society. It is also reasonable to assume that poor people living in a wealthy place will encounter a higher degree of social exclusion than the poor living in a non-wealthy society. Hence, this article tries to discuss the social exclusion of the poor as a diaconal challenge amid an affluent society, based on the experience of Hong Kong.

Poverty and Social Exclusion in Hong Kong

In Asia, Hong Kong is a wealthy city which also has a great challenge of poverty. In 2018, Hong Kong’s per capita GDP at current market prices reached US\$48,700, comparable to many advanced economies.⁴ Nevertheless, the poor population and the poverty rate⁵ in this affluent city in 2018 were 1,406,000 and 20.4%

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² For instance, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has defined poverty as having five core and interrelated dimensions of deprivation, which includes economic capabilities (e.g. income, assets, decent employment), human capabilities (e.g. health, education, nutrition, clean water and shelter), political capabilities (e.g. human rights, give voice over public policies), socio-capabilities (e.g. social status, dignity, participation), and protective capabilities (e.g. insecurity, risk, vulnerability). Refer to: OECD, *The DAC Guidelines: Poverty Reduction* (Paris: OECD, 2001), pp. 37-39.

³ Ruth Levitas et al., *The Multi-Dimensional Analysis of Social Exclusion* (Bristol: University of Bristol, 2007), 25, <http://www.bris.ac.uk/poverty/downloads/socialexclusion/multidimensional.pdf> (accessed 31st March 2020).

⁴ Lai Fong, Poon (ed), *Hong Kong 2018* (Hong Kong: HKSAR Government, 2017), p. 35, <https://www.yearbook.gov.hk/2018/en/pdf/E03.pdf> (accessed 31st March 2020). The figure of the per capita GDP in 2019 is US\$48,897 (HK\$382,046) but it is still subject for revision. Refer to: Census and Statistics Department, *Gross Domestic Product (Yearly) (2019 Edition)* (Hong Kong: HKSAR Government, 2020), p. 12, <https://www.statistics.gov.hk/pub/B10300022019AN19E0100.pdf> (accessed 31st May 2020).

⁵ In 2013, the Commission on Poverty (CoP) of Hong Kong set up the first official poverty line for Hong Kong. This poverty line defines those families, whose household income under 50% of median household income by household size

respectively.⁶ Even after policy intervention (i.e., recurrent cash assistance), the corresponding figures still reached 1,024,000 and 14.9%.⁷ Besides, the overall Gini Coefficients before and after taxation and social transfer were 0.539 and 0.473 respectively in 2016 (Compare: 0.533 and 0.475 in 2006).⁸ Those figures reflect that Hong Kong faces not only the challenges of poverty but also a great disparity between the rich and the poor.

Regarding the situation of social exclusion in Hong Kong, a comprehensive study named *The Research Study on Deprivation and Social Exclusion in Hong Kong* was conducted in 2011 by the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS). This research firstly identified 16 items under various domains related to social exclusion.⁹ Those domains included respect and acceptance by others”, access to transportation, social custom, social support, capability to connect with others and participation in leisure and social activities.¹⁰ The results showed that 34.5% of poor people were also suffering from social exclusion (minimum of 5 items of exclusion).¹¹ Moreover, the social exclusion rate of CSSA recipients¹² (54.1%) was much higher than that of the general public (16.8%).¹³ Among the different domains, ‘social support’ was the weakest among CSSA recipients.¹⁴

Wu Xiaogang and his research team at the Center for Applied Social and Economic Research, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, also conducted a research study on the situation of deprivation and social exclusion in Hong Kong in 2014. The study mainly adopted the set of questions from the previous study mentioned above.¹⁵ The results reflected that, among 505 households being studied, when the household income decreased, the deprivation and social exclusion rates increased.¹⁶ Moreover, in the subgroup analysis of the deprivation and social exclusion rates in relation to age group, educational attainment, and marital

before policy intervention (i.e., before the Government’s income redistribution policies, such as taxation and cash benefits) are living under poverty. Refer to: Census and Statistics Department, *Hong Kong Poverty Situation Report 2012* (Hong Kong: HKSAR Government, 2013), pp. 4-8,

http://www.povertyrelief.gov.hk/pdf/2012_Poverty_Situation_Eng.pdf/ (accessed 31st March 2020).

⁶ Census and Statistics Department, *Hong Kong Poverty Situation Report 2018* (Hong Kong: HKSAR Government, 2019), p. ix, [http://www.povertyrelief.gov.hk/eng/pdf/Hong_Kong_Poverty_Situation_Report_2018\(2019.12.13\).pdf](http://www.povertyrelief.gov.hk/eng/pdf/Hong_Kong_Poverty_Situation_Report_2018(2019.12.13).pdf) (accessed 31st March 2020).

⁷ Census and Statistics Department, *Hong Kong Poverty Situation Report 2018*, p. ix.

⁸ Census and Statistics Department, “2016 Population By-census: Table E305: Gini Coefficient by household size, 2006, 2011 and 2016,” *Hong Kong Statistics*, <https://www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp459.jsp?productCode=D5321605> (accessed 2nd April 2020).

⁹ Hung Wong et al., *Report of Research Study on Deprivation and Social Exclusion in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Council of Social Service, 2012), pp. 37-38, http://www.hkcn.org.hk/fileadmin/user_upload/doc/HKCSS_2012_DeprivationReport_final.pdf (assessed 31st March 2020).

¹⁰ Hung Wong et al., *Report of Research Study*, pp. 38-39, table 20.

¹¹ Hung Wong et al., *Report of Research Study*, p. 44.

¹² The Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme (CSSA) is a safety net provided by the HKSAR Government aimed at bringing the income of those who cannot support themselves up to a prescribed level to meet their basic needs. For details, please refer to: https://www.swd.gov.hk/en/index/site_pubsvc/page_socsecu/sub_comprehens/.

¹³ Hung Wong et al., *Report of Research Study*, table 47.

¹⁴ The percentages of CSSA recipients not having items of “have someone to look after you and help you the housework when you are sick”, “have someone to turn to for money (up to HKD3000) in case of emergency” and “have someone to give advice about an important decision in your life” were 56.6%, 59.8% and 36.9% respectively. Please refer to: Hung Wong et al., p. 81, table 48.

¹⁵ Xiaogang Wu, *Dynamic of Poverty in Hong Kong: A Supplementary Survey* (Hong Kong: Center for Applied Social and Economic Research, HKUST, 2015), p. 9. [https://www.pico.gov.hk/doc/en/research_report\(PDF\)/2013_A7_005_14A_Final_Report_Prof_Wu.pdf](https://www.pico.gov.hk/doc/en/research_report(PDF)/2013_A7_005_14A_Final_Report_Prof_Wu.pdf) (accessed 30th May 2020).

¹⁶ Xiaogang Wu, *Dynamic of Poverty in Hong Kong: A Supplementary Survey*, p. 25.

status, it was found that the rates were significantly higher in the eldest group (aged 65 and above), the lower educational attainment groups (lower secondary, primary or below), and the separated/divorced/widowed group.¹⁷ Furthermore, of the top six items related to social exclusion having the highest percentages in Hong Kong, three are related to the social support domain (e.g., have someone to look after you and help you the housework when you are sick).¹⁸

According to the above findings, there is evidence that poor people are more vulnerable to suffer from social exclusion in Hong Kong. These also hint that the poor people living in other rich places are probably facing social exclusion. Should then a diaconal church work on this challenge?

Social Exclusion as a Diaconal Challenge

In the Bible, we cannot find a divine law or one of Jesus' act or teaching that sanctions the social exclusion of poor people. On the contrary, the Scriptures teach us that poor people should not be excluded or marginalised in the religious life of God's people (Lev. 5:7,11; 12:8; 14:21-22,30; Gal. 3:26-29; 1 Chron. 11:20-22; Jas. 2:1-4). It is also clear that excluding people from religious life was at the time also excluding them from social life. Moreover, poor people's participation in economic life was secured by God's laws. Instead of being dependent on charity, the poor should be allowed to earn their living in the fields of the non-poor (Lev. 19:9-10; 25:4-7). The law of Jubilee also tried to prevent prolonged poverty and to let poor people get back their land for better participation in economic life.

According to the four Gospels, Jesus often stayed with poor people. He declared that his mission was bringing good news to the poor (Luke 4:18). Jesus taught that people who gave a luncheon or a dinner should invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind, instead of their friends, relatives, or rich neighbours (Luke 14:12-14). He was angry with the disciples who stopped people bringing young children to Jesus for blessings (Mark 10:13-16). He also appreciated the poor widow's two small copper coins offering (Luke 21:1-4). Moreover, his healing act on the born blind man reflected that God would choose a disabled beggar to reveal his great works (John 9:3). Therefore, no matter whether one of Jesus' acts or teachings, all reflect that the social exclusion of poor people is not in accord with God's will. Instead, in Christ, all people, no matter slave or free, rich or poor, are children of God through faith (Gal. 3:26-28). This oneness (i.e., no exclusion) is also the eschatological hope given by God (Eph. 1:10). Thus, as a Christian or a diaconal church, we should work on this diaconal challenge. Indeed, this is not a new appeal. Inclusiveness, participation, empowerment, and conviviality are the key diaconal working dimensions, which have been promoted among churches and Christian social services organisations in recent decades.

According to the definition of diakonia given by the Church of Norway, "creating inclusive communities" is one of the major expressions of diakonia.¹⁹ Stephanie Dietrich indicates that empowerment, which is a process of facilitating people to gain control of their lives and to participate in the community, has become a key concept within diakonia.²⁰ Carlos E. Ham also reveals that empowerment as a process of "promoting collective resistance, challenge and mobilisation against basic power relationships and systemic forces that

¹⁷ Xiaogang Wu, *Dynamic of Poverty in Hong Kong: A Supplementary Survey*, pp. 21-22.

¹⁸ Xiaogang Wu, *Dynamic of Poverty in Hong Kong: A Supplementary Survey*, p. 37.

¹⁹ The whole definition is: "Diakonia is the caring ministry of the Church. It is the Gospel in action and is expressed through loving your neighbour, creating inclusive communities, caring for creation and struggling for justice." Refer to: *Church of Norway Plan for Diakonia* (Oslo: Church of Norway National Council, 2007), p. 5, https://kirken.no/globalassets/kirken.no/church-of-norway/plan_diakonia2_english.pdf (accessed 2nd April 2020).

²⁰ Stephanie Dietrich, "Reflections on Core Aspects of Diaconal Theory," in *Diakonia As Christian Social Practice – An Introduction* (eds) Stephanie Dietrich et al. (Oxford: Regnum, 2014), p. 21.

impoverish and exclude the vulnerable²¹ has been emphasised in the diakonia of the World Council of Churches (WCC).²² Besides, Tony Addy exhorts that a diaconal church should work on the conviviality²³ both in church and in society.²⁴ Working against the economy of neo-liberalism is a critical aspect of seeking conviviality because this kind of economy not only produces poverty but also increases the inequality and injustice in work, welfare, health, and education among people in a society.²⁵ Therefore, whether referring to the Bible or the diaconal theology developed in recent years, it is clear that working against the social exclusion of poor people is an essential aspect of diakonia.

Starting from Ourselves – The Necessity of an Intra-congregational Inclusion of the Poor

Before we try to deal with the challenge of social exclusion outside the Church, we must examine and repent if there is social exclusion towards poor people inside the Church. In my research regarding the Chinese Lutheran congregations' diaconal practices for the poor in Hong Kong conducted from 2016 to 2017, some findings might reflect the problem of social exclusion within churches. Among the 92 congregations that participated in the survey, there were 47% and 37% of them indicating that “the poor is difficult to integrate with current members” and “the poor is difficult to integrate into current church gatherings” were the reasons hindering them from conducting more diaconal practices for the poor respectively.²⁶ Moreover, among the 20 congregations involved in the qualitative interviews, when asking about the needs and experience of the poor, six congregations mentioned that poor people had experienced social exclusion in churches.²⁷ For instance, some middle-class parents did not welcome poor kids joining the Sunday school because they would affect the classroom order.

In addition, we need to examine whether poor people are experiencing social exclusion when joining church activities. We should be aware of whether our diaconal ministry is excluding the participation of the poor. That is, we are treating them as mere recipients of the services. In the WCC document “Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in 21st Century” issued in 2012, it emphasises that “the diakonia of the marginalised people,” which means those people should no longer be regarded solely as recipients or objects of church's diakonia; instead, the vulnerable and marginalised communities should be ensured their participation in the discussion, decision and practice of diakonia.²⁸

We should not stop after completing a self-examination, we also need to repent if the Church is one of the sources of social exclusion. How does a church deal with such a problem? The answer is developing a church to be a diaconal church. Here is an example from Hong Kong that we may learn from – the E.F.C.C. Jachin Church. The Jachin Church was founded in 2014 with the assistance of her mother church – the E.F.C.C.

²¹ Carlos E. Ham, “Empowering Diakonia: A Perspective from the World Council of Churches,” in *Diakonia As Christian Social Practice – An Introduction* (eds) Stephanie Dietrich et al. (Oxford: Regnum, 2014), p. 111.

²² Carlos E. Ham, “Empowering Diakonia,” pp. 109-110.

²³ Conviviality is a new concept in diaconal discussions which refers to “the recognition that every neighbourhood is diverse in one way or another and living together must be based on respect for difference and also on development the ‘art and practice of living together’.” Refer to: Tony Addy, “Seeking Conviviality: A New Core Concept for the Diaconal Church,” in *The Diaconal Church* (eds) Stephanie Dietrich et al. (Oxford: Regnum, 2019), p. 169.

²⁴ Tony Addy, “Seeking Conviviality” pp. 162-164.

²⁵ Tony Addy, “Seeking Conviviality” pp. 165-166.

²⁶ Ho Yin Kenneth Tsang, “Being a Diaconal Congregation with the Poor in Hong Kong: A Study on Local Chinese Lutheran Congregations' Diaconal Practices for the Poor,” (Th.D. diss., Lutheran Theological Seminary, Hong Kong, 2018), p. 326.

²⁷ Ho Yin Kenneth Tsang, Appendix pp. 92-95.

²⁸ World Council of Churches, “Theological Perspective on Diakonia in 21st Century,” *World Council of Churches*. <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/unity-mission-evangelism-and-spirituality/just-and-inclusive-communities/theological-perspectives-on-diakonia-in-21st-century> (accessed 5th April 2020).

Tung Fook Church. The church has a remarkable membership increase from 200 members in 2014 to over 1,000 members in 2019.²⁹ It is noted that 20 to 30% of members are coming from grassroots or poor people. The church has two clear visions: make disciples (使人作門徒) and care for poor people (關愛扶貧).³⁰ In line with these two visions, she expends much effort on discipleship training, aiming at helping her members to have both Christian life transformation (being) and behaviour (doing).³¹ Regarding caring for the poor, the church not only organises diaconal works, such as various social activities, children tutorials, and home visits, but also emphasises much on the attitude of love, acceptance, and solidarity behind those works.³² We may describe that being a disciple and caring for poor people have become the norms of being a member of the Jachin Church. This may also be the reason why there are a lot of poor people joining this church rather than feeling it is “difficult to integrate with the current members.”

Conclusion

In Hong Kong, poor people are more vulnerable to suffer from social exclusion. It is also believed that poor people in the midst of wealth will face this problem to a higher degree. However, it is crystal clear that the social exclusion of the poor is not in accord with God’s will. Therefore, building an inclusive community is the diaconal challenge of the Church. In doing so, we may start within the Church. By transforming a church to be a diaconal church, like the example of the Jachin Church, the ‘being’ and ‘doing’ of the church not only addresses the needs of poor people but also lets her become a church with the poor.

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²⁹ John Tran, *Radical Discipleship Journey* (Hong Kong: Christian Communications Ltd., 2019), p. 71. (Remarks: This book is written in Chinese. The Chinese title is: 徹底翻身的旅程 – 門徒的靈命成長.)

³⁰ John Tran, p. 229.

³¹ John Tran, p. 65.

³² John Tran, pp. 76-82.

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56. CONVIVIALITY AS A VISION AND APPROACH FOR A DIACONAL SOCIETY

Tony Addy¹ and Ulla Siirto²

Introduction: How Can We Live Together?

Living together with other people might seem on the surface to be quite easy. Maybe it can be, especially if the other people are 'like us' or are simply seen as 'one of us'. However, really living together has become more of a challenge because increasingly people from many different backgrounds are 'thrown together' especially in cities.³ Perhaps people's education or socio-economic situations are different, or they have different values or interests. Increasingly, however, people come together in one place from different 'life-worlds'.

People are also moving more frequently than ever before. Although there have always been free and forced movements, more people than ever are now affected, and many people move several times in their lifetimes. Being forced to move or moving for a 'better life' creates different life dynamics and challenges. People may live in one place but have important direct connections to another. Their life in one place may be shaped by events and expectations arising on the other side of the world. It may be that identities rooted in one place mean that conflicts there are reproduced in everyday life somewhere else. In this volatile context, life in a given place may also be shaped by the operation of the labour or housing markets and this may lead to segregation. This means that living life together becomes more challenging and complex.

The rapidly changing situation forces us to ask, 'How is it possible to know and learn to understand another person's 'life-world'? and 'How is it possible to live together in peace and with justice?' There are invisible walls between people, sometimes manifesting as physical walls. If we want to support life together with people from diverse 'life-worlds', we have to ask whether it is possible to break down the walls and create a shared, liveable place. This is not only an interpersonal, or even inter-group issue, it is also connected to the economic and social policies which impact life together.

We are concerned with the role of the church and diakonia in this situation. Do we also need a change in our culture and practice, perhaps also in our theological approach? It may not only be a question of doing things differently but also of thinking differently. In this chapter, we will explore these issues and introduce the concept of conviviality which can become a focus for diaconal and church life both locally and worldwide.

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³ Massey, Doreen, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), pp. 140-142; 149-162 (this describes her concept of 'throwntogetherness').

This chapter will introduce the different historical understandings of conviviality which inform both our understanding of living together and relevant diaconal practice, whether by churches or diaconal organisations. The second section will present an overview of the current discussion about the concept in the social sciences and research as well as in practice. Thirdly, we will look more closely at everyday lived conviviality. The final section of the chapter will bring together the findings in relation to the church and diaconal practice.

Seeking Conviviality

The first reflections which led to thinking about ‘conviviality’ in the context of diakonia and Christian social action were in a meeting of representatives of organisations and churches involved in interdiac.⁴ Many of the issues mentioned in the introduction were on the agenda, especially diversity and mobility, although dynamics of these vary across countries. In several situations, there were also divisions between groups creating civil conflict and even war. Other issues such as homelessness, unemployment and growing poverty and inequality also affect many of these contexts.

The words used to describe a positive approach all seemed to create more problems or not to relate to the actual dynamics. For example, ‘community’ assumes a boundary which includes some and excludes others; this was a crucial point which we wanted to overcome. Multiculturalism was used in some European contexts, but this did not resonate with the interdiac members, because this word was related to migration histories in western Europe and many controversial issues are not directly related to migration. However, the main recurring question was, ‘How can we live together with diversity?’ and ‘What is the role of the church and diakonia in supporting life together?’ Therefore, interdiac began to conceptualise the core of its work around ‘seeking conviviality – the art and practice of living together’ and at the same time to work out what social, labour and economic policies and related human rights enable convivial life together.

The work of interdiac is supported by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and when the European member churches of LWF were considering a contribution to the reformation anniversary, they highlighted the need to think again about community or congregational diakonia. They therefore turned to interdiac to discuss the reflections which had been started by their rethinking of community diakonia. The LWF European member churches decided on a European process involving representatives of grass roots diakonia from all regions under the general heading ‘Seeking Conviviality – the Re-formation of Community Diakonia in Europe’. The process includes reflections on conviviality, a convivial economy and conviviality and people on the move as well as with work on theological and Biblical reflection. Several publications have resulted, and the process is ongoing.⁵

In starting to use this concept of conviviality (con vivere = living together, Latin), interdiac emphasises an interpretative link with the period of history when Jews, Muslims and Christians lived together in relative peace. This period, known as ‘*la convivencia*’, lasted from the early eighth century, until around 1492 when the Jews and Muslims were forcibly expelled. There is a great deal of research into this period of history, but what is interesting is that there was not only tolerance but some common involvement in intellectual life and governance.

⁴ interdiac. <https://www.interdiac.eu/>.

⁵ Tony Addy (ed), *Seeking Conviviality. Re-forming community diakonia in Europe*. (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 2013); Tony Addy (ed), *Towards a Convivial Economy* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 2017); Tony Addy, “Convivial Theology – Some Reflections in View of People on the Move” in: Tony Addy (Ed), *Seeking Conviviality – Evaluation and Commentary from the European Solidarity Group* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 2017). For more publications and further information see the conviviality sub-website of LWF www.lutheranworld.org/seeking-conviviality.

The word ‘conviviality’ was picked up again in Parisian society in the nineteenth century. In that context, it referred to meetings between people over a shared meal (and probably wine), where the conversation could freely range over many topics. Nothing was ruled out and the discussions were by all accounts lively! This meaning has entered popular English discourse as a reference to, for example, a party being described as a convivial get together. This is not surprising because very often sharing a meal is accompanied by conversation which may be free and lively and sometimes touch on important life-issues. For Christians, the obvious reference point is the Eucharist or Communion which is also a place where food and wine are shared, as we see in the descriptions of life in the early church. Some traditions have preserved the actual sharing of food (for example, the Moravians) and many churches now organise activities around shared food. Diakonia is also often based on food sharing and conviviality as an approach also offers some reflections on how food could be shared diaconally.

The third influence on the concept comes from the work of Ivan Illich, a Croatian born in Vienna of Catholic and Jewish parents and who became a Catholic priest. He was a firm critic of economic growth and the misapplication of technology. His work in Latin America followed a period engaged with people in one of the poorest neighbourhoods in New York. These experiences led him to produce a seminal volume, *Tools for Conviviality*, which stands in the tradition of Erich Fromm, who emphasised ‘being’ over ‘having’.⁶ Illich described a society that limits the use of tools (technology), so that they are not used to exploit people and the environment. Illich considered conviviality to be freedom realised in personal interdependence and, as such, an intrinsic ethical value. In this way, Illich comes close to present-day discussions which are critical of the dominant economy and economic growth and focuses instead on the search for *buen vivir* (good living).⁷ In his theological thinking, he took an approach which was rooted in the idea of the incarnation and the idea that Christians should adopt an incarnational perspective in practice. The promise of abundant life together is therefore rooted in shared relational responsibility.

Fourthly, conviviality has recently been used as a way to describe everyday life in multiracial and diverse areas of cities in Europe. For instance, Paul Gilroy highlights the lively conviviality of everyday encounters which cross boundaries between people from black and minority ethnic communities. These encounters cross those boundaries which are normally used to delineate people and cultures in mainstream discussions. Whilst such encounters may or may not go very deep, common humanity is shared, and life together supported. This stands in contrast to the view that ascribed identity is fixed and the parallel, often expressed, idea that people are incompatible with one another. Gilroy contrasts this everyday conviviality with the ‘melancholia’ of white society in the post-colonial era.⁸ He therefore draws attention to the impact of Empire on relations between white Europeans and immigrants and refugees from the Global South and from war-torn countries.

Recent thinking about conviviality in relation to diakonia has drawn on all these traditional uses of the word, including developing an understanding of living together with diversity in everyday life as well as in diaconal practice. Following the further elaboration of the concept by Illich, as well as many others, the concept has also informed thinking about the relation between people and the environment and the economy.⁹

This chapter will focus on several aspects of conviviality, which is viewed not as a normative concept but rather as a concept which gives a fresh set of perspectives on living with difference and which informs

⁶ Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

⁷ Acosta, Alberto, “Buen Vivir: a proposal with global potential” in Hartmut Rosa and Christoph Henning, *The Good Life Beyond Growth – New Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2018).

⁸ Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: melancholia or convivial culture*. (London: Routledge, 2004).

⁹ *Convivialist Manifesto. A declaration of interdependence* (Global Dialogues 3), with an introduction by Frank Adloff, translated from the French by Margaret Clarke (Duisburg: Käte Hamburger Kolleg / Centre for Global Cooperation Research, 2014) (original: Manifeste Convivialiste. Déclaration d’interdépendance, Éditions Le Bord de L’Eau, 2013).

professional practice seen as a support for convivial life together.¹⁰ The Lutheran process referred to previously also applied the concept to the questions of work and economy and this is closely linked to understanding of development, an issue which was at the heart of Illich's thinking.¹¹ In this chapter, we pay particular attention to the phenomenon of diversity.

Perspectives on Conviviality and Diversity

Conviviality has begun to influence many disciplines and support the creation of new knowledges and practices in both the social sciences and theology. Furthermore, it creates an impulse for rethinking personal and professional social practice in diverse areas, including diaconal work and planning. Several recent authors have even spoken of a 'convivial turn' in social research, theology and mission.¹² We would like to share some pointers for the use of conviviality in recent discussions concerning how we think of life together from different perspectives.

Conviviality can be used to explore and analyse the ways in which people construct their practice of being together in everyday life. This is the strand which was opened up by Gilroy¹³ and which relates to what Bauman has called 'the art of negotiating shared meanings'.¹⁴ Convivial research analyses and opens up the reality of everyday living in the context of diversity. Such research calls into question approaches to life together which are based on political definitions of the problems, usually based on ethnicity, or on the translation of fixed concepts into reality. An example of this is multiculturalism which tends to assume there are a variety of fixed ethnic or national cultures which relate to each other whereas in reality, identities are much more fluid and the division by ascription may be unrelated to the ways in which people describe themselves and live together. Conviviality starts without fixed presuppositions of identity and it considers people through their actual interrelatedness and the meanings they give to these interactions themselves. In this way, the concept of conviviality is underpinned by the idea of personal meaning coming through interrelatedness and the outcomes of interactions which are not predefined.¹⁵

A perspective which links closely to the concerns of this chapter is to compare conviviality not only to concepts such as multiculturalism but also to other perspectival concepts used in order to achieve inclusive, equitable and peaceful societies. In a comparison of two such approaches – social capital and social cohesion – with conviviality, Hans Morten Haugen concluded that although churches have often based their thinking and practice on the first two concepts, conviviality takes more seriously the questions of divisions, power and justice.¹⁶

Another example of a concept frequently used in this connection is cosmopolitanism, a European ideal which was usually related to the experience of a higher educated minority. A concept such as the recently introduced idea 'everyday cosmopolitanism' has the objective of grasping the reality of life lived in

¹⁰ An example of a recent document which uses Conviviality as a normative concept is the previously mentioned *Convivialist Manifesto. A declaration of interdependence* also available in: https://www.gcr21.org/fileadmin/website/daten/pdf/Publications/Convivialist_Manifesto_2198-0403-GD-3.pdf.

¹¹ Tony Addy (ed), 'Towards a Convivial Economy' (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 2017).

¹² Mette Louise Berg and Magdalena Nowicka (eds), *Studying Diversity, Migration & Multiculture*. (London: UCL Press, 2019); Samuel E. Ewell III, *Faith Seeking Conviviality, Reflections on Illich, Christian Mission and the Promise of Life Together* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2020).

¹³ Paul Gilroy, *After Empire*.

¹⁴ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Love* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003).

¹⁵ Magdalena Nowicka, and Steven Vertovec, "Comparing convivialities: Dreams and realities if living-with-difference." *European Journal of Cultural Studies*. 4(7) (Thousand Oaks: Sage Journals, 2014), pp. 341 -356.

¹⁶ Hans Morten Haugen, "Approaches to Inclusive and Equitable Societies", in *Diaconia, Journal for the Study of Christian Social Practice*, 6(2) (2015) (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht).

diversity.¹⁷ Cosmopolitanism has been criticised as an idealistic notion and the idea of everyday cosmopolitanism has also been called ‘unrealistic’.¹⁸ Other strands of research and analysis have used the idea of ‘everyday diversity’ whereas exploring conviviality may provide a better basis for understanding life together.¹⁹ There are growing examples internationally, of basing empirical research on ‘conviviality’, for example in diverse suburbs²⁰ or on receiving asylum seekers into parish life in Lutheran churches in Finland.²¹ Basing empirical research on conviviality has a number of advantages. First, it does not start with a normative concept, nor does it start with a focus on ascribed identities or predefined problems. Rather the aim is to explore what the everyday lived reality is. There is sufficient experience in this field now to also begin to identify the marks of ‘convivial research’. This picks up the idea of research as a ‘tool’ which should in itself promote convivial life together and support the conditions for such life.²² From these studies, we may discover which factors make for ‘convivial life together’ and which structural conditions are supportive.

Deepening the discussion of everyday conviviality, Wise and Velayutham have developed three important themes which are derived from studies in Sydney and Singapore.²³ Firstly, they notice that the built environment and the physical space shape the possibilities for convivial encounters. Secondly, in each context they found particular people who engaged in connecting and building bridges between people and they identified these people as ‘transversal enablers’. Thirdly, they identify the importance of an intercultural habitus which they relate to a disposition for local encounters. Significantly, their research also looks at the affective aspect of conviviality which they have derived from studies in Latin America which show the importance of emotions in convivial life together. The study which they draw on also recognises that overall conviviality may include positive and negative emotions such as compassion and anger, love and hate and also speaking and working together to handle these differences.²⁴ On the other hand, Wise and Velayutham also note that there is a larger framework and significant power structures that impact on local encounters and this is a reminder that convivial life together is not a positive feature which can simply be considered in isolation from other shaping forces.²⁵

The three aspects of conviviality which Wise and Velayutham describe are useful pointers to practices which can support convivial life together.²⁶ The first concerns ‘space’, especially urban space which is often constructed on the basis of planning decisions and the operation of markets, especially the housing market. It is here that public policy plays an important role. Furthermore, the built environment plays its own role in providing possibilities for people to encounter each other but it can also support the creation of borders

¹⁷ Greg Noble, “Everyday cosmopolitanism and the labour of intercultural community”. In Amanda Wise & Selvaraj Velayutham (eds), *Everyday Multiculturalism*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 46-66.

¹⁸ Rosi Braidotti, Patrick Hanafin et. al. (eds), *After Cosmopolitanism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).

¹⁹ Susanne Wessendorf, “Being open, but sometimes closed. conviviality in a super-diverse London neighbourhood”. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 17(4) (2014), pp. 392-405.

²⁰ Amanda Wise and Selvaraj Velayutham, “Conviviality in everyday multiculturalism: Singapore and Sydney compared.” *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 17(4) (2014), pp. 406-410. Linda Lapiņa, “Besides Conviviality: Paradoxes in being ‘at easy’ with diversity in a Copenhagen district.” *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*. Special Issue Article 6(1) (2016), pp. 33-40.

²¹ Ulla Siirto and Hanna Niemi, “Solidaarista yhdessä elämisen taitoa vai vieraanvaraisuutta. Evankelis-luterilaiset seurakunnat turvapaikkatyössä”. In Eveliina Lyytinen (eds), *Turvapaikanhaku ja pakolaisuus Suomessa*. (Turku: Siirtolaisinstituutti, 2019), pp. 231-251.

²² Ivan Illich, Tools for conviviality Ann Phoenix, “Convivial Practices in Communities of Research”, in Mette Louise Berg and Magdalena Nowicka (eds), *Studying Diversity, Migration & Urban Multiculture. Convivial tools for research and practice*. (London: UCL Press, 2019), pp. 36-56.

²³ Wise and Velayutham, “Conviviality in everyday multiculturalism”.

²⁴ Joanna Overing and Passes *The anthropology of Love and Anger. The Aesthetics of Conviviality in Native Amazonia* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

²⁵ Wise and Velayutham, “Conviviality in everyday multiculturalism”.

²⁶ Wise and Velayutham, “Conviviality in everyday multiculturalism”.

between people so that they do not have to encounter the ‘different other’.²⁷ Convivial life together involves not only practices but also the interplay of practice, structure and space which intersect with one another. Koch and Latham find that many public spaces are built without ‘domestic qualities’.²⁸ That is why they do not create trust, comfort or amenity, which would encourage encounters. Those ‘fences which prevent conviviality’ we call structural. These kinds of fences can be avoided by taking a convivial approach in planning and construction processes.²⁹ This implies an engagement with political advocacy from those who are involved in diakonia.

The second aspect of supporting convivial life together is related to networking between people and building bridges. This can be everyday practice but also an aspect of diaconal professionalism. As mentioned, Wise and Velayutham use the concept of ‘transversal enablers’ to describe people who live and work in this way. It means starting very close to the diverse everyday life of people and being ‘on the spot’ to foster encounters.³⁰ Through these processes, a kind of ‘intercultural gift exchange is established. One of the foundations of convivial life together is the (often informal) gift exchange between people founded on mutual reciprocity. It does not situate one group or person as the ‘donor’ and the other as ‘beneficiary’. This reciprocity is one of the most important elements supporting convivial life together.³¹

The third basic aspect which can support everyday conviviality is the habitus of the people involved.³² Habitus includes the disposition of people and the tacit knowledge with which they approach any situation. This can include aspects such as language, gender and class. Gilroy comes close to this when he contrasts everyday conviviality among and between people from black and ethnic minority communities and relations between white people.³³ Thinking about conviviality in this way draws us away from ascribing convivial behaviour to personal attributes. Inter-relational skills are learnt over time, but they are also more than interpersonal. They are hindered or encouraged by core social institutions and popular media. Through everyday interactions, people learn to blur boundaries and identities, to negotiate with each other and accommodate different practices.³⁴ As this process develops, we can see that an embodied intercultural habitus gradually becomes visible in actions, modes of appearance, ways of speaking and so on in the world of super-diversity.³⁵

We now turn to explore some of the other commonly used words related to working in diverse communities and especially in relation to working with migrants and refugees. In Christian discourse, the word most usually used is ‘hospitality’. This is understandable because there is a strong Biblical message about welcoming the stranger and treating the guest even better than one’s own people (Gen. 18:19; Heb. 13:2). Hospitality has a

²⁷ Richard Sennett, *Building and Dwelling* (London: Allen Lane, 2018).

²⁸ Regan Koch and Alan Latham, “On the hard work of domesticating public space”. *Urban Studies* 50 (1) (2013), pp. 6-21.

²⁹ Lisa Peattie, “Convivial Cities”. In Mike Douglas and John Friedman(eds.), *Cities for Citizens*. (Chichester: Wiley, 1998), pp. 247-254.

³⁰ Wise and Velayutham, “Conviviality in everyday multiculturalism”.

³¹ Marcel Mauss, *Essai sur le don: forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France (1950/2007) (English Translation: *The Gift: The form and reason for exchange in archaic societies*. (London: Routledge, 1954/2002). *Convivialist Manifesto* Ulla Siirto and Hanna Niemi, olidaarista yhdessä elämisen. See the “Convivialist Manifesto. A declaration of interdependence” (Global Dialogues 3), with an introduction by Frank Adloff, translated from the French by Margaret Clarke. Duisburg 2014: Käte Hamburger Kolleg/Centre for Global Cooperation Research (KHK/GCR21). in: https://www.gcr21.org/fileadmin/website/daten/pdf/Publications/Convivialist_Manifesto_2198-0403-GD-3.pdf.

³² Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinction. Critique sociale du jugement*. (Paris: Les éditions de minuit, 1979).

³³ Paul Gilroy, *Colonial Crimes and Convivial Cultures*, keynote speech presented at the ‘Rethinking Nordic Colonialism’ exhibition (2006), Available at: <http://www.rethinking-nordic-colonialism.org/files/pdf/ACT2/ESSAYS/Gilroy.pdf> Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* (London: Routledge, 2004).

³⁴ Wise and Velayutham, “Conviviality in everyday multiculturalism”.

³⁵ Steven Vertovec, Super-diversity and its implications. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30(6) (2007), pp. 1024-1054.

prominent role in the New Testament and repeatedly we see in the Gospels the relationship between Jesus and the different ‘other’ brings in a challenging new element from which we can draw inspiration. In fact, the region known as Galilee was marked by boundaries between different groups which were a fact of daily life. In the Gospels, we see that Jesus was in fact a ‘boundary crosser’ – crossing boundaries between different groups and personal identities. In spite of this, in the early church there was a struggle about who could be included and how the community should live together. This led to some of the most important aspects of Christian life which are expressed also in the Letters (Gal. 3:28; Heb. 13:2).

This development process in Christian thinking in fact mirrors the move from hospitality to conviviality. The idea of hospitality is that the guest, the different ‘other’ has to be warmly received. However, as Jacques Derrida, in conversation with Anne Duforumantelle, points out the idea of being a guest has a time limit.³⁶ A guest who stays for longer becomes part of the situation and hospitality disappears. In fact, hospitality disappears even if the host (the ‘native’ population, for example) does not set any conditions for newcomers, because hospitality is an inappropriate description for long-term relationships.³⁷ We would not like to speak against the relevance of hospitality but there is a need to complement this with the search for conviviality when people are living together for a longer time. Furthermore, this was exactly one of the key questions for the early church, ‘how shall we live together in our diversity?’ This leads to the need to construct meaningful encounters between diverse people which can, of course, be built on everyday convivial life together.³⁸ So far, we have discussed ‘everyday conviviality’ but the discussion of the difference between hospitality, a hospitable attitude and conviviality opens up further questions. For instance, in terms of hospitality, the one who offers hospitality retains the power in the situation and the guest remains in the position of the ‘exception’.

The concept of conviviality draws attention to the fact that all communities are diverse and, whilst everyday conviviality can be an important stepping stone, the art and practice of living together demands a conscious approach to learning together, through dialogue and finding the aspects of life which are possible to share and also to identify the possibilities for change. This may include changes in culture or world view and changes of understanding of faith and religious practice or spirituality. This dialogical approach also enables the identification of changes which can be sought in the wider society and in policies that affect groups in different ways. Through this process people build trust and can join together to work creatively work for a better future. This is the real meaning of ‘integration’ which does not imply the superficial learning about everyday life and customs of the ‘other’, but purposeful dialogue which results in reciprocity and change for everyone involved.

Conviviality in Everyday Practice

In terms of the practice of everyday life, conviviality is tested continuously because it is not easy to live with people in such a complex and rapidly changing environment. It is made even more challenging because each person embodies several ‘identities’, each of which may be important in a specific situation. For example, a person may be a woman, living with a disability, black, highly-educated, professional, unemployed, and a refugee all at the same time. This is called ‘intersectionality’.³⁹ In the same family, workplace or street, people

³⁶ Jacques Derrida and Anne Duforumantelle, *Of Hospitality*, translated by Rachel Bowlby. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

³⁷ See also Ulla Siirto, “Conviviality: A Core Value of Diakonia”. In Anne Burghardt, Anne (ed), *Human Beings –not for sale*. LWF guide material to the themes of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation LWF. (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 2015), pp. 55-62.

³⁸ Miles Hewstone, *Why Can't We Live Together?* Keynote speech 17.1.2013 RSA.

<https://www.thersa.org/discover/videos/event-videos/2013/01/why-cant-we-live-together>.

³⁹ Patricia Hill-Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016).

are coming from different contexts and with different personal histories. As they develop relationships, maybe they marry or otherwise become part of a closely related circle, their identity may change. It can become hybrid and sometimes this gains a self-chosen identity like 'black British'. People have different relationships to 'place' but paradoxically, perhaps it is exactly at this time when people are moving so much that the character of a place is even more important, hence the importance of working on urban design to foster conviviality.

The population, especially in cities and larger towns, has been changing and continues to change due to the increasingly diverse flows of migrants and refugees, people following employment or educational opportunities, family reunion and so on. This means that there is an increased mixing of different cultures, religions and other identities among people who live in one place but may have their most significant relationships with people either in that place or other places. People may have different legal statuses etc and this leads to a phenomenon which is called 'superdiversity'.⁴⁰ Superdiversity does not just mean 'more diversity' but rather a more complex interlinking between people and a recognition of the variables which impact on their lives, for example in terms of rights or having forebears who migrated to the same place.

If we take this development seriously, it calls into question previous simple categorisations of the population according to 'ethnic group', gender, religion or many other of the other tags used not only in everyday life but professionally and institutionally. Conviviality is a very useful interpretative and analytic term because it does not presuppose the identity of persons but rather focuses on the relationships between them.

In this situation, thinking based on stereotypes is a typical shortcut people use to make sense of their everyday experience. In the process of meeting different people and gathering information through different media, people build up a 'picture' of certain 'others'. Often, they do not know very much about the 'other', they may not be in their friendship group and they are not in a deeper relationship with them. The negative suppositions they may make are often confirmed by stories they read or hear and the labels which are then applied are usually inappropriate and negative. People start out by making their own way of life and the culture of their group normative and if they build up a negative picture of the 'other', gradually walls are built up and borders are created. This picture may be reinforced by views about history or the fears people have of losing their position in society or work life. Thinking about the different 'other' in a way which seeks convivial life together means crossing the border and becoming aware of the ways in which stereotypes prevent people from appreciating the life of the 'other'. The single 'other' who they do get to know often functions as the 'exception which proves the rule'. In this way, a personal friendship or trusted relationship 'across the border' normally does not disrupt stereotypical thinking. The steps to breaking down this way of thinking start from having a fundamental attitude of respect for the dignity of the other, to believe all are created in the image of God and have inherent dignity. It implies that people who do things differently or who think differently may find their knowledge and behaviour appropriate and meaningful. There is no fixed hierarchy of living through which 'I' can place myself at the pinnacle! This kind of hierarchical thinking not only affects everyday life, it can also affect social and diaconal work and often it is an underlying presupposition of 'development' projects.

Respect for the 'other' and acting on the basis of their inherent human dignity with awareness of the differences between people is a basis of building the relationships which lead to convivial life together. Respect can be tested when we meet people with a very different way of life, however a respectful attitude can lead to building up trusting relationships. Everyday lived conviviality can be fostered personally in the casual relationships in the street, shop or office and it can be supported by professional work through creating space for mutual learning. This takes convivial life together beyond simply tolerating the 'other' – be it a

⁴⁰ Fran Meissner and Steven Vertovec, Comparing Super-diversity in *Journal of Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 38(4) (2015).

person or group – and importantly, it does not mean there will be no conflict! Conviviality is deepened when people share their story in a safe context and do not feel the pressure to ‘act according to a script’. Such mutuality is based on ‘sharing gifts’, whether these be insights into life or spirituality, symbolic or concrete acts or objects. Reciprocal giving of gifts is the basis of society and of convivial life together.⁴¹ Reciprocity confirms the relationships between people, and it does not depend on ‘ability to pay’. All have something to contribute. This basic approach also changes the negative mirroring, which destroys relationships as people act out what they think is expected by those with power or authority. Furthermore, it challenges donor-recipient attitudes which tend to maintain power of the dominant donor person or group. Supporting convivial life together increases the possibility for mutual aid and helps to overcome loneliness and even may prevent mental ill-health.

Conviviality in Diaconal Practice

Conviviality offers a new core concept for diaconal practice, based on the theoretical and lived perspective outlined in this chapter.⁴² It implies a ‘service model’ which is incarnational, starting close to the everyday life of people. It is based on relationships and the building of trust. This is challenging because traditionally diakonia has been related much more to the delivery of services, the provision of care and often financial support, based on policies decided by the church or diaconal organisation. This tends to set a framework which predefines the ‘other’ as a person who ‘lacks’ something and for whom specific service should be provided. This categorisation then tends to trap both parties in a power relationship which is difficult to overcome. If we start with the idea of conviviality, we also recognise the danger of defining people according to categories of need and the fact that this may block reciprocity which is a key aspect supporting human dignity. On a basic level, then we could say that a convivial approach to diakonia and the diaconal church puts the focus on supporting ‘everyday conviviality’ among the people who are ‘thrown together’.

One approach to implementing a convivial perspective on diakonia is based on developing a process which is based on storytelling, through which diverse people share the key influences on their life, the resources they draw on and the capabilities they have developed. This process of storytelling also reveals the key impact of institutional policies and economic changes have on people’s life. It is a slow process of trust building and then helping people to see the local reality through their own biographically shaped perspective.⁴³ This can create a situation of learning both for the diaconal worker and the people in the process, who may be local residents or ‘service users’ as well as congregational members and volunteers or activists. It is essentially a slow process because it is based on relationship building. Out of this process, people can begin to work together on the issues which affect their lives and using the resources identified can develop innovative responses as well as resistance and advocacy for change. In this way, the convivial approach supports diakonia of and with marginalised people and communities. The approach has been used in local congregations and communities and also with groups of service users, for example young people who are substance abusers. One of the main outcomes of this approach is that it increases the agency of people who are usually on the receiving end of projects and services and helps them design new services which are effective.

⁴¹ Mauss, Marcel, *Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*. 2011 Reprint of 1954 American Edition, Martino Fine Books 2011; Ulla Jokela, *Diakoniatyön paikka ihmisten arjessa*. Diakonia-ammattikorkeakoulu. A Tutkimuksia 34 (2011). Academic dissertation.

⁴² Tony Addy, *Seeking Conviviality, the art and practice of living together – a new core concept for Diaconia*, Český Těšín: interdiac (2017).

⁴³ A detailed description of this process and the application in different diaconal contexts can be found in Jouko Porkka and Marja Pentikäinen (eds) *Community of the future Challenges and New Approaches to Community Based Social Work and Diaconia from the CABLE Approach* (Helsinki: Diak, 2013).

A convivial approach to diakonia does not start with an inventory of deficits or problems. It may end up redefining problem fields and, in some cases, ‘problems’ may be redefined as (public) issues which need to be addressed politically. Essentially, however a convivial approach also deals with the boundaries and borders which may become a source of misunderstanding or conflict. Karner and Parker have studied the ways in which local communities live in ambivalence between local conflicts and conviviality.⁴⁴ Lived conviviality is not to be imagined as a life without conflict, but to recognise that conflict has to be handled in a way which enables people to find shared way forward in life and action together. Therefore, practitioners have to learn how to solve disagreements peacefully.

The so-called restorative approach to handling conflict relates well to convivial life together because it is based on dialogue and mediation.⁴⁵ In a restorative approach, everyone is an equal partner in the negotiation, and everyone is heard and respected with their emotions and experiences. The goal is to find a solution which everyone can accept, and which is durable and sustainable. The approach rests on three aspects: Firstly, it is based on specific values such as dignity and humanity and, in the process, everyone should participate equally and take responsibility. No one should be excluded, and people should be empowered by the process. Secondly, if one person suffers from their rights being denied, the group should work to restore that person to the community. Thirdly, implying a restorative approach is a learning process for all the parties and strengthens commitment to common responsibility.⁴⁶

Conviviality as a core concept for a diaconal church focusing attention on the life of a congregation. It provokes the question about the nature of a diaconal church because the diaconal vocation is grounded in congregational life.⁴⁷ One of the most important challenges to be addressed is the fact that conviviality transcends the ‘love of the same’ and fosters the ‘love of the other’. This implies that the congregation and church have to look very carefully at its own identity and culture in relation to the place where it is set. Very often congregations proclaim themselves to be open to everybody but actually signal that they mean ‘everybody like us’. It seems to be acceptable to support services for the ‘other’ locally or internationally but there is an invisible boundary which keeps the ‘other’ out. This ‘line’ may be cultural, or based on a certain identity and very often it corresponds to an idea that the congregation represents the cultural norm, or mainline when actually the church is more often (at least in Europe) actually a minority among minorities, even in countries with quite a high formal church membership. Seeking conviviality implies the desire to cross borders and boundaries and to take a relational approach with others. In too many cases, congregational diakonia means that people as individuals may volunteer in their everyday life, but that is seen as a personal choice which does not directly concern the congregation. If we apply a convivial approach to congregational life, it means that people develop common activities, among themselves but more importantly with the diverse ‘others’. Everyday ‘lived conviviality’ increases when people do something together. Maybe this is one reason why preparing and sharing food is so often a way into a new practice in the church. This builds up trust and provides a relational and reciprocal basis for deeper discussions.

⁴⁴ Christian Karner and David Parker, Conviviality and conflict: Pluralism, resilience and hope. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37(3) (2011), pp. 355-372.

⁴⁵ Belinda Hopkins *Implementing a restorative approach to behaviour and relationship management in schools – the narrated experiences of educationalists*. University of Reading, UK. Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences. Institute of Education. Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (2006).

⁴⁶ Tim Chapman, Maija Gellin, Ivo Aertsem, and Monique Anderson, *Protecting Rights, Restoring Respect and Strengthening Relationships: A European Model for Restorative Justice with Children and Young People*. European research on restorative juvenile justice. Volume II (2015).

⁴⁷ Tony Addy, *Seeking Conviviality*, pp. 27-29.

Conclusion

There has been a growing interest in the concept of conviviality in the social sciences and in reflecting on social practice in diverse communities as it informs a perspective which is critical of essentialist and communitarian approaches. Gradually, the concept has become more common in international reflections on diaconal work and the churches.⁴⁸ In terms of an overview related to diaconal practice, we can identify the underlying elements of respect and a relational approach as important to the supporting convivial life together, along with reciprocity. We also find restorative justice to offer a creative approach to handling conflict on the way to conviviality.

Conviviality does not offer a blueprint for an ideal society and economy but it offers a perspective on life in diversity which overcomes the limitations of many of the other concepts typically in use in the church and society. If we take this aspect alongside the understanding of development and the economy, the relation of people to technology and the environment as well as the concern for justice, convivial life together becomes a broad comprehensive concept which supports a fresh approach to reflecting on what steps can be taken in order to achieve it.

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57. DIACONIA OF ORTHODOX COMMUNITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF MIGRATION IN GERMANY

Rossitza Dikova-Osthus¹

Orthodox Diaconia in Diaspora Contexts of Germany – an Undeniable Contribution to the Integration of Migrants

Previous studies on orthodox involvement in diaconia often refer to activities in the so-called “orthodox countries”, which usually refer to countries and states with an orthodox majority population. Church representatives and Orthodox theologians in Germany often refer accordingly to projects in Romania, Russia or Greece. Previously published treatises refer for example to “Impulses from German diaconal institutions for the diaconia of the Romanian Orthodox Church”, “Charitable foundations of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church”, “Philanthropia in Greece”, “Church institutions in Russia” etc., which could give the impression that in Germany there is no orthodox diaconia. Country studies deal with church-influenced Orthodox foundations in the context of sociological or canonical questions about social security systems, e.g. in Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, or historical studies, e.g. on traditions of Christian welfare work in Russia, etc. The ecumenical exchange within the Federal Republic of Germany, in which Orthodoxy in Germany participates and has its say, is a good opportunity to reflect on one’s own actions and church life as Orthodox Christians. For, even though many Orthodox congregations see themselves as a bridge to the so-called home countries of many parishioners and of course also support projects and institutions in these countries, they and their many parishioners make – consciously or unconsciously – an undeniable contribution to the integration of many migrants and to the shaping of society as a whole in Germany. The Orthodox Church is at home in Germany and develops its impact here, which also includes various diaconal activities.

Theological Foundations of Orthodox Diaconia

It will not be possible to give a comprehensive answer to the question of orthodox diaconia in Germany within this article. Rather, it can at best be the starting point for a comprehensive study of the framework conditions of orthodox diaconia and its forms in Germany, which is still pending. Here, we will briefly discuss the anchoring of diaconia in the orthodox theological understanding, and then present examples from the practice of orthodox communities.

An inspiration for orthodox diaconia lies in tradition. For Orthodox theology as well as for the lived faith practice the reference to the church fathers – apart from the natural references to the biblical texts – is a very essential coinage. One of the most important Church Fathers is Basil the Great who, in the 4th century, was a bishop in Cappadocia, today geographically belonging to southern Turkey. Statements about human love and charity in his sermons as well as the first foundations of diaconal institutions, *xenodochia* – accommodation for travellers – and hospitals have been handed down from that time. According to Basil’s understanding, all believers are called to participate in the body of Christ, with the gifts and tasks being assigned: Everyone has to make his or her own distinctive contribution to the common good, and no one should think that they are there for themselves alone. In the modern inner-Orthodox discussion in the 1970s and 1980s. the term “*liturgy after the liturgy*”, as well as concepts developed by Orthodox theologians into “*micro- and macro-diaconia*” and “*liturgical diaconia*”. It is important to explain the term “liturgy after the liturgy”, especially since it has also been adopted in ecumenical use. Reference is made to modern Orthodox theologians such as Ion Bria,

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Alexandros Papaderos and Anastasios Yannoulatos. Diaconia in this sense is not something outside the liturgical action, but finds its content within the *Eucharistic understanding of the church*. Dogma and liturgy interpenetrate, the latter being the central moment of ecclesial life. The “fullness of dogma” is made present to the faithful in the liturgy, in actions and hymns, also in relation to sacrifice and charity. The *Eucharistic liturgy* is the celebration of the Incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ, it is participation in the Body and Blood of Christ and anticipation of the coming Kingdom, it also establishes ecclesial communion, the ecclesial *koinonia*. In the ecclesial gathering, this gathering of the People of God in memory of Jesus’ sacrifice is the *liturgy in the liturgy*.

Liturgy after the liturgy now means that the Eucharist, as “the realisation of the process in which cosmos becomes ecclesia, becomes church”, includes all aspects of human life. Thus, the liturgy is not an escape from life, but demands a constant transformation of life according to Christ’s example, just as each and every individual is called to follow Christ and is sent out into the world. This personal continuation of the liturgical message should take place in every human existence, precisely as *liturgy after the liturgy*. According to Yannoulatos, the sacrifice of the Eucharist should be continued in the personal sacrifice for people in need.

By “liturgical”, Yannoulatos also means the personal attitude in everyday life, i.e. diaconal behaviour. From this, each and every one should:

- a) draw strength from participation in the Eucharist
 - b) prepare for a conscious participation in the Eucharist and
 - c) in the celebration of the liturgy, transform themselves into men and women in Christ.
- Liturgical spirituality is thus both personal experience and witness in the world.²

Yannoulatos further expands this liturgical-diaconal understanding. When he writes of the “liberation of people from all demonic structures of injustice, exploitation, fear and loneliness”, he includes the private sphere, but also the public and political spheres. An ethos of the church is called for with the aim of unity of liturgy, mission, witness and “social Diaconia”. Diaconia is involved in “right worship”, in “orthopraxis”. The theologian Georgij Fedotow accordingly demands that the church must become a “living icon of Christ”. From this, it follows that the individual Christian as well as the church as a whole are called upon to act. This idea is confirmed not least by biblical statements when Matthew’s Gospel says “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” (Mt. 5:16). These good works include sharing a meal with the hungry, welcoming strangers and the homeless, dressing the naked, and visiting the sick and prisoners. The content of Christian service, then, is a comprehensive social action in the world, both Christian and non-Christian.

The horizontal and vertical aspects of Christian faith and action should, according to the Russian Metropolitan Alexei, be inseparable; service to man is service to Christ himself, and service to man, which is connected with service to God, includes participation in the complex life of this world. Diaconia is, in this understanding, a “manifestation of faith in good works” and in the letter of James 2:24, it says “*Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only*”.

It is therefore the responsibility of each individual Christian, as well as of the Church, to contribute according to their own abilities to the “edification of their members”, or – as Paul writes in the Letter to the Romans – “We have different gifts, according to the grace given to us [...] If anyone has the gift of service, let him who is called to teach serve, let him teach [...], if anyone exercises mercy, let him do it with joy”.

² Bria, Ion in: “Ecumenical Diaconia – an option for life”, 1988.

From Protestant and Catholic Diaconia Work for Migrant Workers to Orthodox Diaconia by Migrants in Germany

In the history of the Orthodox presence in Germany, labour migration, which has been important since the 1950s, especially from Greece and the former Yugoslavia, represents a significant stage. This migration has considerably increased the number of Orthodox Christians living on the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany and has been accompanied by the founding of numerous new communities, especially Greek and Serbian ones.

These immigrants have indeed had extensive contact with Diakonie in Germany since their arrival, but this has been based on the concept of care for guest workers (*Gastarbeiter*). This diaconal care for guest workers was mostly provided by the independent welfare associations, but also in particular by the Protestant and Catholic associations of *Diakonisches Werk* and *Caritas*. In agreement between the Protestant, Catholic and, at that time in Germany only little organised, Orthodox church, the Greek Orthodox employees were entrusted to the care of the *Diakonisches Werk*, while for Yugoslavs the workers' welfare (*Arbeiterwohlfahrt* – a social democratic inspired welfare organisation) was responsible. This welfare agreement between the churches certainly led to conflicts, especially since the state funds were not – as might have been expected – given to the Greek metropolis, but to the Diakonisches Werk of the Protestant Church. Thus, it was also not possible to perceive or develop specifically orthodox forms of diaconia, but this care remained – despite the employment of up to 120 Greek social workers – under the organisational patronage of the EKD.

Another problem with such a distribution of tasks can be seen in the fact that the role of foreigners in Germany tends to be consolidated by the conception of the *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers) welfare service, whereby the organisational ties of most of the Orthodox church structures based in Germany to the “home countries” are still a reflex to the idea that they are not permanent immigrants, but are staying temporarily.

The Orthodox community life in Germany is very heterogeneous, which can be explained by the variety of structures, national coinages, organisational affiliations to different metropolises and patriarchs as well as the diversity and local differences of the Orthodox life on site. Thus, the Orthodox community pastoral care is also very diverse.

Facets of Orthodox Diaconia in Germany

The first and most important diaconal task of the congregations is to offer a spiritual and social home to their members. This is not to be underestimated when new Orthodox immigrants find a place to go in the parishes, when contacts are made, which break through the confusing life and anonymity of the big city. Due to the so-called diaspora situation, the pronounced feeling of togetherness of some Orthodox Christians in Germany leads to dense *neighbourhood assistance*. Among the services they perceive are child care as a relief for working mothers, shopping for elderly people, invitations to family celebrations, and mutual information about the concerns of everyday social and professional life in Germany. Sometimes it is also a matter of asking a member of the community who works as a lawyer for advice free of charge and without obligation before taking legal action, etc. The priest will be informed in such difficult cases where an individual or a family is involved. Thus, after 2008, the Greek parishes often formed a first contact in Germany for numerous migrants who came to Germany in search of employment because of the severe economic and financial crisis in Greece. Church congregations in both large and small towns are developing forms of neighbourhood help here, and are – in the best sense – not only a place of spiritual community, but also a social network. Here, the *Koinonia* is developed as a church community. One prerequisite for this form of diaconia, however, is the manageability of a parish. It is simply noticeable when a parishioner is absent from church services several times in a row. One knows about others in the group and can help each other spontaneously.

Spontaneous neighbourhood assistance has given rise to the *community-organised diaconia*. This manifests itself concretely in its most diverse forms. Much of the burden here rests on the priests, who are

also purely volunteers in many congregations, and on the volunteers in the congregation who take on one or other tasks within the congregation. The task of pastoral care in prisons and hospitals is in most cases carried out by the local priests. House blessings, the administering of sacraments outside the regular liturgy and visits to the sick also fall within the scope of normal parish diaconry. Pastoral care of the catering trade is a special case. Members of the congregation who work in the catering trade (for instance as owners of Greek restaurants) and are therefore often unable to attend the Sunday liturgy are visited and given pastoral care in joy and sorrow. Many services related to the organisation before and during the service and the *agape* after the service, as well as the planning and preparation of parish and patronage celebrations, the parish hall manager, organising concerts, carrying out counselling services as “help for self-help” (e.g. a paediatrician from the parish advising young expectant parents) and much more are carried out by volunteer parishioners.

There is not *the* typical Orthodox community in Germany. Some are guests in premises which they can use temporarily for the liturgy, others have their own buildings (church and community centres) and a professionalised institutional structure. In some congregations, priests work full-time but, in many congregations, priests exercise a different profession in addition to their spiritual activity. This explains why it is not always possible to set up day-care centres for children, for example, but it is certainly practised.

Orthodox Solidarity Support for Refugees in Germany

A special role is played by the solidary *support of refugees* who today have an experience of migration, which is not unknown to many Orthodox Christians in Germany, at least from the stories of their grandparents. Thus, especially after 2015, some Syrian Orthodox congregations emerged, which celebrate the Arabic liturgy as guests in established Orthodox churches. One example of this is the German-speaking Orthodox parish “zu den Heiligen Erzeugeln” in Düsseldorf-Wersten, a community which, unlike many others, does not define itself nationally. Language courses for refugees were held on the premises of the parish. In a certain sense, this even closes a circle, because church and community centres were built in the early 1960s precisely as a spiritual home for *displaced persons who had* fled from the countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union in cooperation between the city of Düsseldorf, the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the Diakonisches Werk. Today, Orthodox Christians of different origins praise God in German as a matter of course and thus show that they are simultaneously at home in Germany and in the orthodox faith, and this is considered a successful integration project.

Networking and Perspectives of Orthodox Congregations and Diaconia

The anchoring of Orthodoxy in Germany is also shown by the efforts existing since the turn of the millennium towards stronger networking.

Orthodox parish conferences were formed locally; in Germany, the Orthodox Bishops’ Conference was formed to coordinate the joint activities of the different, mostly nationally shaped metropolises, as well as the Orthodox presence in ecumenical cooperation. This networking makes it possible to participate in a mutual exchange about diaconal fields of work and contents and thus to enrich the overall reflection on Christian diaconia in Germany.

But the attempts to establish more pan-Orthodox cooperation, for instance in local parish conferences or at a higher level in the Orthodox Bishops’ Conference, show a tension that is partly based on questions that have so far been undecided. While many congregations see themselves as part of German society, the organisation of Orthodoxy in various national churches, which in turn are directly dependent on state and church structures in the countries of origin, often leads to isolation. Moreover, the work of the Bishops’ Conference and the Parish Conferences has been brought to a *de facto* standstill. Responsible for this is the

decision of the Moscow Patriarchate in 2018, in connection with the Orthodox Church dispute in Ukraine, to terminate all cooperation with the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Despite all the obstacles and internal tensions, the diaconal field of work offers the possibility for a vitality in ecumenism. Ultimately, it is diaconal action that connects the Christian churches in theory and practice and fills not only our existence as Christians but also our ecumenical community with life.

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58. MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES: VOICE AND AGENCY TOWARDS AN INFRASTRUCTURE OF WELCOME AND HOSPITALITY AND AN ARCHITECTURE OF ADVOCACY AND SOLIDARITY

Liberato C. Bautista¹

Migrants and refugees are people like you and me. They are human beings before anything else; they are certainly not to be reduced to documents or valued and valuated as commodities, trading their bodies and their services. As human beings, migrants share the inherent human dignity innate in all human beings. Because migration is about human mobility, each of us in one form or another is a migrant.

This requires further thought: are we all migrants and refugees because we are all peoples on the move?

Not all human beings undertake extraordinary decisions to move and leave their places of meaning, belonging and remembrance. There are people who are forced to move. To simply assert that migrants and refugees are like you and me, neglecting to recognise the forced movement they unduly and unjustly undergo, is to diminish the struggles they have to overcome to truly realise their human dignity and rights.

Human mobility is complex and fascinating. Human mobility is as much biological function as it is geographical, indeed even geopolitical. When our bodies move, or when they are transported by some other means, from one location to another, the things that we carry – goods, services, even ideas – also move. Our bodily and biological needs and functions combined with our economic, political, cultural and environmental activities and relations put us in motion.

We move to see places and sights; we call this tourism. We move to visit relatives or friends or former classmates; reunions are made of such. We move to a new place to begin a family, and in the process, we settle for good. We seek better opportunities for employment, hoping for a better life and livelihood. Many immigrations today are made of these. Of those who move in search for work, the throng is called overseas migrant worker, or simply migrant worker. A smaller group, equally working abroad, is called expatriate. The former is chasing labour and capital while the latter is moving that labour and capital where cost is minimal and profit can be had the most.

The global division of labour that depends heavily on the mobility of workers and the nature of the market that relies on cheap labour to produce profit makes migrant work attractive to many whose domestic economies cannot absorb their burgeoning labour force. The global elite move around too, but not to be called migrant workers. After all, they are the peddlers of capital in places where profit can be made, and on behalf of the captains of industries, whose reach is multinational and power is global.

It is certain that human beings are creatures in motion. Human mobility is fundamentally natural and intrinsically good. However, therein lies the rub; to move or to stay put. Either way, that movement must be a matter of choice and not forced. Unfortunately, the situation of millions of migrants and refugees around the world today is a tragic consequence of push and pull factors, with the push playing a greater part of what we know about migration today.

Human mobility is more than just a biological function. Where we stay as much as why we leave places of meaning and memory in our lives and relations are decisions of geopolitical import. While we may say that

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we are all migrants, not all of us are pushed to move, with little to no choice not to do so. Dislocation is not a condition that all human beings share with migrants who are forced to move.

Migrants and Refugees: Human Beings in Forced Movement

The focus of this essay is to find cause with migrants and refugees who are in situations of forced movement, indeed in conditions of dispersal, displacement and dislocation.² It is to find cause with them as they claim their voice and agency as themselves – as human beings made whole by the dignity that is intrinsic in their humanity.

Like all human beings, migrants and refugees are bearers of dignity – none other than the divine gift of God’s likeness in every person.³ Hitherto, this affirmation of human dignity of every person has been the venue and focus of Christian ministry and service. Migrants and refugees are human beings, created and loved by God, and they too are legitimate agents of God’s love and grace and their struggles a meaningful platform for Christian solidarity and ministry.

Today, migrants see themselves as agents of their own future, and theology is recognising their voice and agency as primary venues of reflection and action, not by others but by themselves. Organised migrants today use the organising mantra which says: “For a long time, others spoke on our behalf. Today, we speak for ourselves.”⁴

That migrants and refugees are themselves bearers of the Good News of God’s justice and liberation is not always readily seen and acknowledged by those whose freedom of movement are not challenged by difficult circumstances like war, famine, and persecutions of every kind. The traditional diaconal expression asserts that they are the recipients of the goodness of the human heart of every Christian without whose aid their lives may not be bettered. Without doubt sincerity, many Christians and Christian institutions have developed acts of mercy to take care of migrants and refugees with utmost sincerity. But with certainty, migrants and refugees have been made to believe they cannot liberate themselves, let alone better their status in life.

But what do we do when migrants not only deserve mercy, but more importantly, demand justice? And what if they are claiming their voice and agency so that they are primary participants in addressing their concerns and resolving them with them and never again without them. Their earlier organising mantra, “nothing about migrants without migrants,”⁵ preceded their assertion to speak for themselves. Certainly, this is a case where their claim of voice is not just an affirmation of innate dignity but a claim of agency because their dignity is now protected by human rights norms.

Human rights, as we know them today, are the protections we have evolved in human struggles to secure human dignity and allow it to flourish. The whole array of codified human rights and humanitarian laws in both national and international laws all apply to migrants and refugees. That is why all human rights are migrants’ rights. Social consciousness among migrants and refugees about their unjust and exploited plight have led them to organise and form movements to better their conditions and their relationships and communities, if not transform their world.

² Jung Eun Sophia Park argues that “Dislocation, which involves moving from a familiar place to an unknown place, is a common experience in this era of globalisation yet it can cause a deep sense of alienation – people feel invisible, voiceless and anonymous.” See Park, Jung Eun Sophia. *A Hermeneutic on Dislocation as Experience: Creating a Borderland, Constructing a Hybrid Identity* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011).

³ See Moltman, Jurgen. *On Human Dignity: Political Theology and Ethics* (London: SCM Press, 1984).

⁴ This is a slogan popularised by the International Migrants Alliance. In Spanish, it said, “*Por mucho tiempo otros hablaron en nuestro nombre. Ahora hablamos por nosotros mismos.*”

⁵ There are several accounts as to the origin of this slogan. What is clear is that no policy decision should be made without the full and direct participation of all affected peoples and communities. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nothing_About_Us_Without_Us.

Churches Witnessing With Migrants: A Tripartite Platform for *Koinonia* and *Diakonia*

What would Christian witness and ministry look like if our understanding about migrants and refugees follows from the above? How might theological education prosper from this kind of perspective that allows the moral agency of migrants and refugees in giving evidence to the abundance of life, and how might their experience of social injustice and personal pain and suffering provide evidence that faith, hope, and love abide in them and undergird their resilience and fortify their resolve to contribute to the betterment of God's wider world? If they assert, as they do, that nothing about migrants without migrants, then what would it take for Christian ministry to fully recognise such an assertion and perspective? What changes and adjustments need to take place so that our diaconal ministries are at once acts of mercy and acts of justice?

The work and witness of the international group called CWWM or Churches Witnessing With Migrants⁶ attempts to demonstrate how an equal tripartite partnership of migrants and refugees, migrant- and refugee-serving institutions, and faith and religious bodies working collaboratively, can model a radical *koinonia* of equals (in a tripartite framework) and a contextual and prophetic *diakonia*.⁷ This model puts the tripartite parties in a common setting of work. This allows for the transformation of social relations among involved persons as well as the transformation of the substance of their ministries and undertakings, so that, in the end, the *koinonia* of equals is made for a *diakonia* of shared thinking and doing, of shared knowledge sources and material resources. The tripartite framework of being, knowing and doing made the work of CWWM a unique platform. One could say that in this work with and among migrants and refugees, each one's salvation and liberation is bound up with each other.

The evolution of the nature and mandate of the international ecumenical platform called Churches Witnessing With Migrants or CWWM for short, took many years of gestation. From a small gathering organised by the National Council of Churches in the Philippines and Migrant International, on the sidelines of the second annual session of the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) held in Manila in 2008,⁸ to the latest international annual consultation, the tenth iteration, held in 2019 in Quito, Ecuador, CWWM has matured in its self-understanding of its organisational orientation, structure, and programmatic direction. Apparently, Mr. Bustamante remarked about migrants "arming themselves with prayers" and that as they move in the process of migration, "one of the first things that they look for in their countries of destination" are churches, places of worship and facilities maintained by religious institutions.⁹

The CWWM is an international network that serves as a platform for advocacy and forthright action focused on global migration, particularly forced migration. CWWM is organised as a tripartite body of equals that includes migrants and refugees, representatives of migrant- and refugee-serving institutions, and faith-based organisations from various faith traditions. In its practice of a tripartite arrangement, it has come to value working together and inclusively on acts of mercy, accompaniment and justice. Migrant workers, the most important voice in any discussion on migration issues, have been historically excluded from both national and international and inter-governmental forums, including at the United Nations.

CWWM's work and impact on the ground and in the international arena has not gone unnoticed. Its profile is clearly highly valued by organised groups of migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, persons in situations of

⁶ The website of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines dedicates a section on the Churches Witnessing with Migrants. See https://nccphilippines.org/cwmm/?page_id=14.

⁷ An articulation of what makes for prophetic *diakonia* was propounded by the Christian Conference of Asia. See <https://www.cca.org.hk/prophetic-diakonia-and-advocacy/>.

⁸ This meeting in Manila, organised by the National Council of Churches in the Philippines and Migrant International, was a luncheon meeting tendered for Mr. Jorge Bustamante (UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants). The luncheon was attended by several leaders of the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines, and representatives of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME).

⁹ An account of this event is found in *Turning Strangers Into Friends: Hospitality, Mercy, Justice*, Liberato C. Bautista (ed) (Quezon City: National Council of Churches in the Philippines, 2017), p. 2.

trafficking and other mutations of forced movement, including internally displaced peoples. This is not so much because of CWWM itself but more because of the established nature and credibility of the groups that make use of the tripartite platform as a mechanism for joint advocacy and action.¹⁰

The tripartite of committed partners made for a strong articulation of CWWM's principles and assertions, and in the venues where its presence is visible, its voice and statements are definitely assertive and hard to ignore.

Academic and scholarly research has taken notice of the force of the combined resources that the tripartite parties have brought to CWWM. Stefan Rother (2019) noticed CWWM's "tripartite of equals" and its use of the power of story-telling directly by affected migrants. While he credited the role of mobilising migrants and refugees to two migrant organisations – the International Migrants Alliance and the International Alliance of Migrants and Refugees – it considered CWWM as a spreader of the "gospel of counter-hegemonic discourse." Rother went on to describe the two publications of CWWM, *Turning Strangers into Friends* (2017) and the earlier book, *The Intersections of Migration, Human Rights and Development Justice* (2014) as education tools for such counter-hegemonic discourse. Rother concludes that in the realm of migration work at the level of the Global Forum on Development, there are hegemonic and counterhegemonic discourses, and CWWM is in the mix, bringing "the advocacy to wider and more diverse audiences besides just 'preaching to the convinced'".¹¹

CWWM in a 10-year Span: Consolidation of Voice and Articulation of a Position

Migrant workers and their organisations needed a forum in which to express their opinion and recommend solutions to minimise the impact of working overseas as temporary workers. The CWWM Network provided such platform. Churches needed to listen to refugees and migrant workers speaking of their pain and struggles as well as hopes and triumphs in the course of their displacement, dispersal and dislocation. CWWM engages theological reflection to undergird its assertions that migrants as human beings are created in God's image. A migrant's human dignity is a gift from God that cannot be taken away when they move from one country to another. CWWM regularly provides a faith-based input and critical accompaniment to the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) and has a legacy of critical and analytical statements produced in its global consultations.¹²

The annual consultations of CWWM have served as venue for the development and elaboration of the nature and substance of its work and mandate. The meeting in Manila (2008) galvanised the resolve of churches and religious institutions as entities widely regarded and trusted by migrants and refugees, as sanctuaries and places of refuge. CWWM's meeting in Athens (2009) asserted CWWM's *raison d'être* – the care, empowerment and upholding of the human rights of migrants and their families. Athens was most instructive in mandating CWWM as a gathering of three equals, but emphasising on the critical "presence

¹⁰ CWWM includes migrant and refugee groups International Migrant Alliance (IMA) and Migrante International, the migrant-serving institution Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM), and the faith-based groups National Council of Churches in the Philippines, World Council of Churches, Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe, *Brot für die Welt* (Berlin), All Africa Council of Churches, Karibu Foundation, The United Methodist Church, The United Church of Canada, The Anglican Church of Canada, and so many more. The book, *Turning Strangers Into Friends*, documents all the names of persons and organisations that have attended the ten international consultations that CWWM has organised.

¹¹ See Stephan Rother, *Angry birds of passage – migrant rights networks and counterhegemonic resistance to global migration discourses*, in Schierup, Carl-Ulrik, Branka Likie-Brboric, Raul Delgado Wise, and Gulay Toksoz (eds). *Migration, Civil Society and Global Governance* (London and New York: Routledge) 2019. pp. 124-136.

¹² See for instance the Istanbul agreements from 2015: <https://ccme.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/2015-10-30-CWWM6-Statement-The-Istanbul-Agreements.pdf>.

and participation of migrants and refugees in any and all endeavours that are about them and affects them – be it their bodies and lives, their jobs and livelihoods, their families and homes.”¹³

The meeting in Mexico (2010) positioned CWWM to address “historic and structural injustices brought about by slavery, colonialism, and racism”. In Mexico, CWWM nuanced the symbiosis of acts of mercy and acts of justice as it also made clear the relation between God-given gifts of dignity and historic human struggles for rights to protect such dignity. The meeting in New York in 2013 intentionally engaged theological and ethical lenses in more ways than in its previous meetings.¹⁴ The gathering in New York asserted that “migrants are human beings with dignity and worth who cannot be reduced to mere commodities traded and exchanged in the global market place”. Formulating this as an advocacy tool, New York argued that “ministry with, and among migrants and refugees, must include rejection of the commodification of the lives and bodies of migrants and refugees.”

The engagement of critical theological reflection with hard-nosed social-scientific inquiry is evident in the Stockholm meeting in 2014. There, the nature of advocacy in relation to hospitality and justice were articulated, introducing a principle already close to church bodies and turning it as a tripartite principle – moving from “acts of mercy into acts of justice.” The assertion that “advocacy and hospitality must embrace” first raised here finds greater articulation later in 2018 and 2019.

In the 2015 gathering in Istanbul, CWWM asserted that “hospitality, mercy and justice are co-constitutive” and that in their totality, “they invoked both the tactical delivery of succour and the strategic planning of the long-term delivery of justice.” Narratives of pain and hope were etched into the statement from Istanbul, meeting as it did just when pictures of the three-year old Syrian child’s lifeless body by the Mediterranean shore were plastered across in newspapers in Turkey and syndicated around the world.

Dhaka (2017) was the setting for the complexification of an already difficult phenomenon that is forced migration. CWWM in Dhaka laid bare the “emerging nexus between forced migration, climate change, unequal trade relations, globalisation, lack of genuine economic development and injustice”. Dhaka gave its participants the analytical framework to see the intersections “arising from conditions that have globalised, racialised, securitised, gendered and sexualised migration.” Dhaka warned that we must “look beyond the current dominant rhetoric on migration and refugees to the drivers of forced migration rooted in climatic vulnerability, global inequality, and development agendas that privilege the Global North and elites within developing countries.”

By the time it met in Berlin in 2018, CWWM was ready to “take seriously its interlocutory role with governmental and intergovernmental bodies, especially multilateral agencies whose purposes affect and impact the human rights and welfare of migrants and refugees.” Berlin was an intense time of engagement in the final drafting of a global compact on migration scheduled for Marrakesh a year later. Berlin produced what it called the “CWWM Talking and Doing Points”, a six-point distillation of its positions designed to be handy enough as an advocacy tool when talking to governmental negotiators of the impending compacts not just on migration but also on refugees.¹⁵

In 2019 in Marrakesh, the focus of almost everyone was the impending approval of the Global Compact on Migration. Even as CWWM’s direct engagement with the intergovernmental and multilateral process was affirmed, it was emphatic about not losing focus on its original purpose – the betterment of the care and welfare of migrants and refugees and the provision of and access to mechanisms and instruments of protection

¹³ Quotations used in this section referring to the salient contributions of the ten annual consultations of CWWM come from the book “Turning Strangers into Friends: Mercy, Hospitality, Justice”.

¹⁴ This was due to the influence of a recent publication of the World Council of Churches, entitled “The ‘Other’ is My Neighbor: Developing and Ecumenical Response to Migration.” Its editor and staff lead for a consultation that produced the contents of the book was a key resource at the New York event, where the Rev. Dr. Deenabandhu Manchala, erstwhile WCC executive for theology, spoke especially but not exclusively on Dalit theology and casteism.

¹⁵ Read the “CWWM Talking and Doing Points” here: <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/sites/default/files/cwwm-ts5.pdf>.

of their dignity. Marrakesh started serious discussions of “an infrastructure of hospitality” (care, acts of mercy) and “an architecture of solidarity” (protection, acts of justice), and it will get a spotlight on the agenda of the 2019 consultation in Quito.

The immediate interest expressed in Marrakesh was the mapping and inventorying of both the resources for care and protection that can be made available, if not already, for the use of migrants and refugees along the routes of their journeys, from places of origin, transit and destination. The consultation in Quito elaborated further on what this infrastructure and architecture is about. Its printed report of the proceedings of the consultation in Quito contains reports from different participants about their work in mapping and making an inventory of the resources within their reach and disposal. Quito in 2019 described the “infrastructure of care” as the inventory of persons, institutions, goods, services and needs across the tripartite composition of CWWM while the “architecture of protection” refers to the inventory of advocacies and solidarities being done in various venues and occasions, but especially by the three components of CWWM.

The preceding section located the concern for migrants and refugees in the context of the work of CWWM. This next section discusses why the concern for migrants and refugees. To do so, we will revisit 2016 before returning to 2020.

What about Migrants and Refugees, and Why the Concern?

On the 19th September 2016, a crucial political process was held at the United Nations General Assembly in New York. It was a High-Level Summit dealing with large flows of refugees and migrants. Member states of the United Nations sent delegations, some at the highest level of participation that included presidents, prime ministers, secretaries of foreign affairs, even royalty. In attendance were some NGO representatives, who managed to go through the hoops and loops of a secondary screening process beyond their accredited status. How and why one gets eventually chosen or not chosen, I only vaguely know. Possibly a few thousand applied and a few hundred were chosen. I was allowed in as one of two representatives of the General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church.

The day after the Summit, I convened a breakfast gathering that brought about 18 representatives from various non-governmental organisations (NGOs), some of whom were at the Summit, others were not. The gathering was privileged with the presence and participation of one of the three NGO speakers, Eni Lestari Andayani Adi, a domestic worker in Hong Kong who is also the president of the International Migrants Alliance. A few of us at the breakfast identified ourselves as migrant workers.

We gathered for breakfast with no fixed agenda except to share among ourselves *a sense of the summit*, and with the presence of migrants among us, to hear them speak about how and whether the summit mattered to them. It was also a gathering to get a *sense of the larger and the wider contexts* about our roles as non-governmental representatives at the UN.

Put in another way, do NGOs really make a difference at the UN and in a world of nation-states? Can we truly matter in a Summit which at its core is about the affairs of governments? What is our place in the international system where the main players are sovereign nation-states? How can we prosper another imagination of the international so that it is about nationals, with peoples being the nation, so that the affairs of the international are truly about the affairs – concerns really – of what the preamble of the Charter of the United Nations says, “We the peoples”?

While we, who are representatives of faith-based NGOs, are like any other NGO representative with access and status at the United Nations, how can we leverage that representation so that we can fulfil our consultative role at the UN? How can we give evidence to our self-understanding that our presence is on behalf of those who do not have access to the UN? As it were, can we be a voice, or a vehicle of voices, of the many who have no access of the UN and the multilateral process, if only for the international community to respond to those voices expressing concerns and struggles for peace, justice and sustainability?

Therefore, what about migrants and refugees, in or out of this UN summit? For me, the situation which most needed a voice and text for articulation at the Summit was the massiveness of the dispersal, displacement, and dislocation of so many human beings today. The UN summit called it the large flows (also movement and dislocation) of migrants and refugees.

At the Summit, the subject matter was of and about migrants and refugees. Governmental representatives dominated the talk; migrants and refugees were in short supply in the Summit itself. Still, the Summit tried to be about migrants and refugees who are bearers of human dignity and protected human rights. The few migrants who spoke before governments and UN officials exuded of such dignity. Migrants are human beings first and foremost. Migrants are peoples and not documents. Migrants are persons whose being, services and labour are precious and not just commodities for trading and managing.

The enormity of the movement of peoples, especially the involuntary and forced movement of peoples, is truly alarming and must move us to action. The United Nations reports that “the number of international migrants globally reached an estimated 272 million in 2019, an increase of 51 million since 2010. Currently, international migrants comprise 3.5 per cent of the global population, compared to 2.8 per cent in the year 2000 [...]”¹⁶ Here, we are talking upwards of 65 million, or one in 113 persons, affected by massive movement and forced displacement; a crisis of global proportions and implications!

Movement of Peoples Happen All the Time, but Some are Forced to Move

Migration is a fact of life. Human beings and living things move from one place to another in their lifetimes. People move on their own volition. However, sometimes, such movement is not voluntary. There are those who are forced to move.

Forced migration, especially massive dislocation and displacement, are realities whose roots and underlying causes we cannot and must not ignore. Lingering wars and conflicts, environmental degradation, human trafficking, political and religious persecution are all causing the involuntary movement and displacement of massive numbers of peoples.

We must not ignore the root causes of forced migration. We must address them with solutions that are just, durable and sustainable.

Migrants are human beings. They are humans first before they are migrants. Migrants are human beings who, like all other human beings, share fundamental human dignity and the equal protection of all human rights. Because movement is a natural thing that human beings do, freedom of movement is precious to human beings.

The Freedom to Move is a Protected Human Right

Human beings have always moved for life and livelihood, for security and survival, indeed, they move to find food, clothing, shelter, work, and so much more. This is why it is a protected human right. Where there is deprivation of these basics in life in the usual places of dwelling and community of peoples, then there is bound to be an irregular, even, massive movement of people.

Massive movement and dislocation of peoples including migrant workers and asylum seekers, leads to denial of human dignity and a violation of human rights when such movements have been forced by political upheavals, lingering wars and conflicts, economic inequalities, religious persecution, or trafficking in persons of all types.

While globalisation heralded the swift movement of capital and profits across national borders, the movement of labourers seeking work in developed countries of the world steadily grew and yet increasingly

¹⁶ See <https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/population/international-migrant-stock-2019.html>.

restricted and securitised, ethnicised and racialised, even gendered and sexualised – conditions that today describe why attention to the massive movement, displacement, and resettlement of migrants and refugees is beyond alarming. They invite moral outrage and a commitment to not just “welcome the strangers” in our midst, but to “turn strangers into friends” and “seek justice and pursue it” with them.

Freedom of movement is a protected human right already codified in national, regional and international laws, even in indigenous knowledge and practice. “All human rights for all.” This is an understanding that evolved and is asserted within the human rights community, assertions like “All human rights are indigenous people’s rights”, or “All human rights are women’s rights.”

In this case, we must also say “All human rights are migrant rights”. To say this is not just to assert human dignity being foundational to our valuing of migrants as human beings, but to make sure we do not forget the injustices – historic and contemporary – that are heaped upon people who are forced to move and locate. We say it over and over to make sure we are not complicit to reducing migrants and their labour and services to commodities for trading in commerce.

Ownership of Property, the Accumulation of Wealth and the Historic Movement of Peoples across Lands and Ocean

It was the movement of colonisers which made an impact, in the most consequential manner, to the relation between nature and human beings. The accumulation of properties drove the appetite for moving, no longer just in one’s immediate surroundings but beyond and across lands and oceans. Colonialism did that in a manner and process that was planned and consequential. It also shows that today’s migrants and refugees were not the first to move and relocate.

The so-called Doctrine of Discovery provided a set of religious precepts, philosophical and ideological backing that allowed, albeit violently, the colonial seizure of indigenous lands and properties, including the subjugation of people’s allegiances, which consequentially displaced peoples from their traditional places of abode and sources of livelihood.

Colonialism, slavery and racism, and other historic ignominies that are at the root of the massive movement and displacement of peoples then and now – including current realities of racial discrimination, xenophobia and various forms of intolerances – must not to be forgotten and ignored at any time. This was my hope for the Summit, believing in the sincerity of the summit’s organisers to hold it so as to “secure firm, action-oriented commitments to enhance responsibility-sharing and to strengthen international cooperation,” and for UN Member States to “adopt a global compact on responsibility-sharing for refugees and agree on a roadmap to guide the development of a global compact for safe, regular and orderly migration.”

The Commodification of Nature and People is at the Root of Injustice Experienced by Migrants

At the root of the misery and injustice experienced by migrants is the treatment today of both nature and peoples as goods. The commodification of nature and people, and the commoditisation of their labour and services are at the root of wanton disregard for the dignity and human rights of migrants and refugees, and the human-induced destruction of the environment.

Today, migrants and their labour are under the spell of globalisation regarded as tradeable goods – up for bidding at the lowest cost and least burden. Over the course of history, the conditions of migration of people became more the free, unbridled and unregulated movement of capital on one hand, and the restricted and regulated movement of peoples’ goods and their services on the other hand. These changes were due to the intervention of and struggle among political forces, economic classes and cultural movements.

Over the same course of history, the material conditions of both peoples and nature have changed. These changes have significantly affected the movement of peoples, goods, and services. People chase labour.

Labour chases capital. Capital chases wealth. Capital goes where more profit can be made, not necessarily where it is socially and responsibly needed.

Forced and Enforced Migration are Violations of Human Rights

The Churches Witnessing With Migrants asserts that “freedom of movement is a human right that allows peoples to forge human relations and found sustainable communities. Forced migration is a violation of human rights.” Forced migration includes enforced migration – the type of forced movement that is encouraged by government through public policy and legislation. Such is the case of the Philippines which maintains an export labour policy.

CWWM further asserts that, “Violent situations, environmental degradation, militarization, wars, lingering conflicts and political persecution in countries have resulted in internal displacement and forced and external movement of peoples that have produced asylum seekers and massive numbers of refugees. Under such conditions, people have fled their communities and sought refuge elsewhere, including in other countries. In situations like these, indigenous peoples, women, children, and peoples with disabilities who are migrants or are family members of migrants are especially more at risk and vulnerable.”

Migrants are Subjects of their Own Destinies

Nothing about migrants must be decided without migrants involved in the decision-making process. At negotiations about migrant and refugees, it is incumbent on those expressing accompaniment and solidarity to be conscious that the agency – human and moral agency – of migrants and refugees is visible and recognised.

A true and meaningful process that addresses the concerns of migrants and refugees is one that includes migrants as subjects of their own destinies and puts primacy to their human rights and welfare. Such dialogue must not be limited to migration as a strategy for development. We must challenge policies and priorities set by international institutions and national governments that allot more funds to profit enterprises and military and defence budgets and lesser to education, health, decent labour and the environment.

Towards a Multifaith Witness and Ministry with Migrants and Refugees

The tenth consultation of CWWM in Quito, held in November of 2019, included a new and significant segment – an interfaith event that addressed the moral and ethical imperatives of sustainable human mobility. While the tripartite character of CWWM has allowed its composition to be multifaith, Quito provided the venue and intentionality to gather faith leaders from various traditions to affirm that “All human beings bear the image of the divine in them. All religions and faith persuasions affirm this fundamental dignity inherent in all human beings.”

At the public interfaith event,¹⁷ faith bodies declared publicly, and in concert, that all human beings – including migrants, refugees and uprooted peoples – bear that dignity which no one can take away. Wherever people are and where they go – country of origin, transit or destination – people bear with them their dignity.

¹⁷ In attendance at the interfaith event were religious leaders from Christian, Jewish, Islamic, and Hindu traditions. Among the Christian leaders represented were major ecumenical groups including the World Council of Churches, World Communion of Reformed Churches, World Evangelical Alliance, the World Methodist Council the Council of Anglican Provinces in Africa and Student Christian Federation. The Christian communions present included the Roman Catholic Church represented by the Ecumenical Commission of the Conference of Bishops of Ecuador, the Lutheran Church in Ecuador, United Church of Canada, Church and Society, The United Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Anglican Church of Canada, Salesianos de Don Bosco, Iglesia Metodista de Mexico, American Baptist

Religions and faith bodies publicly affirmed in Quito that migration and human mobility is fundamentally good. This freedom of movement is a protected human right, and its pursuit and protection is fundamentally just. One by one, the religious leaders committed to the upholding of the dignity and human rights of migrants, refugees and uprooted peoples as a fundamental task of religions.

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Churches USA, Eglise Evangelique au Maroc, and the National Council of Churches in the Philippines.. The migrant-serving religious institutions present included Comisión Argentina Para Refugiados y Migrantes, Church World Service, Inter-Religious Committee for Refugees and Migrants in Peru, and Tearfund.

59. HEALTH AND HEALING IN DIACONIA

Thorsten Moos¹

Healing as a Christian Practice

Issues of health and healing have been central to Christianity from its very beginning. Visiting the sick belongs to the works of charity according to Matthew 25:36, and Jesus explicitly sends his disciples out to heal the sick (Mt. 10:8). Caring and compassion for the sick has been a characteristic trait of Christian communities. The institution of hospitals evolved from Christian origins² and modern diakonia has been a driver of medical development.³ Today, a wide spectrum of Christian organisations and initiatives target health problems worldwide. In Germany, the context of this article, Protestant organisations run more than 200 hospitals and 28,000 inpatient and outpatient care centres.⁴

“Health and healing” combines medical and spiritual aspects. This can be seen from etymology, since “health/healing” can be traced back to the term “whole”, as well as in the famous modern definition of health, issued by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 1948: “Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”⁵ Health is not just a physical status of the body. It comprises social, practical and temporal aspects as well; and it has a spiritual or religious relevance. In many Christian contexts, healing the sick has correspondingly not only been considered a moral obligation but also a religious activity on its own. Many Christian churches – especially, but not only, in Evangelical and Charismatic traditions – offer healing services and ceremonies.

Western Theological Unease

In the Western liberal theological tradition since the 20th century, interferences between religion and medicine have been looked at with unease, if not with suspicion. Illness and health are conceived as issues of medicine alone, not of religion. From this perspective, religion trying to serve medical goals will miss its proper target and become superstition. Biblical healing narratives are interpreted metaphorically (the healing of “social blindness”), and intercessions for the sick do not ask for healing (but only for the ability to bear the illness). Moreover, a theological critique of medicine as quasi-religious ambition to seek salvation, not in the communion with God but in the condition of one’s body, contributed to the estrangement between theology and medicine. By consequence, experiences of illness ceased to be of theological concern, even if diakonia still plays a major role in the professional healthcare system. In German theology, a “silence” around issues of disease and illness has been diagnosed;⁶ a diagnosis that was recently renewed in the context of the COVID-

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² See Francois Peter Retief/ Louise Cilliers, “The evolution of hospitals from antiquity to the Renaissance”, *Acta Theologica Supplementum* 7 (2010), pp. 213-232; Gary B. Ferngren, *Medicine and health care in early Christianity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 2009).

³ See Hans-Walter Schmuhl, “Diakonie und Medikalisierung”, *Jahrbuch für Westfälische Kirchengeschichte* 106 (2010), pp. 179-195.

⁴ See <https://dekv.de/wer-wir-sind/>, 16.03.2020; <https://www.diakonie.de/english>, 16.03.2020.

⁵ World Health Organisation, *Constitution*, WHO Official Records 1, 1948, Preamble.

⁶ Gregor Etzelmüller and Annete Weissenrieder, *Religion und Krankheit* (Darmstadt: WBG 2010), p. 5.

19 crisis. Correspondingly, the need to learn from experiences in the international *oikoumene* and to develop a “healing ministry” in church and diakonia has been postulated⁷ but not really met.

Public statements issued by the churches and diaconia mostly focus on issues of health politics, for example on health inequalities, on patients without health insurance or legal status, on hospital financing, on the roles of nurses and on the education of health professionals.⁸ Spiritual “resources” are especially invoked when questions of hospital chaplaincy, acceptance of an illness, consolation and hope are addressed.⁹

Spiritual Care

However, considerable interest in issues of spirituality came up inside the health care sector itself. Starting from the hospice movement and from palliative care, “Spiritual Care” has become a label for the use of religious and spiritual resources in health care. From this perspective, the sick are considered not only as patients with bodily, social and mental needs but as also having “spiritual” needs. Among the factors leading to this development were: the perception of religious plurality; the growing attention to the question of the meaning of illness in alternative and complementary medicine, later also in academic medicine; moreover, the integration of a spiritual dimension within the notion of health on the level of the WHO; but also the rise of New Managerialism interested in “efficient” use of health care resources. These factors gave rise to empirical studies on the institutional implementation of spiritual care professionals in some Western European countries. Here, traditional Christian health chaplains had to relate their profession to this new trend. Can Christian chaplaincy be conceived as a special case of spiritual care, or is it something different? In Germany for example, public finance can be obtained for spiritual care services in palliative care. This is of some interest for the churches that traditionally send chaplains to clinics at their own expense.¹⁰

In sum, diaconal hospitals on the one hand and hospital chaplaincy on the other are the most obvious and, in terms of numbers, most important connections between religion and health in the German context. Moreover, several strands of “alternative” and “complementary” medicine have absorbed notions and concerns from religious traditions – among them the highly problematic claim of providing “holistic” care. Apart from that, in the language of systems theory, health care and religion have evolved into two differentiated systems that each communicate within itself, but not with the other. Accordingly, “Health and healing” denotes a theological problem. How can the experience of illness and the hope for health be understood from a theological viewpoint? How can the lived body in its sometimes-difficult conditions again become a theological issue without undermining the appropriate differentiation between religion and medicine?

⁷ See Peter Bartmann, Beate Jakob, Ulrich Laepple, Dietrich Werner: *Health, Healing and Spirituality: The Future of the Church's Ministry of Healing. A German position paper offering ecumenical, diaconal and missiological perspectives on a holistic understanding of Christian witness for healing in western societies*, Tübingen 2008 (https://difaem.de/fileadmin/Dokumente/Publikationen/Gemeinde_Materialien/Health_Healing_and_Spirituality.pdf, 24/07/2020).

⁸ See <https://www.diakonie.de/stellungnahmen/kategorie/gesundheits-und-pflege> (20/07/2020).

⁹ See for example: Council of the Protestant Church in Germany, “*Und unsern kranken Nachbarn auch!*” *Aktuelle Herausforderungen der Gesundheitspolitik. Eine Denkschrift des Rates der EKD* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus 2011).

¹⁰ Most aspects of this debate are covered in the academic journal *Spiritual Care* (<https://www.degruyter.com/view/journals/spircare/spircare-overview.xml>, 24/07/2020).

A Theological Approach to Health and Illness

A starting point for theological understanding is the observation that dealing with health and illness shows aspects of absoluteness that can be interpreted theologically.¹¹ For example, the concept of health as shown in the above-mentioned WHO definition implies a moment of wholeness: “a state of complete [...] well-being”. This has been criticised as an exaggerated claim and unachievable goal. Yet, if illness is experienced as disintegration in multiple ways – a disintegration of the body, of social relations, of the ability to act and of one’s future life perspectives – then health is precisely the inversion of this experience: a state of bodily integration, integrated social relations, a full ability to act and trust in one’s future. Of course, a state like this can – maybe except some rare moments – never be experienced in life. Yet it is that what people who fall sick finally hope for: not for it getting *a bit better*, but getting *good*. From a theological perspective, it thus can be said that “health” – *restitutio in integrum*, complete restitution – is an eschatological concept. It is a utopian ideal, addressed by hope, but not, at least not as a whole, by intentional action. As such, the concept of health has no definite limitation towards concepts like happiness or, in religious language, the reign of God.

Why is such a theological interpretation useful? Basically, it stresses the difference between what we hope for and what we can achieve. Health, of course, is a legitimate ideal to strive for: it’s worthwhile helping people with diseases to overcome or avoid experiences of disintegration. It is good to heal people, and it is good to prevent diseases. Nonetheless, abilities, opportunities and resources are limited. Sometimes, diseases are incurable, no matter how much is done. Sometimes, there is a lack of resources: societies negotiate (and thus, even in wealthy countries: limit) the amount of resources provided for the healthcare sector. In situations of emergency, there might be an actual scarcity of drugs, tools and personnel. Additionally, if the aim is to prevent diseases, there is always more to be done. In public health politics, it is necessary to actively limit the measures taken to avoid a “dictatorship of health”.¹²

In these cases, it is necessary to differentiate between *wishing* and *willing*. Health, in many respects, is something to willingly strive for. In other respects, it might be something to wish without taking action. A patient might express the wish to get healthy even on the deathbed; but this wish probably does not mean that more treatment is requested from the physician. Nonetheless, the border between wish and will is not fixed; it might move, and it is subject to ongoing negotiation. The theological interpretation of health as an eschatological concept thus helps to unfold a phenomenology of hope that is in many cases not primarily a call to action.

Similarly, other health-related concepts can be subject to theological interpretation as well. The concept of *patient’s dignity* has also an aspect of absoluteness. It denotes the unconditional acknowledgement of the sick person that can never be completely realised in a social interaction. Here, theological concepts of rectification and of trust can be employed for an adequate understanding of dignity. Correspondingly, there is a moment of the absolute in the quest for a *meaning of illness*, leading to the theodicy issue. The same holds for the concept of *care* for an individual in their concrete situation: here, the theological concept of love and devotedness is useful to understand the complex structures of the ‘secular’ but nonetheless religious vibrant notion of care.

Conclusion

Theology has nothing to say about whether religious practices do contribute to health outcomes (“Do prayers cure?”, “Does religion make people resilient against threats to health?”). That is a question of medicine and

¹¹ For the following see Thorsten Moos, *Krankheitserfahrung und Religion* (Tübingen: Mohr 2018).

¹² Peter Nawroth, *Die Gesundheitsdiktatur* (Kulmbach: Plassen 2016).

religion psychology, not theology.¹³ Theology deals with religious undercurrents in dealing with issues of health and illness that become conceptually visible in notions like health, dignity, care and meaning. From here, it becomes clear why there has been a strong connection between the religious and the medical sector throughout history. Religious practices such as praying, blessing, grievance et cetera are common in the context of illness. They might be adequate, since they allow people to express their ultimate concern towards their situation. Then, they allow one to cultivate hope without illusion or cynicism; they allow the cultivation of a caring attitude without becoming intrusive and nonprofessional. Nonetheless, religion in the context of medicine might also be superstitious, repressive and destructive. Thus, theological reflection on the issue of health and illness, involving critique of religious practices, is finally a diaconal endeavour in itself.

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¹³ See Harold Koenig, Dana E. King and Verena Carson. 2012). See also the notion of health assets in faith communities in the contribution of Beate Jakob in this volume.

60. HEALING IN THE CHURCH IN AFRICA AS DIAKONAL PRAXIS

Philomena Njeri Mwaura¹

Introduction

Diakonia, a term derived from the Greek, is a Christian theological concept which encompasses the call to serve the poor, marginalised and oppressed. The term is used in the New Testament close to 100 times with different meanings.² Sometimes, it refers to any specific type of help people may need and other times it means to serve tables or the distribution of financial resources. *The Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* defines diakonia as, ‘the responsible service of the gospel by deeds and by words, performed by Christians in response to the needs of the People.’³ Diakonia is perceived as an integral part of Christian discipleship. It is a mandate to the whole Church as all the baptised are called to the priesthood of believers and the consequent call to witness to Christ (1 Peter 2:5). Christians are called to participate in God’s mission of healing and reconciliation, to serve one’s neighbour and be committed to causes of justice, reconciliation and peace. Diakonia is also embodied in the practice of discipleship as we see in the stories of the Acts of the Apostles.

In the Vatican II and post conciliar documents, a view of mission emerges that emphasises social concern and promotion of peace in the world. The mission of the Church is depicted as both spiritual and temporal. The *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* declared: ‘Christ’s redemptive work, while of itself directed toward the salvation of men [sic.] involves the renewal of the whole temporal order. Hence the mission of the Church is not only to bring men to the message and grace of Christ, but also penetrate and perfect the temporal sphere with the spirit of the Gospel. In fulfilling this mission of the Church, the laity therefore exercise their apostolate both in the Church and in the world in both spiritual and temporal orders’.⁴

In *Africae Munus: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation*, Pope Benedict XVI called upon the Church in Africa to exercise justice as a means for true and lasting peace. He calls upon the Church to educate all her members, so they can truly be informed apostles for justice.⁵

From the above it is clear that diakonia is integral to the mission of the Church, for the Church is expected to be sensitive to the human reality, to what people experience and especially to what threatens human dignity. The gospels depict Jesus inviting his disciples to be sensitive to the plight of the people and react to human needs. In the story of the feeding of the 5000 for example, he asks the disciples to give something to the hungry multitude (Matthew 14:16). John 10:10 and Matthew 25:31-46 point to a vision and practice of Diakonia as ‘the church’s embodiment of God’s reign to come with its promise of life, justice and peace and God’s preferential option for the poor as theological and ethical criteria for the way forward’.⁶

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² Kjell Nordstokke, ‘Reflections on the Theology of Diakonia’, *Diakonian Tutkimus* 2 (2011), p. 223.

³ Quoted in Isabel Apawo Phiri, ‘An Overview on the Imperative of Diakonia for the Church’. Paper presented at the All African Conference of Churches General Assembly, Kigali, Rwanda; 5th July 2018.

⁴ Flannery Abbot, ‘Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity’, para. 5, p. 495. *Documents of Vatican II*. London; *Geoffrey Chapman*, 1967.

⁵ Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation*, no.24.

⁶ Isabel Apawo Phiri, ‘An Overview on the Imperative of Diakonia for the Church’.

Mary Louise Norpel, in her article ‘Diakonia, the Mission of the Church’,⁷ opines that the Church is nothing without diakonia for this is what exemplifies the role of the Church as servant for the sake of the Kingdom. She also gives a word of caution that, all service for example benevolent actions, is not diakonia. Such actions are not the sufficient reason for the existence of the Church. This is because, ‘the aim of Jesus and his disciples was not to set up human orders in the world. Their main concern was with the Kingdom of God. What is different about Christian service is that it is rooted in the Word. To be concerned about the Kingdom requires faith, and faith comes through hearing. As the word is uttered to be heard, listening, obedience and love are integral to diakonia or the Christian idea of service.’⁸ The World Council of Churches document, ‘*The Church: Towards a Common Vision*’, observes that, ‘the world that ‘God so loved’, is experiencing turbulence and is scarred with problems and tragedies which cry out for the compassionate engagement by Christians’.⁹ Christians believe that God who is ‘absolute love, mercy and justice, can work through them, in the power of the Holy Spirit’.¹⁰ Christians are called upon to be Christ’s witnesses in a broken world, to heal the sick, cast out demons, care for people with disabilities, orphaned children, the aged, refugees, internally displaced, feed the hungry, provide shelter to the homeless and be a voice to the voiceless. Their faith compels them to also work for a just social order. Diakonia is, therefore, a constant reminder to us of the selfless love taught by Jesus in the gospels.

This paper explores the Church’s healing ministry in Africa with the aim of establishing how diakonia is exemplified in this mission activity. It will begin by briefly discussing the context in which healing is sought in Africa; meaning of the terms: sickness, health and wholeness/healing and what they entail in African culture and in the Bible, and the Church’s diakonic role in the promotion of healing, wholeness and wellbeing.

Necessity for Healing in Africa

Africa is a context that tells or depicts two stories that are diametrically opposed. One is a story of frustration and cry of children, women and men who are tired of unending debt, poverty, unlimited exploitation of their natural and human resources and who desperately seek to end the misery caused by civil wars, ethnic conflicts, inept and unaccountable leadership, debilitating disease including HIV and AIDS, malaria, and now COVID-19, corruption and mismanagement of national affairs and resources. The other story is one of a vibrant Christianity, a rich spirituality that engenders hope and sustains her in the midst of this apparent chaos. There is joy in community life and the African values of solidarity, mutual caring, reverence for God, and a dynamic engagement with spiritual forces is experienced and shared. Just like in the rest of the two third worlds, what is drawing Africans to Christianity is the power of the Gospel to change the individual and one’s personal circumstances, and a search for justice and love of God for the poor and marginalised.

There is tremendous revival in the Church as is evidenced by multiplication of new Pentecostal Christian groups and charismatic renewal within Protestant and Catholic Christianities.¹¹ Unfortunately for Africa, numerical growth has not resulted into a transforming spirituality that fosters Christian and national identity. Ethnicity is a demon threatening to tear not only the nation state apart, but also the Church.

⁷ Mary Louise Norpel, ‘Diakonia, the Mission of the Church.’ [Available at: <https://www.theway.org.u.k/Back/s017Norpel.pdf>].

⁸ Norpel, ‘Diakonia, the Mission of the Church’. p. 15.

⁹ World Council of Churches, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 2013), p. 36.

¹⁰ World Council of Churches, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, p. 36.

¹¹ David B. Barrett et al. *World Christian Encyclopedia: Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World*. Vol. 1, Second edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 5.

In the Lineamenta¹² (preparatory document for the Second Special Assembly for Africa, for the Catholic Church), the promotion of the Kingdom of God, which is reconciliation, justice and peace is regarded as crucial to the identity and relevance of the Church in Africa; hence the choice of these issues in the theme of the assembly. The document identifies social-economic, cultural, socio-political concerns, ecumenism, minorities, migration, inter-religious dialogue, violence, gender injustice, sexual and gender-based violence and environmental degradation among others as crucial issues for the Church to address if her missionary engagement is to be fruitful. Her participation in God's mission and diakonia has been questioned and this calls for an evaluation and reconstruction of her mission theology and practice.

The All Africa Conference of Churches General Assembly that was held in Kigali, Rwanda in 2018, identified these same issues as critical for the mission of the Church in Africa. The churches' involvement in peacebuilding, conflict resolution, peace and civic education, anti-gun campaigns and advocacy for human rights and economic justice is remarkable. However, more spirited efforts are required centred on Gospel values. To continually be relevant, the church needs to continue her advocacy for social justice, equitable distribution of resources and the promotion of the dignity of the person in teaching and practice. Economic growth in some countries like Nigeria, Kenya, Malawi, Zambia, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda in the last twelve years has not translated to a marked improvement in the livelihoods of people. It has widened the gap between the rich and poor, and the frustration of the people has been expressed through ethnic and xenophobic violence as witnessed in South Africa in the last few years.

The Church should create a balance between service provision, proclamation of the Gospel and being prophetic. There should be deeper pastoral involvement that will foster a faith life, catechesis of children and adults, prayerful liturgies, spiritual depth of families and consequent involvement of a genuinely and authentically African Church. The Church especially former mission churches require to be more self-reliant in theology, mission practice and otherwise. This calls for a creative and dynamic view of diakonia and accountability even in church affairs. Peter Henriot writing about the Catholic Church in Zambia observes, '[...] we still have a long way to go before we can say that mechanisms of participation, guarantee of human rights and openness of decision making are fully adopted in the Church.'¹³ This situation calls for the Church to be servant and to exercise diakonic praxis that is empowering and furthers the Kingdom of God in this context. What does healing in this context mean for the Church in Africa? It is to this that we shall now turn.

Defining Healing

The word health conveys the idea of being 'hale' that is possessing soundness or wholeness. In its general usage, it means the absence of disease. Being 'hale' or healthy is a condition that is highly valued and striven for by every human being. Wilson states that, 'health is a concept like truth which cannot be defined. To define it is to kill it; nor can it be possessed. It can only be shared'.¹⁴ In so saying, Wilson is expressing the complexity of the term, for it can be variously described. It may be thought of as the extent of an individual's continuing physical, emotional, mental, and social ability to cope with their environment. On the other hand, he argues that, 'health can never be equated with human wellness and an absence of disease. Health is to do with the totality of creation and with the Creator Himself'.¹⁵ In offering an apparently utopian view, the World Health Organization (WHO), perceives health to mean, 'a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely absence of disease or infirmity'.¹⁶

¹² Synod of Bishops II Special Assembly for Africa, *Lineamenta: The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace*. (Nairobi: Paulines, 2006). The Synod was held in Rome in October 2009.

¹³ Peter Henriot, "AMECEA and the Second African Synod", *New People*, No. 114 (May-June 2008), 20.17.

¹⁴ M. Wilson. *Health is for People*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 117.

¹⁵ M. Maddock, *The Healing Ministry of the Church*. (London: SPCK, 1981), p. 7.

¹⁶ Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1974, vol 18, p.368.

It follows from this definition that being whole or possessing health has individual, human, social, environmental, spiritual and cosmic dimensions. Wholeness is experienced by human beings at different levels; in rapport with nature, in bodily health, in expectation of survival after death, in social and psychic integration and in the sphere of human morality and the world of cosmic forces.¹⁷ The human being is not a fragmentation but a complete entity, needing healing for their whole being; spiritually, socially, physically, psychologically and in relationship with their environment. It is in view of this that the holistic approach to healing is advocated. Any illness or imbalance in the individual or society or in the cosmic realm generates physical, emotional, spiritual and psychological disharmony.

In traditional African society, health is conceived as more than physical well-being. It is a state that entails mental, physical, spiritual, social, and cosmic harmony. Having health evokes equilibrium in all these dimensions. It is associated with all that is positively valued in life. It is also a sign of correct relationship between people and one another, with the environment and God. Health is understood more in a social than a biological sense. According to Appiah-Kubi, 'health is not an isolated phenomenon but part of the entire magico-religious fabric'.¹⁸

Illness on the other hand is regarded as a misfortune and is a sign that one has fallen out of the (already described) delicate balance. It is seen as a social sanction and therefore peaceful living with one's neighbours, observing social norms and living in harmony with one's environment and God, spirits and ancestors, is essential to protect oneself from disease and illness.¹⁹ Illness is often attributed to breaking of taboos, social norms, curses by parents, offending God, spirits and ancestors, witchcraft, sorcery and possession by evil spirits. Healing is mediated by healing specialists through healing rituals. Healing ceremonies combine herbal medication, psychotherapy, psychology and religion. It involves confession, atonement, restitution, forgiveness and reconciliation. This world view and understanding of healing, still colours and influences Africans' search for healing. The churches in Africa are now more than ever before responding to the need for health and healing through various healing ministries and retreats and medical interventions. This is true of the mainline churches, Pentecostal and African Instituted churches. What do the scriptures say about healing? It is to this that we shall now turn.

The Bible and Healing

There are several references to healing in the Old Testament. In Exodus 15:26 we read, 'for I am the Lord your healer'. There are references to physical healing. For example, Moses prayed for the healing of Miriam from Leprosy (Numbers 12:13). King Hezekiah, sick and at the point of death, also prayed and was promised and given healing by God (2 Kings, 20:1-5). Medical care is also indicated by the law (Ex. 21:18-19), which required that a man who injured another in a quarrel so that he became bed-ridden, 'shall pay for his loss of time and shall be thoroughly healed'. The Old Testament appears to primarily focus on physical healing. However, there are also references to spiritual healing.²⁰ In Hebrew society, disease was seen as a punishment from God due to sin or disobedience. Other factors were also envisaged though not emphasised, for example, the work of the devil (Job 2:7), spirit of deafness or dumbness (Mark 9:17) and parental sin (John 9:2).

¹⁷ Aylward Shorter, *Jesus and the Witch Doctor: An Approach to Healing and Wholeness*. (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1985).

¹⁸ Kofi Appiah-Kubi, *Man Cures God Heals: Religion and Medical Practice among the Akan of Ghana*. (New York: Friendship Press, 1981) p. 78.

¹⁹ Philomena Njeri Mwaura. "Healing as a Pastoral Concern". In Douglas W. Waruta and Hannah W. Kinoti (eds.), *Pastoral Care in Africa: Challenging Essays in Pastoral Theology*. (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1994). 67.

²⁰ Kilian McDonnell, *Presence, Power, Praise Documents on the Charismatic Renewal*. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press), p. 116.

As sickness was attributed to spiritual causes, healing was also a spiritual matter. The Bible constantly implies that there is a relationship between sin and sickness and forgiveness and health. Health is to be obtained by observing the commandments. If this observance was undertaken consistently, the blessing of material prosperity was added to physical and material health (Dt. 28:1-6). This view is still very popular in Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in Africa.

In the New Testament, Jesus' ministry is described in terms of preaching, teaching and healing (Mt. 4:23-24). Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, preaching the gospel of the Kingdom, healing every infirmity among the people and casting out demons. It is clear from the gospels that healing was an integral part of Jesus' mission. In both preaching and healing, Jesus acted with authority (Mt. 7:28-29) and he claimed for himself the authority to forgive sins and to heal (Mt. 9:1-8). When Jesus sent the twelve, he gave them the same twofold mission; to preach the kingdom of God and heal (Lk. 9:1-2); Mt. 10:7-8). The New Testament seems to confirm that, healing is intended to be part of his disciples work as well and consequently the universal church.

The Church's Role in Healing in Africa

Since the coming of Christian missionaries to Africa in the 19th and 20th centuries, health and healing has been an integral part of their diakonia. The missionaries were faithful to Jesus Christ's commission to preach the Good News, teach and heal the sick. The Commission to heal was fulfilled through the establishment of hospitals, clinics and pastoral care. The success of the Church in Africa was mainly in part, due to the preaching of a Healer-Saviour who redeemed human-kind not only from physical ailments but also the dehumanising conditions of life.

There were missionaries who adopted a holistic approach in their encounter with the people, but in general, missionaries preached a spiritual salvation. This approach tended to ignore the totality of the African experience, especially their struggle with witchcraft and culturally related problems. As Archbishop Milingo observes, no approach to healing that ignores the African world-view can be successful in Africa. This lacuna, left by the missionaries and mainline churches, is being filled by African Instituted Churches and Charismatic and Pentecostal Churches whose deliverance and healing ministries are very well developed and appealing. Their approach to healing resonates well with healing in the traditional African worldview which addresses all realms of being. In these churches, healing not only sought for physical and mental illnesses but also for broken relationships, marital conflicts, sickness with a mystical source, problems in the work place, joblessness, economic and financial problems and any other problems that deny people the ability to live in peace, realise their hopes, ambitions and full human potential.²¹ Nevertheless, the mainline churches all over Africa are now also incorporating healing and deliverance in their ministries, for example in the Charismatic Renewal Movements. It is imperative from the above discussion that in its healing ministry, the Church should attend to all levels of human caring that is, physical, moral, spiritual and social. A good diakonia should promote the understanding of life in all its fullness. It should be driven by a quest for justice in every sense and the upholding of human dignity.

The churches, especially the mainline churches and faith-based organisations, have used considerable resources in relief, rehabilitation work and medical care. The Catholic Church, for example, has contributed immensely to the Kenya's health care and social support systems through its 513 hospitals and clinics, 21 "leper colonies," 117 homes for the elderly, sick, or people with disabilities, 1,713 orphanages and nurseries, and 110 family advisory centres. On the whole, the churches in Kenya own and run 45% of the health care services in the country. Programmes for people living with HIV and AIDS exist that provide not only medical services but home-based care and spiritual accompaniment as well. Since the out-break of COVID-19 early

²¹ Mwaura, 'Healing as a Pastoral Concern', p. 71.

in 2020, the churches continue to provide humanitarian support to the vulnerable and medical care for the sick in their hospitals.

The churches have also played key roles in condemning injustices in every sphere of society, advocating for climate justice and environmental conservation. The Church should therefore continue to be a 'shepherd' of God's flock and address herself to alleviating suffering and enabling the realisation of the Kingdom of God. She must administer healing that will promote harmony in the lives of individuals, community and the environment. Through the diakonia of healing, Jesus' compassion and healing power is realised. Healing diakonia involves consoling those in pain, and showing them compassion.

Currently, as Africa and, indeed, the whole world is tottering due to the burden of COVID-19 and other tragic human agonies, there is need for a system of support which can only be given by the Church. The Church as hierarchy and people of God has a responsibility to reach out to persons in trouble wherever they are. Just like during the crisis of HIV and AIDS when there were many misconceptions about the causes, nature and transmission of the disease, there are similar challenges with the COVID-19. Unlike HIV and AIDS, COVID-19 has far-reaching ramifications socially, economically and health-wise. Economic growth has slowed down because of the lockdowns, many jobs have been lost, and families who were recently able to earn their livelihoods have now been reduced to beggars because their businesses have shut down. Churches which have been places of refuge have also shut down to avoid crowding and transmission of the disease. In these circumstances, it behoves the Church to redefine her diakonic mission. How can she still be a beacon of hope, a mediator of salvation, a healer to the sick and dying, a comfort to the families? The challenge of the Church today is to recognise the fears, dangers and problems facing her members and to find solutions that are inspired by the Gospel. God has the power to heal and the onus is upon Christians to heed St. Paul's advice to the Philippians, 'Have no anxiety about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, and let your requests be made known to God' (Phil. 4:6). As we have argued in this paper, healing is holistic and covers not only the physical aspects but the spiritual, social and environmental as well. An ideal diakonia of healing therefore should address all dimensions of being and engage with the African world-view.

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61. HEALTH AND HEALING AS KEY CONCERNS IN CHURCHES DIACONIA IN WEST AFRICA

Godwin Gladson Delase Ampony¹

Introduction

This article presents a practical combination of both health and healing in the church's discharge of its mission and vision. It is written from the context of Ghana in West Africa and may therefore share some similarities with respect to the topic in other West African countries and/or the whole African continent. The article considers the key definition of health and healing, presents some biblical concepts of health and healing, some of the intervention areas by the church as diaconic action, institutionalisation of health and healing by the church, some practical examples, and then some challenges.

Health and Healing as Defined

The concept of health and healing has over the past two to three decades received much recognition in the public spheres. This is not to say however, that health or healing are new terms. What is new is rather the effective combination of the two terms and the observation of their interconnectedness. Swartley² asserted that writing on the topic of health and healing is a daunting task. In his opinion, healthcare, i.e. medicine, has an overriding debate in the present day. On one side of the argument, the Consultation on Faith, Healing and Mission, which was held in Ghana in the year 2002 by the World Council of Churches, came to a common conviction that "Healing, which is more than curing, comes from God, who works through various means".³ This includes "instant healing or deliverance from evil spirits, as well as medical service or long-term pastoral accompaniment, reconciliation and the healing of memories".⁴ This brings us to the point of recognition that the end result of healthcare is healing in the most comprehensive sense of the word, i.e. in the sense of "Shalom". While some will argue that ill-health or sickness is purely an issue of science and therefore needs only biological experts, another school of thought also argues that sickness or ill-health will be overcome by the practice of one's faith in the Supreme Being for recovery. It is therefore worth noting that the combination of health and healing forms a major part of the church's mission. This is supported by the WCC which in its programme on Health and Healing stated: "Health and healing were a central feature of Jesus' ministry and of his call to his followers, and the church has been engaged in health services for centuries".⁵ The mission of diaconia is embedded in the very nature of the church and it cannot be separated from the Great Commission of Christ to the Church which includes health and healing.⁶

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² Willard M. Swartley, *Health, Healing and the Church's Mission: Biblical Perspectives and Moral Priorities*. (Illinois: IVP Academic-Intersity Press Downers Grove, 2012), p. 11.

³ http://www.pctii.org/wcc/press/Accra_2002.html para. 3.

⁴ World Council of Churches. Consultation on faith, healing and mission – Ghana

<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/mission-and-evangelism/consultation-on-faith-healing-and-mission-ghana>.

⁵ World Council of Churches. Health and Healing. <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/health-and-healing>.

⁶ Kjell Nordstokke (ed) *Diakonia in context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment – An LWF Contribution to the Understanding and Practice of Diakonia*. (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2009), pp. 27-31.

According to the WHO constitution, “health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”.⁷ This definition refers to a more limited part of the wholeness of a person. WHO further argues that “unequal development in different countries in the promotion of health and control of disease, especially communicable disease is a common danger”.⁸ This assertion is visible between different countries, but also within a country; between urban and rural societies, there often is a huge healthcare gap.

In the opinion of World Council of Churches, however, it is asserted that “health is more than physical and mental well-being, and that healing is not primarily medical”.⁹ The Christian Medical Commission-CMC of the World Council of Churches, which was founded in 1968, later provided a broader definition for health and stated; “Health is a dynamic state of wellbeing of the individual and the society; of physical, mental, spiritual, economic, political and social wellbeing; of being in harmony with each other, with the material environment and with God”.¹⁰ This definition provides a broader and comprehensive perspective of how health is perceived by the Christian community and in this way it is also close to the biblical concept of “Shalom”.

Biblical Concept of Health and Healing

The biblical concept of health and healing is found in the two Testaments of the Bible. For example, in Leviticus. 11:1-47 and 14:1-57 of the Old Testament, the prohibition of the Israelites from eating the meat of certain animals was based on grounds of good health. It is believed that some of these forbidden meats were carrying diseases to cause ill-health to the human body, apart from its spiritual underpinning reasons.

Secondly, the practice of isolation and the creation of isolation centres in the present day was equally practiced in the Old Testament days. In Leviticus 13, the priest, Aaron was mandated by God to examine the persons believed that have contracted one of the ancient communicable diseases which is now referred to as one of the Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs).¹¹ Based on the final decision from the priest, the person will be isolated or let go if found non-infected.

In the New Testament, the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ and the apostles comprised of health and healing. The synoptic recorded vivid accounts of Jesus’ healing encounter with the people of His time. White referred to Christ as the true medical missionary and asserts that “He came into the world as the unwearied servant of human need”.¹² Emphasising on this, she referenced Matthew 8:17b “He took our infirmities and bore our diseases”. Christ came to give the world a life in its fullness. To remove the disease, wretchedness, sin from humanity and reconcile us back to God.¹³ Christ dealt with different ill-health conditions including fever, blindness, leprosy, lameness, haemorrhage, dumb and deafness, and paralysis among others.¹⁴ Jakob stated “*to consider the cure of isolated physical or psychological symptoms as the only aim of Jesus’ healings would contradict the biblical anthropology. In the Bible, the human being is seen as an entity of the body, mind and soul. Health and disease always affect a human being as an entity. Therefore, to be healed in the*

⁷ WHO Constitution: <https://www.who.int/about/who-we-are/constitution>.

⁸ WHO Constitution: <https://www.who.int/about/who-we-are/constitution>.

⁹ World Council of Churches-WCC. Health and Healing. <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/health-and-healing>.

¹⁰ Beate Jakob, We can Expect Great Things from God: The Relation between Faith and Healing. International Review of Mission- World Council of Churches. (2004):466.

¹¹ World Health Organization-WHO. Neglected tropical disease. https://www.who.int/neglected_diseases/diseases/en/

¹² Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Health and Healing*. (2004), pp. 13-14.

¹³ Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Health and Healing*. (2004), p. 14.

¹⁴ Recorded in the Synoptic.

biblical sense could never be understood as the cure of isolated symptoms".¹⁵ In the Ewe language in Ghana, it is often said, "Agbe enye Ame" which literally means a healthy life makes a person whole. These biblical practices and patterns as well as the biblical forms of dealing with illness have a major impact on the diaconia of the church in Africa, as are visible in its responses to health and healing and its orientation towards comprehensiveness in many of the intervention areas.

Cultural Dimensions of Health and Healing

The influence of culture and cultural practices are visible in all spheres of our society and human lives. Culture has accounted for human actions, responses, thinking, and work life, programmes and projects implementations. Young and Koopsen said "culture can be learned from birth through language and socialisation; it is dynamic and changing, and it continually adapts to the environment, social and historical context, technology and resources".¹⁶ In the Ghanaian and African context, health and healing issues are also interpreted from the cultural perspectives or cultural connotations and meanings are given to ill-health or good health. Young and Koopsen assert that, "culture has a significant impact on health behaviours, health problems; and actions taken to promote, maintain, or restore health".¹⁷ The praxis of diaconia takes into perspectives all sensitive elements of culture in the discharge of health and healing interventions.

Intervention Areas

Most of the Churches in West Africa and, indeed, the whole African continent provide spiritual as well as physical support services to their constituents. The presence and intervention of churches in the well-being of the communities have had many positive impacts.

Long before the government started constructing health facilities, churches had already built hospitals and clinics in very remote areas to meet the health needs of the inhabitants. Bartmann observed that "the whole healthcare systems of many African and Asian countries were pioneered by Christian churches, before States started to take some part in providing health services in the 60s and 70s".¹⁸

As a diaconic action, the church played and is still playing a pivotal role in HIV and AIDS prevention, treatment, care and support intervention programmes. The All Africa Heads of Churches Summit on HIV and AIDS (2003) committed themselves to networking at all levels to combat HIV and AIDS on the African continent.¹⁹ This was observed from the national, regional, district and local council of churches' responses in awareness to the creation, treatment, care and support, advocacy and formation of various networks. One such national country response in Ghana is the representation of the Christian and Muslim Community on the governing board of the Ghana AIDS Commission.²⁰

A diaconic action of chaplaincy services was also instituted within the health facilities to meet the spiritual needs of patients who were on admission and could not participate in worship service. The chaplains are integrated to become part of the health facility's organisational structure indicating its importance within the

¹⁵ Jakob, Beate. "We can Expect Great Things from God: The Relation between Faith and Healing." *International Review of Mission* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2004), pp. 458-473.

¹⁶ Caroline Young, and Cyndie Koopsen, *Spirituality, Health, and Healing*. (Burlington, MA: Jones & Bartlett Learning, 2005).

¹⁷ Young and Koopsen, *Spirituality, Health, and Healing*.

¹⁸ Peter Bartmann, Beate Jakob, Ulrich Laepple, Dietrich Werner, "Health, Healing and Spirituality. The Future of the Church's Ministry of Healing," 29th May 2020, Available at:

https://difaem.de/uploads/tx_bfactorpublikationen/20081107Health_Healing_and_Spirituality.pdf.

¹⁹ World Health Organization-International. <https://www.who.int/3by5/en/churchessummitstatement.pdf>.

²⁰ Ghana AIDS Commission-GAC. Governing Board. <https://www.ghanaisds.gov.gh/pages/governing-board>.

facility. On the other hand, the hospital administrations provide specific visiting hours within which some of the clergy outside the chaplaincy of the facility would visit the wards to offer prayers for the sick (especially those belonging to their denomination or congregation) and to administer the Eucharist.

In Togo, the Eglise Evangélique Presbytérienne du Togo (EEPT) undertakes a diaconic activity of visiting the CHU Tokoin hospital in Lome to provide food, clothing and toiletry support to patients suffering from AIDS and Tuberculosis. Oftentimes in Africa, people suffering from AIDS are stigmatised and abandoned by families. The church, therefore, takes the responsibility in many instances to provide support for the treatment of AIDS patients.²¹

Establishment of Prayer Camps

The insurgence of prayer camps in Ghana and across the African continent has been visible over the last decade. Prayer camps became an important part of the extension of health and healing for many denominations in Africa. The prayer camps provide services such as spiritual guidance for psychological problems and ill-health.²² A major research result (Arias, Taylor, Ofori-Atta, and Bradley, 2016) indicated that, due to the inadequate healthcare service for mental health patients, prayer camps became an alternative for many families seeking restoration of health for their loved ones.²³ The very well established prayer camps also provide health counselling for attendees and refer them to health facilities in many cases after prayers are offered for them.

In 2020, during the Coronavirus pandemic that hit the world, the Church of Pentecost, one of the largest churches in Ghana, gave out their evangelism cinema vans to be used by government for public education in the rural areas.²⁴

The Institutions of Health

The institution of the church in Africa came not only with the preaching of gospel in words but also in deeds. The early missionaries who came to the African continent, mostly from Europe, were not only preachers of the gospel but also the demonstration of the gospel through their various professions such as medical practitioners, joineries, agriculturalists, and handcrafts. In this light, many facilities were established through the continent in order to cater for the health of the people. For example, in Ghana, church-owned health infrastructure is about 7% of the overall health facilities, providing health services to 30-40% of the population in an annual record of about 6 million people.²⁵

²¹ Norddeutsche Mission. Krankenhaus-Seelsorge in Lomé (MP 1903)

<http://www.norddeutsche-mission.de/en/programmes/togo/krankenhaus-seelsorge-in-lome/>.

²² Norddeutsche Mission. Spirituelles Heilungszentrum in Ghana (MP 1610).

<http://www.norddeutsche-mission.de/en/programmes/ghana/spirituelles-heilungszentrum/>

²³ D. Arias, L. Taylor, A. Ofori-Atta, E.H. Bradley (2016) Prayer Camps and Biomedical Care in Ghana: Is Collaboration in Mental Health Care Possible? PLoS ONE 11(9) [Available at: e0162305.doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0162305].

²⁴ *Myjoyonline.com*. "Pentecost Church donates 10 Vans to support NCCE's Public education on coronavirus".

<https://www.myjoyonline.com/news/national/pentecost-church-donates-10-vans-to-support-ncces-public-education-on-coronavirus/>.

²⁵ *Stella*, "CHAG-Christian Health Association of Ghana", <https://stellafutura.com/portfolio-posts/chag-christian-health-association-of-ghana/>.

Christian Health Association of Ghana – CHAG

The Christian Health Association of Ghana – CHAG is the network of 344 health facilities and health training institutions owned by 33 different church denominations in Ghana.²⁶ As a result of its vast geographical coverage in the country, it is recognised as the second largest provider of health services in the country, second to State owned, and it has a presence in 188 districts across all 16 regions of the country.²⁷ The vision of CHAG states “A healthy nation, Christ’s Healing Ministry Fulfilled” and with its Mission of “promoting the healing ministry of Christ and be a reliable partner in the Health Sector in providing the health needs of the people in Ghana in fulfilment of Christ’s mandate to heal the sick”.²⁸ The diaconic action of CHAG in healthcare provision is visible in its policy direction in the Memorandum of Understanding it has signed with the government of Ghana.

Its very first policy direction is to “improve the health status of people living in Ghana, especially the marginalised and the poorest of the poor, in fulfilment of Christ healing ministry”. In addition, it sought to “improve the quality of services and financial access for users of primary healthcare and hospital services especially for the very poor and the deprived”.²⁹ CHAG is therefore committed to the diaconic action of reaching out to the poor and the weak in society.

Christian Health Association of Liberia (CHAL)

CHAL, like its sister-counterpart CHAG, also works with the grassroots. Below is an example as published by the German Institute for Medical Mission (DIFÄM):³⁰ The Christian Health Association of Liberia (CHAL) organises special health seminars and workshops for evangelists and catechists, who pass on the acquired knowledge during their regular travels to the villages. Health messages are thus transmitted to the grassroots. In the village of Ndambo, the evangelists, together with the village people, analysed the health problems and taught the preparation of home-made rehydration solution. As a result, children no longer died of diarrhoea dehydration. They also dug wells to provide safe water, thereby reducing the problem of diarrhoea among the people. Through proper education on the value of immunisation and good nutrition, they were able to reduce the infant mortality rate. The people of Ndambo have thus learned that health is not just a medical matter. It is possible for the community to gain control over diseases that formerly struck fear in the heart. Slowly, the message of God’s love is being experienced because the children are not dying as before.

Africa Christian Health Associations Platform – ACHAP

The ACHAP “is an advocacy and network platform for Christian Health Associations (CHAs) and Church Health Networks from Sub-Saharan Africa. The platform was established through the inspiration and support of World Council of Churches in 2007”.³¹ ACHAP’s primary aim is to promote continued, effective and

²⁶ Stella, “CHAG-Christian Health Association of Ghana”, <https://stellafutura.com/portfolio-posts/chag-christian-health-association-of-ghana/>.

²⁷ Stella, “CHAG-Christian Health Association of Ghana”, <https://stellafutura.com/portfolio-posts/chag-christian-health-association-of-ghana/>.

²⁸ <https://www.chag.org.gh/>.

²⁹ Ministry of Health-MOH, Christian Health Association of Ghana-CHAG. Memorandum of Understanding and Administrative Instructions. <https://www.nchs.org.gh/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/MOH-CHAG-MoU.pdf> p. 4.

³⁰ German Institute for Medical Mission- DIFÄM. “Healing and Wholeness. The Churches’ Role in Health”, CMC, Genf 1990, i-iv. 1-40. Available at:

https://difaem.de/fileadmin/Dokumente/Publikationen/Dokumente_AErztliche_Mission/healing_wholeness.pdf.

³¹ Africa Christian Health Associations Platform, “History of ACHAP”, <https://africachap.org/about-the-achap/history-of-achap/>.

efficient engagement of Church Health Services in Africa towards achieving access to quality healthcare among members of the platform and in Africa at large.³² It can be asserted that the church and ecumenical bodies are very much interested in the wholeness of every single individual. These established professional bodies combine both health-medicine and healing-spirituality to meet the well-being goal of all people.

Personal Experience while on Duty

In 2014, I travelled to one of our clinics in a hard-to-reach community called Bladjai in the northern part of the Ghana. The clinic, which is the only one in the catchment area, serves 14 other communities with about 15 000 inhabitants. I was on my quarterly monitoring duty when a one-year child was brought to the clinic for treatment. While the midwife was preparing first-aid for him, she observed quickly that the child was dying, was short of breath and was unable to move any part of his body. At that moment, something more than the medicine at hand was needed. I was called immediately by the midwife to come and offer prayers for the child. All other clinic activities halted and, in the midst of the other patients, I took the child in my arms knelt down and prayed fervently to God for His healing power for the child. After some moments of prayer, I could observe life coming back to the child and the people present started giving thanks to God. The child was revived by God's healing hands and the midwife continued with her medication.³³ This is one of the classical examples why health-medicine and healing-spiritual cannot be separated from each other in the African context.

Some Key Challenges

Amidst the successes of the integration of health-medicine and healing-spirituality, it is not without some challenges. Although prayer camps play a major role in the health and healing process of the people, many of them have also serious human right violations, due to their unregulated nature of operations of the various denominational umbrella bodies. The church also has a challenge of mobilisation of adequate resources to meet the increasing health and healing needs of the society in all forms. This has led to Mission-owned health facilities being taken over by national governments.

Conclusion

The subject of health and healing is much wider than this article can do justice. It is important to emphasise that health and healing is one of the foundations of the churches' diaconic action. Churches in West Africa have embraced and are imitating the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ in meeting the soul, spirit, and body of the individual person. This has been done through various intervention programs both at the local congregation as well as in formally established institutions. Both medical and faith interventions are paramount to achieving total wellness of a person. As rightly noted by Jakob, it holds true that, although there are different forms of health and healing, all healing comes from God and that God heals through skills and science, through spiritual gifts, through prayers of all Christians and through the sacraments.³⁴

³² Africa Christian Health Associations Platform, "History of ACHAP", <https://africachap.org/about-the-achap/history-of-achap/>.

³³ Practical experience by the author of this article.

³⁴ Beate Jakob, "We can Expect Great Things from God: The Relation between Faith and Healing". *International Review of Mission* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2004), p. 467.

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62. MENTAL HEALTH AS A TASK OF A DIACONAL CHURCH AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Beate Jakob¹

Introduction

For almost 110 years, the German Institute for Medical Mission (DIFAEM)² has been engaged in promoting Christian health services worldwide – in partnership with Christian churches and organisations. DIFAEM’s work is based on the conviction that Christians, Christian communities and churches have a healing ministry which is an essential part of their mission, and that they can contribute to health in a specific way. The health projects that DIFAEM develops and supports reflect a dynamic and holistic concept of health and healing that includes the spiritual and social dimension of health.³

In the implementation of health projects together with partners, DIFAEM applies the principles of Primary Health Care the World Health Organization (WHO) promoted in 1978.⁴ Primary Health Care is a people-centred bottom-up approach to health whereby people at local level are the main actors. Instead of offering interventions in a top-down manner, PHC facilitates participation and gives space for solutions created and owned by communities which use their own strengths. Thus, the former selective and mostly curative approach to health has been broadened by measures that promote health and prevent ill-health. Primary Health Care reflects the knowledge that health and healing are not only and sometimes not primarily medical issues. The improvement of health needs a comprehensive multidimensional approach. In 2008, 30 years after the proclamation of Primary Health Care, the WHO’s World Health Report entitled “Primary Health Care Now more than ever” strongly advocated for the revitalisation of Primary Health Care.⁵

In 2014, DIFAEM hosted an international symposium on “Christian Responses to Health and Development”.⁶ The main questions the participants discussed were: “What are the characteristics of Christian health services in our time and how can Christian health services become partners of the formal health system?” Among the main characteristics of Christian health services that the participants identified were the inclusion of the spiritual dimension in health care, and the focus on community-based approaches to health.

What Faith Communities Can Contribute to Health – the “Religious Health Assets” Model

Churches and Christian communities significantly contribute to health, especially in resource limited settings. However, Christian health services are not always aligned with the formal health system. While most governments appreciate Christian health services, only a few are ready to allocate an appropriate share of the national health budget to the health work of the churches. Why? These are just some of the reasons:

- Historically, the churches themselves did not actively seek a close cooperation with the formal health system, especially as long as they had enough funds from other, mostly overseas, sources.
- So far, the churches’ contribution to health has not been documented properly. Most of their huge health work, especially the work of communities, is literally not “on the map”.

¹ Dr. Beate Jakob is trained both as a medical doctor and a Roman Catholic theologian. She has worked as senior consultant until 2020 with the German Institute for Medical Mission in Tübingen, Germany.

² www.difaem.de.

³ Cf. Jakob/Laepfle, *Gesundheit*.

⁴ Online: http://www.who.int/topics/primary_health_care/en/.

⁵ World Health Organization, *Primary Health Care*.

⁶ See: https://difaem.de/uploads/tx_bfactorpublikationen/Conference_Documentation_02.pdf.

- Sometimes, there has also been a problem of communication between governments and the churches. Representatives of the governments might say that, “These church people are people of good will who do a lot of good. We need them. But nobody knows exactly what they are doing. It’s sometimes even difficult to understand them as they use their own faith language.”
- Moreover, faith communities themselves often are not aware of what they actually contribute to health.

How then can we understand and document the contribution of faith communities to health? How can we make this contribution known to the communities themselves as well as the public? How can we bring church health services on the map? These questions led to establishing the “African Religious Health Assets Programme” (ARHAP) in 2001 – today: “International Religious Health Assets Programme” (IRHAP).⁷ IRHAP is a collaborative research network based at the University of Cape Town. Its aim is to document the contribution of religion and of religious communities to health, and to align church-based health services with the formal health system.

According to IRHAP, faith communities contribute to health because they own “Religious Health Assets” (RHAs). RHAs are strengths, potentials, resources – in Biblical terms, it is the “talents” of faith communities that promote health. Tangible or visible health assets of faith communities like the provision of medical services or groups caring for others are well known and appreciated. In addition, faith communities own so-called intangible, invisible health assets. These are rooted in the spiritual dimension and the motivational and mobilising capacity of faith communities. These assets like trust, motivation, credibility, compassion, mutual support, honesty, prayer, moral authority, etc. can play an important part in fostering the health of individuals and communities. However, as it is difficult to assess these assets and to measure their impact on health, they are often overlooked.

Within the framework of IRHAP’s research programme, a matrix to make the nature of religious health assets understandable was developed. Of course, this matrix reflects only a theory, but it is a helpful concept to widen our perception of the health assets owned by faith communities.

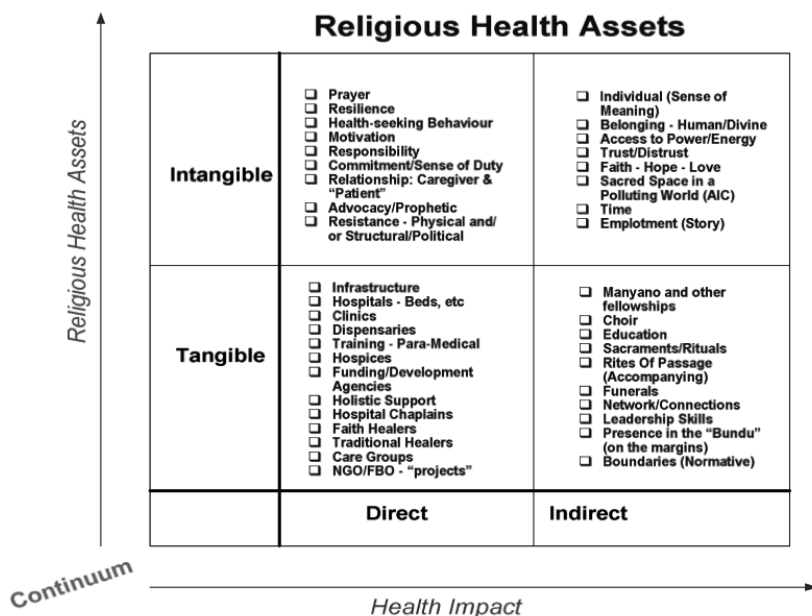


Figure 1: Cochrane 2006

⁷ <http://www.irhap.uct.ac.za/>.

This matrix includes four quadrants. Along the vertical axis are the tangible and intangible health assets. Along its horizontal axis the matrix distinguishes between assets with a direct and those with an indirect health outcome.⁸

Talking about the impact on health, one usually refers to the assets in the bottom-left quadrant of the matrix which are the tangible health assets with a direct positive impact on health, e.g. hospitals, care are counselling groups etc. These assets can be measured and quantified. Among the tangible health assets having an indirect impact on health are the groups who foster relationships, like the choir which can also have a positive impact on health, and rituals. These tangible assets are usually not regarded as health promoting. Nevertheless, they often do have a positive impact on health.

The two upper quadrants refer to intangible religious health assets, graded according to their direct or indirect impact on health – like prayer and resilience which are directly related to health, and a sense of meaning and faith/hope/love which are assets not directly linked to health, but with a major impact on health. These assets are much more difficult to assess than the tangible ones as they are not quantifiable but have to be assessed through qualitative methods.

In terms of mental health, it is especially these intangible religious health assets that are important. The RHA matrix was initially designed to demonstrate and document the contribution of faith communities to health with regard to HIV/AIDS. For people affected by HIV/AIDS, it is obviously very important to have access to treatment and care. However, we also know that belonging to a social network as well as having hope and trust affects these patients' physical significantly, especially their mental health.

The concept of Religious Health Assets helps to make the comprehensive contribution of faith communities to health understandable. Health promotion at community level goes beyond providing tangible health services and also goes beyond counselling and praying for the sick. Moreover, this concept demonstrates that the genuine contribution of faith communities to health is not a special task, an add-on to what is being done already. The majority of these religious health assets, especially the intangible ones, are an integral part of everyday life of the community. The community as a social network and a place of worship is a healing place in itself.

Integration of Mental Health in Community-based Approaches – A Brief Overview on DIFAEM's Projects in Countries of the Global South

So far, mental health has not really been included in community-based approaches in the so-called low-income countries. A graph given in the WHO Mental Health Atlas 2011 shows the rate of outpatient mental health facilities per 100 000 people with regard to the World Bank Income Groups. Globally, there are 0.61 outpatient facilities per 100,000 population. This figure varies widely at the regional level, with the highest rates of facilities in Europe and Western Pacific Region (both 1.47), and the lowest rate on the African continent (0.06).⁹

DIFAEM did not focus on mental health either in its Primary Health Care projects over the past decades. There is plenty of experience with community-based approaches in projects primarily addressing physical health issues like HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and Ebola as well as mother and child health. In actuality most of the community-based projects have included a mental health component from the beginning, or mental health issues emerged during project implementation. The WHO was right when they coined the sentence: "No health without mental health".¹⁰

⁸ Jim Cochrane: "Religious Health Assets (RHAs) – Conceptual and Theoretical Framework," in: Difäm (ed), *Religion, Faith and Public Health. Documentation on a Consultation at Difäm- German Institute for Medical Mission*, 9-11 February 2006, Tübingen: Difäm, 2006, pp. 14-45: p. 24.

⁹ *Mental Health Atlas 2011*, p.36, in: http://www.who.int/mental_health/publications/mental_health_atlas_2011/en/.

¹⁰ Cf. WHO, Fact sheet: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs220/en/>.

To give some examples:

In the *Democratic Republic of the Congo*, DIFAEM runs projects for traumatised women. These women need medical treatment like restorative surgeries, financial support and they surely benefit from trainings and education. To be healed, they need a healing community that takes them up and helps them to gradually regain hope, trust and dignity.

In the *Ebola work in West Africa* during the acute phase of the epidemic, the focus was on bringing the epidemic to a halt by providing protection materials and by training health workers and people in the communities. However, after this first phase, it appeared that “Ebola survivors” and many health workers are severely traumatised. According to estimates of church partners in Liberia and Sierra Leone, up to 60 percent of Ebola survivors suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. For them, too, the community will be of help through the above mentioned intangible direct and indirect health assets.

In *Raxaul, India*, a town close to the border with Nepal, DIFAEM has been supporting a community-based HIV/AIDS project of a Christian hospital since 2010. Last year, the project team came up with a project proposal towards integrating mental health in this community-based project. They had realised that there is a high and growing rate of depression and suicide in the catchment area of the hospital, partly caused by gender-based violence.

In a project in *Malawi*, the focus has shifted to consider mental health as one of the issues which cannot be neglected in communities and at the same time can be addressed by them. Since 2011, DIFAEM has been implementing a project that strictly applies the principles of Primary Health Care. In the communities of the catchment areas of a Presbyterian and a Catholic health centre, people at local level are engaged in a process of improving the health of their communities. At the beginning of this project, the communities performed a community and asset mapping and learnt about the religious health assets.

When asked about “what contributes to health in your community?” people mentioned mainly the following factors: the services of the health centre, safe water sources, nutrition, and availability of drugs. However, their list also comprised some of the intangible factors like mutual respect, relationships, and prayer.

In another exercise, the people listed their health concerns. They mentioned malnutrition, lack of safe water, cultural practices with a negative impact on health, drinking locally brewed beer etc. Thereafter, they were asked to bear in mind their health assets and to think about who has the capacity and who is responsible to tackle their health concerns: the community, the health centre, or the government? The result was quite encouraging showing that the communities attributed almost all health concerns to their own capacity and responsibility.

As a next step, the communities ranked their health concerns and developed respective action plans. All participating communities ranked sanitation and nutrition on top. They focused on tangible things to be tackled by using assets like manpower and materials. Alongside building pit latrines, hand washing facilities, digging rubbish pits etc, they continued discussing health issues and health assets. For a long time, mental health issues were not mentioned at all. It took three years for people to come to sensitive issues like alcoholism, gender-based violence, teenage pregnancies, prostitution, depression, and the issue of suicide. These taboo issues are now being addressed now that the communities have walked a long way together. Currently, these issues are discussed in community meetings before the church elders and the traditional authorities. People ask how to use their own assets to tackle these issues. Issues of gender-based violence and alcohol abuse definitely cannot be improved by imposed strategies or through legislation. These issues are related to cultural norms and behaviour patterns that can only be changed in a very slow process of transformation. In this process, intangible religious health assets like mutual trust and good relationships are essential. There are now plans to train the community health workers in mental health issues so that they can detect mental disorders and offer basic counselling services.

Congregations Promote Mental Health – A Pilot Project in Germany

A project on “Congregations and Depression” was performed by DIFAEM and the Department of Practical Theology at the Theological Faculty of Tübingen in cooperation with health professionals forming an “Alliance against Depression” (“Bündnis gegen Depression”). Funds were provided by the “Stiftung Diakonie Württemberg”.

One might ask: Why does DIFAEM run such a project in German congregations and why on depression? DIFAEM aims at improving access to quality health care for people in resource-limited settings. Why was this project meaningful to be undertaken in a context where most people still have access to a very high standard of health care?

- Firstly, European communities in general and congregations in particular should rediscover their role in health and become active partners of the formal health sector.
- Secondly, there is a window of opportunity to introduce experiences of DIFAEM’s work with communities of the Global South to Germany where many people are disappointed by a purely biomedical approach to health. In their search for health and wholeness people are open to approaches including the social and spiritual dimension of healing.

Why start a project on depression? It was decided to tackle depression not only because the number of people suffering from depression is increasing constantly, but also because depression is a disease that affects the person as a whole. Of course, this is true for each disease. Even a broken leg has implications beyond the physical dimension. But it is especially true for depression. It deeply affects the person’s relationships with themselves, with fellow human beings and also and often particularly with God.

The research questions of the project on “Congregations and Depression” was defined as, “How can congregations in their capacity as social networks and places of worship assist people suffering from depression?”

The definition of depression used in the project does not end with the diagnostic classification system but takes into account a wider phenomenal domain. However, in dealing with this topic, people are made aware that there is a difference between depression in the sense of an illness which severely affects people for a longer period on the one side, and the condition of being in a depressed mood which everybody experiences from time to time.

In terms of the project design, the project was implemented in four stages:

1. Online questionnaire
2. 25 qualitative semi-structured interviews
3. Development of resource materials for congregations
4. Implementation in three congregations.

The research-findings were based on an online questionnaire which was sent to all pastors serving in a church district. The response rate was 32%. In 16.3 % of all pastoral counselling sessions, the consulters are people suffering from depressions. The majority of the pastors (62%) do not feel well-prepared for counselling depressive persons. More than 90% of depressive people are concerned about religious topics like guilt, feeling God to be absent and wondering about a God who allows them to suffer.

The interviewees were selected through purposive sampling. They represented the groups of persons affected and their relatives, health experts like psychologists in counselling centres, ministers, and volunteers.

The results, based on the qualitative data of the semi-structured interviews brought about interesting insights related to different groups.

Persons affected by depression

As a common feature they long for relationships with others but at the same time feel unable or “not worthy” to be related to others. They feel stigmatised as the disease is still a taboo in church and society. While, for

some of them, the congregation is a place where they feel welcome, the majority are not integrated in a congregation.

A man suffering from depression still remembers well the sermons held by the pastor of the congregation he was a member of when he was young. At the time, his mother suffered from depression, in his sermons this pastor frequently talked about mental disorders being caused by personal sin. Up until today, the man feels deeply affected and hurt by the message the pastor was giving about mental diseases.

In spite of negative experiences with congregations, some people say that their personal faith helps them to cope with their disease. In particular, very short prayers or Bible verses are of help to them.

What do people suffering from depression expect from the congregation? First and foremost, they wish the congregation to be better informed about the disease. People should know that it is not a lack of will power to get up in the morning but a matter of not being able to do so. The same applies to the fact that people suffering from depression are definitely not able to work on a regular basis. Depression should not be regarded as being rooted in personal failure but has to be recognised and accepted as a disease like any other.

Relatives

Many relatives, especially parents, consider themselves guilty of the family member's sickness, especially at the beginning. They feel helpless and unable to cope with the situation of living with a relative being severely ill, whom they feel to be "far away" from them, and whom they cannot really help. For most of them, the congregation has not been of help. They feel what a parish offers does not really relate to their lives. According to their experience, the parish members do not have an eye for them, as one participant phrased it: "No one of the congregation approached me and asked if I needed help."

Among their requests, they mention the need for working against misconceptions by sensitising and providing information about depression in congregations. They would welcome being assisted by visits and practical help. Moreover, they would appreciate talking to the pastor and joining meditation exercises.

Volunteers

Just to give one positive example, the leader of a church choir offers participation to people affected by mental disorders. The choir's first aim is not achievement but to serve as a strong social network. According to the choir leader, it is of most importance that choir members feel welcome no matter their condition. She says: "Everybody can just be the way he or she is." The choir members treat each other with care. They call or visit each other in times of distress thus forming a social network. At the same time, the spiritual dimension of the song repertoire is important. According to the choir leader, "Singing spiritual songs like hymns of praise sometimes makes people cry", which she encourages explicitly. This choir is an example of an intangible religious health asset.

Pastors

The interviews with the pastors focused on their counselling services. Pastors often feel helpless when dealing with people affected by depression. Not being able to help people by talking to and praying with them is, as one of them put it, "like driving in total darkness". Pastors complain about a lack of skills in how to interact with depressive people, especially in terms of knowing when it is necessary to draw clear boundaries e.g. if congregation members want to consult them almost daily. Questions of sin, guilt and personal failure are frequent issues in pastoral counselling. Sometimes, it is difficult to discern between real guilt and inadequate feelings of being guilty as part of the disease pattern. Therefore, pastors strongly request more information about depression to be available and advise strongly these questions to become part of the education and formation of future pastors.

Looking at the quantitative and qualitative data the following ways of how congregations can deal with depression were identified:

- Information about the disease pattern and thus taking depression out of the taboo zone and into the congregation.
- Inclusion of sick persons in day-to-day parish activities or inviting them to participate in church groups are of great importance.
- Theological discussions on misconceptions in terms of guilt and personal failure relating to the causes and course of depression.
- Further trainings for pastors and volunteers.

As a result of the study, a publication was developed with major resources for pastors, lay-people, and medical doctors pointing to different ways of supporting people suffering from depression.¹¹

In a follow up and implementational phase in three congregations, a mapping exercise was developed locally to identify further pathways and resources for identifying groups, important persons, meeting points that might play a role in tackling mental health issues and noting them on cards. The map which came up showed the assets of the congregation with their links to other churches or secular assets. Within the congregation, they mapped, for example, women's groups, communication teams, grief groups, a pastoral counselling team etc. Among the secular entities that were put on the map were the general practitioner, the pharmacy, groups visiting terminally ill persons etc. The lines marking the linkages between the assets showed that a good number of church groups are not well cross-linked.

This exercise was an eye-opener both to the congregation members and the representatives of the formal health system. Even the congregation members did not know all the church activities and groups. In addition, some proposals for follow up activities were brought together which included the following:

- All participating congregations celebrated thematic Sunday services. The Sunday service serves as an important platform to create awareness about the frequency of mental disorders so that people become aware that "Christians get depression, too".
- Psychiatrists and psychotherapists provided information about the character of mental disorders.
- In one congregation, the two pastors started open counselling hours once a week and offer people to be personally blessed after the Sunday service.
- Volunteers like group leaders and the members of an already existing counselling group received further trainings that instructed them about the nature of depression and mental disorders and taught them some conversation techniques and pastoral counselling approaches.
- Confirmation classes about mobbing and depression were held.
- Bible studies were performed on "depression and guilt".
- After events or lectures, "safe spaces" were offered to share personal issues in small groups.

This intense local learning process resulted in new insights and experiences:

- As there are still a lot of misconceptions in congregations concerning mental disorders, it proved to be essential to create awareness about mental disorders in general and depression in particular and to provide sound information about the disease, its various causes, its impact on people's lives, and the available therapies.
- The pastors were very surprised that instead of only learning and talking about depression, it has been possible to reach people suffering from depression and their relatives. Many people were ready to talk about themselves. All pastors mentioned that depression has become a major issue in their pastoral counselling.
- People very much appreciated the "safe spaces" to share their experiences.
- Even people who are more distant to the congregation visited the project events.

¹¹ Beate Jakob and Birgit Weyel, *Menschen mit Depression. "Glaube als Kraftquelle der Heilung entdecken – Orientierung und Impulse für die Praxis in Kirchengemeinden"*, 2020, Available at: <https://difaem.de/aktuelles/publikationen/?bfpub%5B5%5D%5Byear%5D=2020>.

- Congregation members mentioned that “It is good to openly address issues around depression. It was a taboo in spite of all of us knowing depression being a major problem within the congregation.”
- Representatives of the local “Alliance against Depression” were very impressed by congregations taking up the issue and regard the project as the starting point of a fruitful cooperation. Thus, congregations have entered into a process of being linked to the formal health sector.
- The local newspapers and some church-related radio stations reported about the project.

Conclusion

What we can conclude from this important learning project are three major insights:

- Faith communities’ own assets to promote mental health especially can become visible particularly through their intangible health assets.
- In some of DIFAEM’s community-based projects in the Global South mental health issues have either been included already or are emerging and can be addressed in local communities.
- In Germany, but also in many other church settings globally, there is a window of opportunity to mobilise congregations to address mental health issues. Congregations can and should become partners of the formal health system.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Jim Cochrane: Religious Health Assets (RHAs) – Conceptual and Theoretical Framework, in Difäm Ed., Religion, Faith and Public Health. Documentation on a Consultation at Difäm-German Institute for Medical Mission, 9-11 February 2006, Tübingen, Difäm 2006, pp. 14-45.

Jakob, Beate and Ulrich Laepple, “Gesundheit, Heilung und Spiritualität. Heilende Dienste” in *Kirche, Diakonie und weltweiter Ökumene*, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2014.

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Weyel, Birgit and Beate Jakob, Eds. “Menschen mit Depressionen. Orientierungen und Impulse für die Praxis” in *Kirchengemeinden*, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2014.

Online Resources [accessed July 10, 2015]

Materials on PHC including the Alma Ata proclamation of PHC:

http://www.who.int/topics/primary_health_care/en/.

WHO Mental Health Atlas 2011:

http://www.who.int/mental_health/publications/mental_health_atlas_2011/en/.

Mental health: strengthening our response – WHO Fact sheet N°220, Updated August 2014:

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs220/en/>.

63. DIACONIA IN CONTEXTS OF TRAUMATISATION – AN INTRODUCTION

Christine Gühne¹

Diaconia and Psychosocial Care

Psychosocial Care is an integral dimension of diaconia which is meant to serve human beings in all aspects of their existence and is called to recognise and to meet the needs of the body, the soul, the mind and the spirit likewise. An approach which considers itself to be holistic cannot neglect emotional, social and spiritual needs as central parts of human wellbeing. A Christian approach is especially obliged to perceive all dimensions of human existence as interconnected and as equally belonging to and reflecting the image of God. Diaconia as servanthood in the footsteps of Jesus Christ also cannot be silent about the faith and hope that motivates its actions, and it has to be aware of the possible healing aspects of the Christian faith and spirituality for those it is called to serve. These aspects are crucial especially in communities and societies that have undergone severe shocks and have experienced high levels of distress. In humanitarian aid and in development work, these dimensions are usually subsumed under the headline of “psychosocial care”. This dimension of diaconia has recently undergone a period of transition and is still doing so. After a period of focusing mainly on Western professional psychological methods which often could not be adequately contextualised in other cultural settings and a time of hesitation especially concerning the possible healing dimensions of religion and spirituality in general, this factor and its unique contribution has recently been rediscovered and stressed again by humanitarian and development actors. The World Humanitarian Summit (2016) states that:

Religious communities and faith-based organisations are uniquely positioned to provide spiritual assistance to people affected by conflict and disaster [...] We request all actors to recognise the *right of communities in need to access the best spiritual service* and seek to collaborate with faith leaders and faith based organisations to provide for the same. In addition to material assistance and other services, we therefore *commit to facilitating spiritual assistance* which can significantly contribute to the population’s sense of hope during and after a disaster, while prohibiting pressuring people into any religious practice. We *commit to continuing to work with national governments to recognise and affirm the role of faith and faith-based-organisations to provide faith-based assistance to communities in need.*

Faith communities have been well aware of the healing dimension of religion and spirituality and of its central role for holistic human wellbeing throughout. It is deeply rooted in the Christian tradition (1 Thess. 5, 23; Mt. 16, 26; Phil. 4, 7; Col. 3, 16-17 and others) and constantly has to be translated into the architecture of aid and development work today. The spirit of Christian diaconia in itself has to be an opponent of aid systems that are marked by a superficial materialism that focuses on support for the body and for economic survival only. Faith-sensitive, contextualised psychosocial care in its very different forms (counselling, pastoral care, indigenous wisdom, spiritual accompaniment, professional therapy) has to be considered as an indispensable and integral dimension of every project design in humanitarian aid and development work. It is not an optional add-on that can come in when the more tangible and visible efforts have been completed. Psychosocial needs have to shape and model the whole of aid activities if they want to be humanitarian in the full sense of the word, and psychosocial work is especially successful if it is integrated and combined with other support measures.

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A System of Multi-layered Supports

The most important learning experience from different humanitarian settings in the last decades has been that, even after extremely stressful events, only a relatively small number of people develop symptoms that require specialised and professional mental health treatments.² Statistics of the World Health Organization that are based on different kinds of emergency situations indicate that “whilst almost everybody will experience a range of difficult thoughts and feelings (including fear, grief, uncertainty, hopelessness), most people will improve over time without any expert intervention, as long as they have access to their basic needs (safety, information, food etc) and they remain socially connected.”³ Psychosocial care in humanitarian aid therefore has to be structured according to a system of so-called “multi-layered supports”, because “different types of supports and services are required in order to meet the psychosocial and mental needs of a population.”⁴ The model of a Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Intervention Pyramid⁵ which is widely used in emergency contexts illustrates the different levels and their range: after an emergency, everybody will need basic services and security in order to be able to recover. A large proportion of the affected population will need special support to re-establish their most important relationships and to get connected again. If this is provided, then the majority of the people will certainly experience painful emotions, but will be able to cope with them as long as they feel safe and can connect to their own strengths and resources. A smaller proportion will need special attention because they feel unable to handle their higher levels of emotional distress. They will need emotional support which should possibly be integrated in and should come along with other widely accepted support systems, making sure that those who need it do not have to be afraid of stigma and may therefore feel free to accept it. Only a rather small number of people (about 3-5%) will require specialised mental health care provided by professional experts.

The pyramid model of multi-layered support challenges an aid system which under the headline of psychosocial care mainly focuses on the issue of trauma healing and has started to finance specialised centres for traumatised people in countries of the Global South in and after wars and other emergencies. The establishment of isolated centres for traumatised people misses the chance of integrating psychosocial measures in other support systems and to shape them accordingly. It can lead to stigmatisation if whole populations are labelled with the diagnosis of being traumatised – without first looking at their own coping mechanisms and personal resources and without knowing about their indigenous ways of dealing with different forms of emotional distress. It also most certainly leads to a dominance of Western professional psychological approaches and does not pay enough attention to non-therapeutic ways of assistance by providing safe spaces, by supporting the process of getting connected and rebuilding relationships and by leaving space for contextual ways of reframing the present situation and the troublesome experiences of the past. Diaconia in so-called traumatised societies, therefore, should at first challenge the assumption that all members of an affected community are traumatised in the clinical sense of the word. Diaconia as an attitude and a way of close accompaniment at first has to empower people to reject a biased diagnosis which is coming from outside. It corresponds to the spirit of diaconia to create enough space to look for the real needs of the affected population according to their own assessments of the situation. Diaconia in communities under severe emotional distress has to take sides for the people and is called to help them to connect to and to value their own resources. These are areas of engagement where churches can contribute in an outstanding manner. Their service starts long before the need for highly specialised psychological and therapeutic expertise. With their presence, their ways of building community, with rites, symbols and the ability to bring back an over-

² See <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/mental-health-psychosocial-support-emergencies-what-working-horn>.

³ R. Horn in <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/mental-health-psychosocial-support-emergencies-what-working-horn>.

⁴ R. Horn in <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/mental-health-psychosocial-support-emergencies-what-working-horn>.

⁵ See Inter-Agency Standing Committee, IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergencies, Geneva: IASC, 2007.

individual rhythm in disrupted lives; with words and signs of holy significance, they shape spaces of holistic accompaniment and places to feel at home again even if the original home has been lost. If churches are present as listeners without pressure in an attitude of respect for the individual biography and dignity of people, it becomes possible for people to not be tied to their identity as victims forever. They can pave ways for transformation of shame and fear into self-perceptions of being seen and valued by God, even in situations of extreme powerlessness. Issues of meaning, identity, values and transcendence can be reinterpreted and provide a frame that stabilises individuals and communities in fragile situations.

Spiritual Resources in Contexts of Traumatization

Traumatized people are survivors. Their bodies, souls and minds carry wounds. All their relationships are affected: the relation to their own self, to family members, to society, to the whole of creation and to God. Life is broken apart into fragments. All interactions with others carry possibly threatening situations and can be potentially dangerous. For steps into a process of healing, a safe space is the first and crucial necessity. Here, connections can be re-established – a framework for the reconstruction of the own fragile self-concept and a sense of coherence may be found. The next step is to reintegrate into a community, to put an end to isolation and to rediscover trust in life, trust in others, maybe also trust in God.⁶

Biblical texts contain a lot of wisdom and experience in dealing with traumatized (= wounded) life. They introduce God as the safe space that is accessible from anywhere at any time. They offer a narrative which can open up horizons for the future and they borrow language for traumatizing experiences of all kinds in the past. Affected people can relate to that and are invited to integrate their own experiences of loss and disruption into a framework which exceeds their personal situation and yet is able to deeply value it. This is a setting that allows one to remember the past in all its dimensions as well as to rediscover a more comprehensive narrative that interprets and reframes the personal story. This is probably the most decisive contribution that Christian faith can offer for the integration of traumatizing experiences: to heal memories by retelling them in the presence of God, thereby breaking inner barriers of being tied to the past, to open up a sense of a life after and with the own trauma, the own wound – and for similar experiences of others.⁷ Notions of sense, of meaning, of a rebuilt identity that stays wounded and is yet able to carry on may be developed and may be discovered by the victims themselves at their own pace.

Diaconia in contexts of traumatization starts with the offer of safe spaces where people do not suffer stigma and where the deeds of the perpetrators are acknowledged by those who listen to the victims. In these spaces, people can connect to each other and can re-establish relations. The space is marked by an atmosphere of listening and of acceptance, by an attitude of grace and by the offer of reframing one's own biography in the light of the Gospel. Diaconia in emergency contexts has to be a praxis of solidarity with the victims and has to take up their cry for justice and for the public perception of what has happened. Diaconia in the context of traumatization has to break the silence and invisibility of the victims and has to help them to rediscover their dignity as well as to redefine their place in the community. Diaconal workers in contexts of traumatization also have to be aware of a possible abuse of faith / religion in the lives of the affected people and have to carefully support personal and common processes of differentiation between healing and liberating elements of faith in opposition to authoritarian and other harmful elements. A praxis of diaconia which is watchful and committed to the liberating and healing truth of the Gospel can accompany others in order to strengthen positive ways of religious coping – and to question negative and dangerous ones.

⁶ B. Schütz, "Aufstiegslieder", demonstrates how Old Testament Psalms carefully describe and accompany the steps of a traumatized self towards comprehensive healing. Beate Schütz, "'Aufstiegslieder'. Eine traumatologische Lesung der Wallfahrtspsalmen", in *Theol. Beiträge* 20(2), 51. (April 2020) pp. 105-120.

⁷ See B. Schütz, "Aufstiegslieder" p. 117.

Conclusion

Psychosocial Care and pastoral care are dimensions of a praxis of diaconia that serves people in order to help them to shape their lives according to the Gospel: according to the good news which stays good and is able to create hope even in contexts of traumatising. Diaconia in such contexts has been helpful if it accompanies people up to a certain stage in life that is not primarily marked by the experience of traumatising any more. The trauma cannot be healed in the sense of making it disappear, but people can learn to live with it and to integrate the traumatic experience in a redefined concept of the own self – this includes new ways and forms of believing and trusting in God. Faith communities have special intangible assets to support the difficult and often painful process of trauma integration in individual biographies and in communities. They do not replace professional methods of trauma therapy, but complete them in a special and unique way and are essential in diaconia for human beings as body, soul and spirit.

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64. DIACONIA IN TRAUMATISED SOCIETIES: LEARNING FROM THE RWANDAN CONTEXT

Nagaju Muke¹

Introduction

The beginning of the twenty-first century has been marked by significant turbulence, fuelled by brutal violence, wars and genocide in many countries across the globe. Many people have been affected by conflicts, suffering and loss that mainly resulted from political division to economic hardship. Conflict affects not only the social, economic and political spheres of individuals but also their mental health.² This justifies why reconciliation and healing provides a new paradigm for mission theology.³ As such, despite the fact that trauma healing is needed to prevent future conflicts and sustain long-term peace in many different contexts, trauma and mental health issues associated with violent conflict tend to be under-prioritised, poorly understood and generally neglected.⁴ This article aims at exploring the question of how and whether the church programmes, such as diaconia, have addressed the issue of trauma and deep wounds from the past that affects the everyday life of individuals. It focuses on post-genocide settings like Rwanda.

Trauma in the Post Genocide Rwandan Context

The 1994 genocide against the Tutsi was a human-generated traumatic event with catastrophic and far-reaching effects on the entire society.⁵ The speed and ferocity with which the 1994 genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi was executed left the country almost entirely destroyed. Over a million people were brutally murdered, the economy was completely destroyed, and there were no functioning state institutions remaining. Approximately 400, 000 children were separated from their parents or orphaned. Children, in particular, bear the marks of the violence and traumatic events. Moreover, the genocide left a legacy of countless widows and widowers, thousands of handicapped people, and a very vulnerable population in its aftermath. Furthermore, 150, 000 suspects of genocide were awaiting trials, and over 120, 000 persons were detained in jails with very poor legal infrastructure and limited human resources.⁶ Genocide causes immense suffering to all people, but it also has a different impact on men and women, because victimisation is partly gender specific.⁷ Rape was used as a weapon of destruction during the genocide. More than 250, 000 women were raped and between 2 000 and 5 000 pregnancies resulted from war rape. Additionally, 66% of women who were raped tested positive for HIV and other infectious diseases.

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² B. Friederike. and T. Marian, "Healing Communities, transforming society: Exploring the interconnectedness between psychosocial needs, practice and peacebuilding," Conference Report A conference organised by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation and the War Trauma Foundation (2015), pp. 1-23.

³ J.R. Schreiter, "Reconciliation and healing as a paradigm for mission". *International Review of Mission* (2005), p. 74.

⁴ Abiosseh Davis, Celestin Nsengiyumva and Daniel Hyslop, "Trauma and Building Trust and Tolerance in Rwanda", Inter peace *Peacebuilding in Practice* Paper № 4. (2019), p. 10.

⁵ Mutuyimana et al., "PTSD prevalence among resident mothers and their offspring in Rwanda 25 years after the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi". *BMC Psychology* 7(84) (2019), p. 4.

⁶ J. Mutamba, and J. Izabiliza, "The Role of Women in Reconciliation and Peacebuilding in Rwanda: Ten Years after Genocide 1994-2004: Contribution, Challenges and Way Forward". *The National Unity and Reconciliation Commission*, Kigali. (2005), p. 10.

⁷ L. Huyse, "Victims," in D.T. Bloomfield, T. Barnes and L. Hyuse, L. (eds.), *Reconciliation after violent conflict: A Handbook*. 77-88. (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2003), p. 55.

This situation had an impact not only on the physical well-being of women, but on their mental health as well. Most of the survivors of the genocide – the majority of whom happened to be women – experienced serious economic deprivation.⁸ The rates of trauma were twice as high in women compared with men. Women’s mental health status was influenced by the trauma experienced during the genocide as well as by occurrence of spousal violence over their lifetime.⁹ The level of mistrust among the families of those who survived the genocide and those whose relatives were suspected of having committed genocide was high and deeply rooted. The population was severely traumatised and deeply divided. The 1994 genocide had terrible consequences for the people of Rwanda and society as a whole. It left the Rwandan cultural and moral fabric torn to shreds.¹⁰

Although most Rwandese have been exposed to traumatic events in their lifetime, the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) were exacerbated in genocide survivors as a result of their lived experience and chronic exposure to multiple traumas during the genocide.¹¹ Many survivors have to cope with severe physical disabilities. Many lost hands, arms, legs and/or other body parts when they were attacked with machetes. On top of that, they have had to deal with the traumatic memories of the violence they witnessed. The Kinyarwanda expression *Guhahamuka Syndrome* describes the psychological aftermath of the genocide – the feelings of despair, hopelessness, worthlessness, excessive crying, attempted suicide, being easily startled, repeatedly dreaming of bad events, and experiencing mental chaos or flashbacks.¹² Indeed, the impact of genocide on survivors is enormous. Staub and his colleagues observe that “their basic psychological needs are profoundly frustrated – their identity, their way of understanding the world, and their spirituality disrupted. These disruptions, along with those of interpersonal relationships, and the ability to regulate internal emotional states, co-exist with and give rise to intense trauma symptoms”.¹³ Furthermore, there are signs of trauma among perpetrators too, especially prisoners released and their respective families who are experiencing trauma related to guilt about deeds or exposure to violence, genocide and their refugee status.¹⁴ There has been a marked increase of peacebuilding, unit and reconciliation programs in Rwanda done by both the government and the Church. However, despite this increase, little has been done to address the challenges related to trauma caused by the genocide. In addition to that, studies carried out in Rwanda indicate that “The 1994 genocide against the Tutsi was a major traumatic event affecting nearly all Rwandans. Significant psychological sequels continue to occur in the population 25 years after.”¹⁵ Depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and suicidal attempts are prevalent in Rwanda.¹⁶ These traumatic sufferings are so complex and diversified on the level that they deserve to be studied and treated in their various contexts.

⁸ Mutamba and Izabiliza, “The Role of Women” p. 10, p. 15.

⁹ L. Rugema, I. Mogren, J. Ntaganira, G. Krantz, “Traumatic episodes and mental health effects in young men and women in Rwanda, 17 years after the genocide”. *BMJ Open* (2015), p. 7.

¹⁰ Mutamba and Izabiliza, “The Role of Women” p. 10, p. 15.

¹¹ Mutuyimana et al. “PTSD prevalence” p. 5.

¹² N.W. Boris, R.T. Thurman, L. Snider, E. Spencer, and L. Brown (eds.) ‘Infants and Young Children Living in Youth-Headed Household in Rwanda: Implications of Emerging Data,’ *Infant Mental Health Journal*. Vol. 27(6) (2006) pp. 584–602.

¹³ E. Staub, A.L. Pearlman, A. Gubin, A. Hagengimana, “Healing, Reconciliation, Forgiveness and the Prevention of Violence after Genocide or Mass Killing: An Intervention and its Experimental Evaluation in Rwanda,” *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 24(3) (2005), pp.297-334.

¹⁴ Heide Rieder and Thomas Elbert, “Rwanda – lasting imprints of a genocide: trauma, mental health and psychosocial conditions in survivors, former prisoners and their children” *Conflict and Health* (2013), p. 2.

<http://www.conflictandhealth.com/content/7/1/6>

¹⁵ Mutuyimana et al., “PTSD prevalence” p. 1.

¹⁶ Rugema L et al. “Traumatic episodes”, p. 7.

Understanding of Trauma and its Effects

For the purpose of this section, it important to define what trauma is and describe how it affects individuals and communities. The term “trauma” has different meaning depending on the context. From the point of view of behavioural health professionals, trauma is defined as resulting “from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.”¹⁷

Traumatic events span multiple domains of life, including the interpersonal (e.g., violence, sexual assault, physical abuse, emotional maltreatment, neglect, death, separation), medical (e.g., physical injury, illness), ecological (e.g., natural disaster, man-made industrial accident), and political (e.g., war, terrorism, forced displacement).¹⁸ For the purpose of this essay, the term ‘trauma’ is used to define a risk factor for the development of post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD). Thus, the traumatic event that triggers PTSD may be an accumulation of multiple exposures to various traumatic events.¹⁹

In a society like Rwanda where repeated violent victimisation occurred, trauma and PTSD are the major difficulties that have negatively impacted the health of individuals, family household and their potential for development and social change.²⁰ People with trauma, suffer from poor functioning, resulting in a range of negative impacts for economic productivity, education, health and violence outcomes.²¹ Furthermore, trauma affects not only the intra-psychic world, but also a person’s relationships because individuals who experience extreme violence often have difficulties relating to others as violence harms the internalised culturally constituted webs of trust, based on social norms, world views and moral conventions.²² In other words, trauma on this scale culminates in a climate of fear and distrust among communities.

Trauma continues to impact not only the minds of individuals but also affects Rwandan society at different levels. This justifies why the prevalence of trauma has been of such a magnitude that often terms such as “traumatised nation” or “collective trauma” are used.²³ The term collective trauma refers to any society, ethnic or religious group, social category or class that has been exposed to extreme circumstances of traumatisation as a result of armed conflict, including social, political, cultural, gender, ethnic or religious persecution. Collective trauma damages the social tissue of a community, ruptures social bonds, undermines communality, destroys previous sources of support, and can even traumatise those members of a community, society or

¹⁷ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2012, p. 7 cited in NREPP, “Behind the Term: Trauma”. SAMHSA’S National registry of evidences- based programs and Practices (2016) pp. 1-6.

¹⁸ Anna R. Harper and Kenneth I. Pargament. “Trauma, Religion, and Spirituality: Pathways to Healing”, In K. E. Cherry (ed.), *Traumatic Stress and Long-Term Recovery*, DOI (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2015), p. 351.

¹⁹ Jitender Sareen. “Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Adults: Impact, Comorbidity, Risk Factors, and Treatment”, *Can J Psychiatry* 59 (9) (2014), pp. 460–467.

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²¹ Abiosseh Davis, Celestin Nsengiyumva and Daniel Hyslop, “Trauma and Building Trust and Tolerance in Rwanda,” *Interpeace Peacebuilding in Practice Paper* № 4 (2019), p. 10.

²² Friederike Bubenze and Marian Tankink, “Healing Communities, transforming society: Exploring the interconnectedness between psychosocial needs, practice and peacebuilding,” Conference Report, A conference organised by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation and the War Trauma Foundation (2015), p. 5.

²³ Bob Erinkveld, “The land of a thousand broken hearts: Trauma and reconciliation in post-genocide Rwanda” (Master thesis, Utrecht University, 2016).

group who were absent when the traumatising took place.²⁴ Collective traumas become fixed in communal memories and narratives and get transmitted across generations. It also affects everyone who lives under the same 'ethnic tent'.²⁵ In the case of Rwanda, a high prevalence of PTSD is prevalent and the most vulnerable group are the survivors and their offspring.²⁶ Traumatic memories are ingrained in the psyches of most Rwandans. However, there is a lack of knowledge about what constitutes trauma and some traumatised people are not aware that they are traumatised.

Due to lack of knowledge, most people identified trauma as hysterical manifestations and they even relate trauma as being possessed by demoniac spirits (*yahanzweho n' amazimu*) or madness (*ibisazi*).²⁷

Despite the fact that there is a lack of awareness on trauma and PTSD, different symptoms have been highlighted. These symptoms include avoidance and numbing, overlap with other mental disorders, such as generalised anxiety disorder, panic disorder, and depression.²⁸ In addition, people with PTSD struggle with experiencing or witnessing a stressful event; re-experiencing symptoms of the event such as nightmares and (or) flashbacks; efforts to avoid situations, places, and people that are reminders of the traumatic event; and hyperarousal symptoms, such as irritability, concentration problems, and sleep disturbances.²⁹ Hyperarousal refers to generally psychosomatic symptoms where serious physiological reactions are triggered; e.g. hypervigilance, anxiety and agitation, insomnia, startle reactions, tension headaches, nausea, tremors, choking sensations and abdominal, back or pelvic pain.³⁰ Trauma affects not only the physical and cognitive of the individual, but also their spiritual aspect. With regard to the spiritual, the person may feel guilt, shame, self-blame, self-hatred and feeling damaged, feeling like a bad person and questioning one's own purpose.³¹

Trauma Healing and Reconciliation

In the post-violence context, trauma healing and recovery is required to address not only individual trauma issues but also issues of ethnic divisions, hatred, fear and mistrust. Therefore, reconciliation has recently been recognised as a necessary component to heal the traumatised society and reconstruct broken relations. Indeed, reconciliation is an act of healing the past and building the future.³²

In post genocide Rwanda, the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) suggested that the guiding principles for unity and reconciliation is "to mutually strive to heal one another's physical and psychological wounds while building future interpersonal trust based on truth telling, repentance and forgiveness".³³ This entails that reconciliation has four essential elements which include relationship-building;

²⁴ Suárez-Orozco and Robben 2000, p. 24 cited by Friederike Bubenze and Marian Tankink, "Healing Communities" p. 5.

²⁵ Wessells M, "Trauma, peacebuilding and development: An African region perspective". Paper presented at the Trauma, Development and Peacebuilding Conference, New Delhi, India. (2008), p. 13. Available at [http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/pdfs/IDRC clancyhamber](http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/pdfs/IDRC%20clancyhamber).

²⁶ Mutuyimana et al, "PTSD prevalence", p. 5.

²⁷ Erinkveld, "The land of a thousand broken hearts", p. 41.

²⁸ Sureen. "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder", p. 460.

²⁹ Sureen. "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder", p. 460.

³⁰ Schöenberg 2013, p. 74; Shock and Knaevelsrud, 2013, p. 61 cited in Erinkveld, "The land of a thousand broken hearts", p. 11.

³¹ Nova Scotia, "Recognizing and responding to the Effects of Trauma: A Discussion Guide for the Health and Social Service Providers", *IWK health center* (2015), p. 7.

³² J.R. Schreiter, "The Emergence of Reconciliation as a Paradigm of Mission: Dimensions, Levels, and Characteristics" (2013), pp. 9-29, in R. Schreiter and K. Jorgesen, *Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation*. (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2013).

³³NURC, "The National Policy on Unity and Reconciliation". (Kigali: National Unity Reconciliation Commission, 2007), p. 10.

truth telling; forgiveness and healing. The focus in this paper is put on the truth telling and healing as important elements for the healing of a traumatised society.

Truth-telling

In the process of trauma healing, it is important to tell the truth about what caused the rupture in the relationship. “Truth-telling is a medicine that has healing power. It creates safe and sacred spaces where people can gather to remember while grieving”.³⁴ Likewise, “[...] truth-telling means overcoming and correcting the lies and distortions that bring unearned shame on the innocent and isolate people from one another so as to exercise hegemony over society. Truth-telling has to be a constant effort to tell the whole truth, both for victims and wrongdoers”.³⁵

Writing from the South African context, Meiring maintains that, “Reconciliation and truth go hand in hand”. He adds, “Searching for truth can be painful and difficult, even hazardous. It can disrupt the journey towards reconciliation. But in the long run, it is the only way to go. Reconciliation is about uncovering the truth, not about amnesia”.³⁶ He also suggests that it is not “only the victims and the perpetrators that needed the truth-telling, the nation needed it as well – to listen to the truth, to be confronted by the truth, to be shamed by the truth, to struggle with the truth and finally to be liberated by the truth”.³⁷ To emphasise the importance of truth-telling, Meiring uses the words of Ellen Kuzwayo, a celebrated South African author: “Africa is a place of storytelling. We need more stories, never mind how painful the exercise may be. This is how we will learn to love one another. Stories help us to understand, to forgive and to see things through someone else’s eyes”.³⁸

It has been indicated that truth-telling contributes to “any of the following [...] truth, assisting victims, reconciliation, healing, interracial unity, reconstruction, public deliberation, rule of law, justice, accountability, and institutional reform”.³⁹

In fact, in the Rwandan context, truth-telling is a key element in the process of reconciliation and healing the traumatised society. There is a Rwandan saying: “*Ukuri kurakiza*,” which means, “The Truth Saves or Truth Heals”. In post-genocide Rwanda, “The Truth Saves” has become the popular slogan among people who promote healing and reconciliation. Despite the fact that storytelling is considered to be a key component in the healing trauma, there is a Rwandan proverb that reads as follows: “*amarira y’umugabo atemba ajya mu nda*.” Which literally means “the tears of a man flow into his stomach”. It reflects the cultural norm that pain should be kept inside. This makes trauma healing more difficult as some individuals prefer to remain silent.

Sharing their stories is seen by some victims as a powerful way to redefine the past, reimagine the future and affect social change. It is also a way to re-establish commonly shared values and a shared past. In sharing stories “[...] reinterpretation is the key word, enabling the survivor to ‘re-humanise’ the perpetrators. The facts can’t be changed, but the meaning given to them and the perceptions can be altered by gathering and introducing credible account of the events”.⁴⁰ For this to happen, “people must find ways to encounter

³⁴ P.J. Isaak, “God’s mission as praxis for healing and reconciliation.” *International Review of Mission*. 100(2) (2011), pp. 322-336.

³⁵ Schreiter, “Reconciliation and healing”, p. 3.

³⁶ P. Meiring, ‘Ukubuyisa and Ukuhlanza: Reconciliation and the Washing of the Spears. The role of the faith communities in the quest for healing and reconciliation.’ *NGTT*, 54(3 & 4) (2013), pp. 1-15.

³⁷ Meiring, “Ukubuyisa and Ukuhlanza”: 7.

³⁸ Meiring, “Ukubuyisa and Ukuhlanza” quoted Ellen Kuzwayo from Van Vught and Cloete, *Reconciliation*, p. 196

³⁹ K. Brounéus, “Truth-telling as talking cure? Insecurity and retraumatization in the Rwandan gacaca courts,” *Security Dialogue*, 39 (1) (2008), pp. 55-76.

⁴⁰ J.P. Lederach, “*Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*”. (Washington. D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997), p. 27.

themselves and their enemies, their hopes and their fears. Acknowledgement through hearing one another's stories validates experience and represents the first step toward restoration of the person and the relationship".⁴¹

In the light of the above discussion, it can be affirmed that truth-telling is an essential element of the reconciliation process and trauma healing. However, it does entail some risks. Brounéus highlights three such findings within recent psychological research: First, there were reports in South Africa indicating a risk of re-traumatisation for victims when they gave testimony to the Truth Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Second, there are recommendations that the practice of one-session debriefing, an early psychological intervention after trauma, should cease as it may increase the risk of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression. A single session of debriefing and testifying in a reconciliation court both involve short and intensive trauma exposure. Third, there are novel theoretical explanations in cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and neuropsychology for why short durations of trauma exposure may lead to re-traumatisation.⁴²

In the case of Rwanda, Brounéus investigates the risks related to truth-telling among the genocide survivors. He states that witnesses in the *Gacaca* traditional courts suffered from significantly higher levels of depression and PTSD than non-witnesses. The results of his study strongly challenge the claim that truth-telling is healing, suggesting instead that there are risks for the individuals on whom the truth-telling processes depend.⁴³ Another challenge related to truth telling is that "people suffering with PTSD symptoms often are reluctant to speak about the details of the traumatic event".⁴⁴

Healing

Healing is viewed as any strategy, process or activity that improves the psychological health of individuals following extensive violent conflict. As such, healing is not only about assisting individuals to address their psychological health needs in an isolated way, but is dependent upon and integrally linked to repairing and rebuilding communities and the social context. This implies restoring a normalised everyday life that can recreate and confirm people's sense of being and belonging.⁴⁵

Hamber outlines some of the healing strategies that have been used in different contexts, and discusses how they can be useful sources of inspiration and guidance when building a healing programme. However, he reminds us to keep the following in mind: (a) all strategies should ideally grow out of the local context; and (b) most contexts demand that multiple strategies be undertaken simultaneously. Healing-oriented programs which might be relevant in a post-conflict situation include: psychosocial programs; individual counselling and support interventions; training of local communities with psychosocial support skills; self-help support groups; and symbolic forms of healing.⁴⁶ However, it is rare for the psychological impact of the past ever to be completely dealt with. Yet, this does not mean that programmes in pursuit of healing are a waste of time – it is quite the contrary. Assistance with healing can be invaluable for individuals and their communities.⁴⁷

With regards to healing memories, Schreiter states that this healing takes more than a generation to accomplish. He proposes three stages through which the process often moves. These are: 1) acknowledging loss, (2) making connections, and (3) taking new action. He also explains that acknowledging loss does not

⁴¹ Lederach, "Building Peace", p. 27, 26.

⁴² Brounéus, "Truth-telling as talking cure", pp. 15-16.

⁴³ Brounéus, "Truth-telling as talking cure", p. 15.

⁴⁴ Sareen: "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder", p. 464.

⁴⁵ B. Hamber, "Healing," in D. Bloomfield, T. Barnes and L. Hyuse (eds.), *Reconciliation after Violent Conflict A Handbook*. (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2003), pp. 77-88: 77.

⁴⁶ Hamber, "Healing", p. 82.

⁴⁷ Hamber, "Healing", p. 82.

mean abandoning the past, but rather means, creating a new relationship to it.⁴⁸ Healing strengthens the self, moderates the perception of the world as dangerous, and makes it more likely that positive changes in the other group are perceived.⁴⁹

As a psychological researcher, Ervin Staub is also involved in reconciliation programs and interventions in Rwanda aimed at healing its citizens. Considering how genocide affected huge numbers of people, he promotes healing by providing information about the impact of traumatising events on people through radio dramas known as “Musekeweya”. The purpose of this is to help people understand changes in themselves and in others around them as a natural, normal consequence of extreme, and in their case, horrendous events. This approach seeks to educate the community by means of informational programmes and radio dramas, whereby the stories of the characters help people to support each other through empathic listening.⁵⁰

Diaconia: A Healing Ministry of the Church

The ministry and the mission of the church is located within the mission of God (*Mission Dei*), which is the church’s participation in God’s work and its contribution to the common good of the world.⁵¹ This means that trauma healing should currently be the focus of our theological mission of the Church.

The question to be asked is how does diaconia relate to church mission? In the document entitled “Diakonia in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment” published by the Lutheran World Federation in 2009, which maintains that Diakonia is a theological concept that points to the very identity and mission of the Church. Diakonia is a call to action, as a response to challenges of human suffering, injustice and care for creation. Diakonia is the caring ministry of the Church. It is the Gospel in action and is expressed through loving your neighbour, creating inclusive communities, caring for creation and struggling for justice.

“The church remains both a place of studying and pursuing theology, mission, ministry and diaconal service (*diakonia*). It is a place of continual accompaniment that reflects the interaction between context, theology and practice. In other words, it is about the *missional church* and its *missionary praxis*, or what God in Jesus Christ together with the Holy Spirit is doing in the world to bring about healing”.⁵² This implies that Christian mission today is to provide a healing community that gives people a sense of hope in the possibility of trauma healing.⁵³

In short, diakonia has been described as a primary expression of the churches’ participation in the ongoing mission of God. The Church, as a community is called to participate in God’s mission. Through its diakonia activities, the Church acts as witness to God’s purpose in Jesus Christ and follows the way of its Servant Lord who claimed that he came to serve and not to be served (Mark 10:45). Diakonia, then, was seen as being an expression of support and help to those in need. However, the churches today have new possibilities of diakonia in which the church should not only offer services to the marginalised but also to address the root cause of traumatic experiences and tragic effects of their reality; diakonia must build individual and communities, and affirm the dignity of all people.⁵⁴ Diakonia is not limited to binding the wounds of the

⁴⁸ Schreiter, “Establishing a Shared Identity: The Role of Healing of the Memories and of Narrative,” in C.K. Sebastian, Pauline K. Kollontai, and Greg H. Hoyland, *Peace and Reconciliation: In search of Shared Identity*. (York: St John University, 2008), p. 13.

⁴⁹ Staub, “Reconciliation after genocide, mass killing or intractable conflict: understanding the roots of violence, psychological recovery and steps toward a general theory.” *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 27(6) (2006), pp. 867-895.

⁵⁰ Staub, “Reconciliation after genocide”, p. 874.

⁵¹ J.D. Bosch, “*Transforming mission: Paradigm shifts in theology of mission*”. New York: Orbis, 1991), p. 10.

⁵² Isaak, “God’s mission as praxis”, p. 223.

⁵³ Isaak, “God’s mission as praxis”, p. 223.

⁵⁴ WCC, 2012. From the conference jointly organised by the Justice and Diakonia, Just and Inclusive Communities, and Mission and Evangelism programmes of the World Council of Churches in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

victims or acts of compassion. Diaconal ministry thus must heal the trauma of the victim as well as the one who victimises.⁵⁵

Church Response in Addressing the Issue of Trauma

Religion and spirituality have been recognised as relevant to many peoples' experiences in times of crisis because people often draw upon religion and spirituality in the wake of traumatic events.⁵⁶ People in Rwanda used religion as a way to attempt to rationalise the acts of the genocide that seemed to defy the human capacity for cruelty, to put the chaos of what post-genocide life was into the hands of a higher being and find comfort in the fact that they were being looked after.⁵⁷ Indeed, churches have played an important role in post-genocide Rwanda. People use religion to make sense of what happened to them and to explain the changes they see in Rwanda after the genocide. Religious beliefs help people find meaning in their suffering, and participating in religious activities makes them feel less lonely. Religious friendships provide comfort and solace.⁵⁸ This is owing to the fact that, in the case of Rwanda, both the perpetrators of the genocide and the survivors attend the same church. This means that the pastoral role of the ministry of the church is to serve as a healing place for both victims and perpetrators.

In post-genocide Rwanda, trauma and post-traumatic stress disorders are some of the main issues that have impacted on the health of individuals, and their potential for development and social change. Hence, effective recovery and trauma healing programmes were necessary to balance the emotions and thoughts of traumatised individuals, as a way of re-integrating them back into society and promoting their holistic development.⁵⁹

For this reason, churches promoted storytelling in its congregations. It provided victims and perpetrators with a safe space to tell their stories and dialogue with one another. During the liturgical service, there is an open time called "*gutanganga ubuhamya*," which means 'giving testimony'. This opportunity helped church members to open up and tell their stories, hear one another, and testify to God's power in terrible situations. This has facilitated the healing of their wounds caused by the 1994 genocide. This illustrates some of the ways in which people cope from traumatic experiences because "victims need to know that they have been heard and that their experience is recognised as significant. Victims need someone to listen to them. They must have opportunities to tell their story and to vent their feelings, perhaps over and over. They must tell their truth. And they need others to suffer with them, to lament with them the evil that has been done".⁶⁰ At the same time, "people need opportunity and space to express to and with one another the trauma of loss, their grief at that loss, and the anger that accompanies the pain and the memory of injustice experienced".⁶¹

In addition, pastors at the congregation level offer counselling by listening to both victims and perpetrators, focusing on the importance of helping both groups through the trauma they experienced. The main function of pastoral care and counselling is on sustaining, empowering, guiding, reconciling, nurturing and healing people in need of psychological and spiritual care.⁶²

⁵⁵ WCC, 2012.

⁵⁶ Harper and Pargament, "Trauma, Religion", p. 351.

⁵⁷ Marvin Danielle, "An Analysis of Positive Coping Mechanisms Utilized to Overcome Trauma in Post-Genocidal Rwanda", *Independent Study project (ISP) Collection*, 2576. (2017), p. 17.

⁵⁸ Bazuin, J.T., "Religion in the Remaking of Rwanda after", Unpublished DTh. Thesis. Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee. (2013), p. 172.

⁵⁹ Mukabera, "Effectiveness of unconditional", p. 101.

⁶⁰ A.P. Boers, "*Justice that Heals: a Biblical Vision for Victims and Offenders*". (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1992), p. 88.

⁶¹ Lederach, "Building Peace", p. 26.

⁶² Nagaju, M., 'The Role of the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda towards the Mission of Reconciliation. A case study of the Remera Parish (2002-2012).' (Master of Theology Thesis, University of Tumaini- Makumira, Tuma, 2013), p. 91.

In Rwanda, churches were understood as the civil society organisations best situated to provide immediate and direct services (diaconia) at the grassroots level. The church in mission is obligated to help the needy in society. In the EPR congregations, through diaconal service, pastors, evangelists, elders and deacons are aware of the needs of their church members and surrounding community. They are also better able to mobilise members when the need arises in the community. The deacons were faced with a huge task after the genocide. There were many vulnerable people and this vulnerability re-enforced trauma. The Presbyterian Church in Rwanda (EPR), for example, has been sensitising deacons so as to launch charity projects to improve the conditions of the vulnerable. For children from poor families, orphans, or child-headed households, deacons and church members have the moral obligation to help them obtain school fees. The EPR also helps street children. There were numerous children roaming the streets of Kigali, as they had no families with sufficient means to support them. Therefore, in response to the consequences of genocide, the EPR created a centre to take care of these children whose future otherwise seemed bleak.

Special attention was given to victims (survivors) by providing to them services (diaconia) such as financial assistance, building houses, providing medical and psychological assistance, and paying school fees. In this regard, churches have historically been and still are significant economic actors in Rwandan society. After the genocide, they have mobilised large amounts of material and economic resources to build houses and pay school fees for survivors, and to a lesser extent, assist families where the main breadwinner has been imprisoned. Both social support and economic resources are important components especially for a traumatised society.⁶³

Like victims, perpetrators were not excluded from the services (diaconia) provided by the church. In this regard, healing seeks to rebuild social relations and helps both victim and perpetrator to live together, peacefully without hatred, fear or bitterness. The service to prisoners is seen as an important way of promoting healing and reconciliation among perpetrators who are still in prison. Therefore, the visitation of genocide perpetrators by pastors, elders and Christians in prison helped them to confess their crimes and reconcile with their victims. The church also taught them the necessary steps to meet survivors, tell the truth, and confess the wrong they have done. This helped perpetrators to heal their wounds and trauma related to the guilt of their deeds and restore broken relationships with the communities.

Healing from psychological wounds – the trauma resulting from victimization – is important because it prevents the defensive attitudes of survivors from turning into thoughts of revenge. Healing and reconciliation are essential both to improve the quality of life of wounded people and to make renewed violence less likely.⁶⁴

In Rwanda, the task of the church is to build, strengthen the trust of the traumatised person in God. Therefore, the pastor's role in the church would be to give a traumatised individual the opportunity to search for different images of God and speak of His presence or (absence) during violence.⁶⁵ In this case, the role of the church is to help the persons in the trauma healing process and help them to live positively.

In order for survivors to cope with overcome negative feelings during remembrance periods, an initiative called "Messages of Hope" commenced in partnership with *Ibuka* (the primary survivors' organisation in Rwanda), the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre (KGM), and an interdisciplinary team that includes social and clinical psychologists, and media and communications researchers from Murdoch University. The project aims to provide a practical framework through which Rwandans can tell their own personal stories of healing and hope for the future.⁶⁶

⁶³ Bazuin, "Religion in the Remaking of Rwanda", p. 170.

⁶⁴ E. Staub, L.A. Pearlman and V. Miller, "Healing the roots of genocide in Rwanda". *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice*, 15(3) (2003), pp. 287-294.

⁶⁵ Auli Vab't Spijker. "Pastoral Theology and Pastoral Care and Counseling". (Yaounde: Edition CLE, 2011), p. 66

⁶⁶ G. Lala, C. McGarty, F.E. Thomas, A. Eberta, M. Broderick, M. Mhandoc and Y. Kamuronsi, "Messages of Hope: Using Positive Stories of Survival to Assist Recovery in Rwanda". *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 2(1) (2014), pp. 450-468.

Messages of Hope focuses on the stories of ordinary Rwandan citizens who have recovered from their experiences of trauma and loss. The messages are comprised of testimonies in which the survivor tells the story of their personal journey since the genocide, and relays hopeful feelings for their own and the country's future. The majority of messages are delivered by people who were present in Rwanda during the genocide. However, messages have also been created by Rwandans who were outside of the country or who were not yet born, but whose families were directly affected by the genocide.⁶⁷

Messengers are encouraged to tell their stories in their own words and to talk about aspects in their own life that inspired hope. For example, survivors frequently mention the importance of recovery as a means to honour those who were killed. The role of education in transforming lives is another common theme, as is the need for community support, reconciliation and healing. While acknowledging the reality of traumatic experiences during the genocide, survivors' messages of hope have focused on their own efforts to recover and rebuild, and includes advice and encouragement for other survivors that acknowledge suffering but celebrate resilience.

To that end, Schreiter proposes that the church as a community of memory is concerned with truthful memory and creates safe places where memories can be spoken out aloud in order to prevent anger that can poison any possibilities for the future. Living in the memory of what Christ has gone through – suffering and death, yet not forgotten and indeed raised up by God – is the source of our hope.⁶⁸

Conclusion

Trauma has various effects on the lives of the people and destructs their wellbeing, relationships and their emotions. As such, the church as a community of hope has a role of proclaiming the message of hope amidst turmoil and of healing wounds of the people, including by listening to them. In this respect, diaconial actions of the church should involve healing the communities affected by trauma by providing spaces and opportunities for individuals to tell their painful stories related to their traumatic experience. This remains the major challenge for the churches of Rwanda. Not only the lack of safe spaces where individuals can tell their painful stories but also the lack of professional and competencies in the field of trauma healing is still an issue. Since diakonia is a call to action and a response to challenges of human suffering, therefore, the church and its institutions at both the local and the global level are called to act and serve by responding to the challenge of trauma and its effects.

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⁶⁷ Lala *et al.*, "Message of Hope", p. 452.

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65. DIACONIA AS PEACEBUILDING AND RECONCILIATION

Wendy Kroeker¹

Peacebuilding and reconciliation remain critical to the church's mission and mandate of diaconia in the context of persistent human violence and conflict, ranging from interpersonal and local settings to international and global contexts. Following a review of some core elements of the biblical and theological foundations of diaconia as peacebuilding and reconciliation, this chapter will review a few key elements of peacebuilding theory and practice (from the practitioner-academic fields of peace and justice studies) in terms of their relevance for diaconal engagements in these areas.

Biblical-Theological Perspectives on Diaconia as Peacebuilding and Reconciliation

Recent discussions of ecumenical and transformative diaconia have highlighted that diaconia is integral to the church's identity and calling; it is not to be understood as some optional activity nor as some community effort or social ministry seemingly disconnected with the core reality of the church.² Moreover, it is not to be limited in scope to one-directional "serving" in some narrow sense, but suggestive of transformative action, dynamic engagement, and solidarity in the struggles of our world. Diaconia is both necessarily responsive to deep needs or injustice around and inside the church, and entails critical reflection on our action in a dynamic action-reflection interface.³ It is ecumenical both in the sense of being globally engaged (e.g., north-south) and in the sense of working across Christian denominational differences, constantly aware of power and privilege differentials in our common mission. Diaconal engagement does not mean Christians working in isolation, but often alongside civil society actors, knowing that this partnered work can help in the renewal of the church itself.

Diaconia as peacebuilding and reconciliation emerges from the central biblical and theological perspectives that peace and reconciliation are core dimensions of the gospel itself, namely, of God's own mission of restoration and transformation in this world. At the centre of the Bible's vision of the ideal kingdom

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² For this and the next paragraph, see "The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity," The Hanover Report (London: Anglican Communion Publications, 1996), https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/102181/the_hanover_report.pdf; Reinhard Böttcher (ed), *Prophetic Diakonia: "For the Healing of the World"*, A Report from the Global Consultation, Johannesburg, 2002 (Geneva, Switzerland: The Lutheran World Federation, 2002), available at http://elcic.ca/Documents/documents/PropheticDiakoniaConsultation_Diakonia2002.pdf; Kjell Nordstokke, ed., *Diakonia in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2009); Kjell Nordstokke, "Reflections on the Theology of Diakonia," *Diakonian tutkimus 2* (2011), pp. 223-233; the essays by Agnes R. M. Abuom, Kari Karsrud Korslien, Kjell Nordstokke, and Stephanie Dietrich in *Diakonia as Christian Social Practice: An Introduction*, eds., Stephanie Dietrich, Knud Jørgensen, Kari Karsrud Korslien and Kjell Nordstokke (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015); Isabel Apawo Phiri, "An Overview on the Imperative of Diakonia for the Church," World Council of Churches, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/diakonia/an-overview-on-the-imperative-of-diakonia-for-the-church>.

³ The dialogical interface of (a) careful social analysis (using critical social science tools and frameworks), (b) theological-biblical perspectives, and (c) pastoral-strategic engagement is exemplified, for instance, in the 1968 statement on peace by the Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM), "Medellín Document on Peace," in *Third World Liberation Theologies: A Reader* (ed) Deane William Ferm (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), pp. 3-11.

or of a renewed world, to which the church is called to work in alignment with God's mission, are persistent images of the coming together of peace and justice.⁴ Indeed, the biblical imagery of *shalom* is one that is inclusive of salvation-liberation, justice, and peace.⁵

Not only is peace central to God's transformative work in this world; it is also central to the very means enacted to achieve this goal, suffering love. Biblically speaking, peace relates to strategies and goals, both means and ends.⁶ The intersection of peace and justice in the Bible reveals that both of these are to be perceived and enacted only in their intersection, as a peace that struggles and a justice that restores.

The correlation of peacebuilding, justice work, and diaconia is exemplified, for instance, in the following pronouncement of interrelated social virtues:

Blessed are those who hunger for justice-righteousness [...]

Blessed are those who show mercy⁷ [...]

Blessed are the peacemakers [...] (Mt. 5:6, 7, 9)

Taking the model of Jesus himself, one can consider the relevance of his enactment of the Kingdom of God in connection with peace and justice work schematically as involving, on the one hand, a Galilean component, and on the other hand, a Jerusalem component. The Galilean component focuses on acts of serving, ministering, reconciling, empowering, inviting and being in solidarity, while the Jerusalem component includes protesting, resisting, challenging, criticising, truth-telling, and consequently, suffering. Together, they represent the range of holistic dimensions of being the church in the world.⁸

Contributions of Peacebuilding Theory for the Enhancement of Diaconal Work of Peacebuilding and Reconciliation

We turn, then, to consider some of the contours of recent peacebuilding theory for its relevance for Christian diaconal engagement.

Definitions of peace

A first challenge is that of defining peace. It might well be easy to assume that the term peace is well understood in the circles of church ministry and requires no further interrogation. Yet, as peacebuilding scholars assert, it is difficult to define what peace is without considering "who creates and promotes it and who peace is for."⁹ Peace work is always situated in a particular time and context and, as such, cannot be "assumed to be monolithic and universal."¹⁰ The contemplation of cultural, economic, political and social

⁴ For instance, Isaiah 2:1-5; 9:7; 11:1-9; 32:16-18; 54:13-14; 60:17-18; 65:17-25; Psalm 85:10; Romans 14:17; James 3:18; see Gordon Zerbe, "Peace and Justice in the Bible," in *Peace and Justice: Essays from the Fourth Shi'i Muslim Mennonite Christian Dialogue*, Harry J Huebner, Hajj Muhammad Legenhausen (eds) (Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2011), pp. 124-43.

⁵ Perry B. Yoder, *Shalom: The Bible's Word for Salvation, Justice, and Peace* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1987).

⁶ Thus, for instance, the exhortation, "conquer evil with good" (Rom. 12:21). For a classic statement in this connection, see Jacques Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom*, trans. Olive Wyon (2nd ed., Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers & Howard, 1989).

⁷ "Mercy" in this text refers both to philanthropic "acts of mercy" and to acts of reconciliation and forgiveness.

⁸ For this schematic presentation, I rely on Gordon Zerbe, *The New Testament: Introductory Lectures* (Dumaguete City, Philippines: Silliman University, Religious Studies Department, 2006), pp. 61-63.

⁹ Oliver P. Richmond, *The Transformation of Peace* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 15.

¹⁰ Richmond, *Transformation of Peace*, p. 16.

conditions is required when considering the focus of the needed peace – this is the necessary work of deep analysis regarding the context in which we do our work.

Peace research scholar, Johan Galtung views peace as having two faces: negative peace and positive peace.¹¹ Negative peace, simply put, is the absence of violence. Positive peace, on the other hand, is oriented to social justice and the building of structures that enable society to flourish. Galtung's basic premise is that "[to] work for peace is to work against violence" in its varied forms, from overt to covert, latent to manifest, and intra/inter-group to institutional.¹² Peace work requires analysing the causes of the violence and potential actions for the prevention of that violence in order to achieve peace. Galtung is emphatic that the journey towards sustainable peace must be linked to the naming and analysis of violence.

Another significant dimension of peace discourse emerges from the work of Quaker peace scholar Adam Curle. His definition of peace emphasises the importance of building relationships. Curle views peace as "making changes to relationships so that they may be brought to a point where [flourishing] can occur."¹³ Foundational to the work of achieving peace is the expectation that this entails working towards significant change in the dynamics of the relationships within the conflict situation. The work of peace requires a focus on transformation. Engagements seeking to be transformational can be recognised by an orientation towards seeking out the roots of the violence on both personal and structural levels.

Oliver P. Richmond observes that peace is a fluid, context-based, value-laden term and that many organisations expend very little effort in "conceptualising the essential qualities of peace."¹⁴ Is it possible to direct peacebuilding efforts without thinking about the kind of peace that is sought? John Paul Lederach explains that peace cannot be "just for a few" and that if peace is not pervasive it is only a mirage.¹⁵ Diaconal ministry seeking to be attentive to peace and reconciliation must consider how it defines the terms of its work.

Peacebuilding

Clarity around what constitutes peacebuilding is also crucial. Lisa Schirch defines peacebuilding as that which "seeks to prevent, reduce, transform, and help people recover from violence in all forms, even structural violence that has not yet led to massive civil unrest."¹⁶ Kevin Clements understands peacebuilding that holds a vision towards transformation as an engagement requiring significant "levels of collaboration," observing that societal stakeholders need to invest in being a vital part of the whole energies towards peace, along with development and conflict resolution experts and agencies.¹⁷

Peacebuilding is that work which utilises all processes in order to transform conflict and move towards peaceful relationships. Lederach describes this wide approach towards peacebuilding as a "dynamic social construct."¹⁸ Peacebuilding plans must be holistically grounded in current realities, articulated by a range of voices and players, and be oriented towards building relationships. For peacebuilding efforts to be grounded

¹¹ Johan Galtung, "Violence, peace and peace research," *Journal of Peace Research* 6(3) (1969), pp. 167-191; Johan Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization* (Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, 1996).

¹² Johan Galtung, Carl G. Jacobsen and Kai Frithjof Brand Jacobsen, *Searching for Peace: The Road to TRANSCEND* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p. xiii.

¹³ Adam Curle, *Making Peace* (London: Tavistock, 1971), p. 15.

¹⁴ Oliver P. Richmond, "The Globalization of Responses to Conflict and the Peacebuilding Consensus," *Cooperation and Conflict* 39(2) (2004), p. 136.

¹⁵ John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997), p. 28.

¹⁶ Lisa Schirch, *The Little Book of Strategic Peacebuilding* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2005), p. 9.

¹⁷ Kevin Clements, *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation: Towards Conflict Transformation and a Just Peace*, Vol. 6. (Berlin: Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, 2004), p. 14.

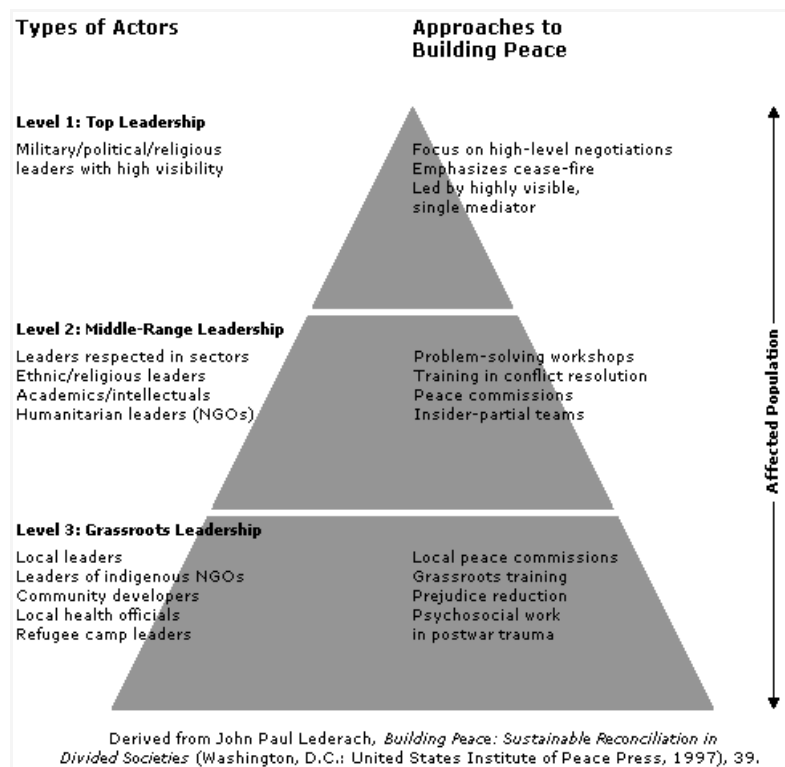
¹⁸ Lederach, *Building Peace*, p. 20.

in a real context and for these efforts to have hope of being sustainable, narratives and storytelling become crucial resources.¹⁹

Peacebuilding is complex work. As Kenneth Bush argues, it is a twofold project of “*deconstructing* the structures of violence and *constructing* the structures of peace.”²⁰ The realisation that these two aspects require simultaneous coordination is crucial. For peacebuilding work to have a chance of success, this axis provides the opportunity for a positive and constructive peace impact. The challenge for diaconal-oriented peacebuilding is to identify opportunities to “nurture the political, economic, and social spaces” and utilise various factors and resources that can assist in creating a positive peace.²¹

Multiple entry points and horizontal-vertical integration in peacebuilding

The work necessary towards a meaningful and transformative peace requires a critical peacebuilding lens that emphasises the analysis of underlying structures. Accordingly, maximising efforts at different levels is key to building an integrative and sustainable peace.²²



¹⁹ Eneko Sanz, “The Peace-Building Story: A Narrative Policy Analysis of Strategic Planning Frameworks for International Postconflict Peace-Building,” 29th November 2012, 3. Available at SSRN, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2239222>.

²⁰ Kenneth Bush, “Commodification, compartmentalization, and militarization of peacebuilding,” in *Building Sustainable Peace*, Tom Keating and Andy W. Knight (eds) (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2004), pp. 23-46: p. 25.

²¹ Bush, “Commodification,” p. 25.

²² Erin McCandless, Eric Abitbol and Timothy Donais, “Vertical Integration: A Dynamic Practice Promoting Transformative Peacebuilding.” *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 10(1) (2015), p. 1.

The work of Mennonite peace scholar John Paul Lederach enhances this consideration. He approaches peacebuilding as work that necessitates an infrastructure that intertwines multiple dimensions. Lederach's "Pyramid of Actors" framework provides a springboard for identifying stakeholders and the directional aspect of their engagement with each other.²³

The peacebuilding space is vast and there are multiple roles for community actors and organisations to play in the areas of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. It is impossible for any one local group to address the immensity of societal needs and, thus, Lederach contends, it is important to identify the aspects necessary to nurture the assets that are already available and to partner with others to build a collaborative and sustainable approach. He identifies these potential engagement sectors for peacebuilding as: top, middle, and grassroots. Lederach's framework encourages vertical and horizontal networking between the different levels of stakeholders and organisations. With an integrated peacebuilding approach, co-ordination and stronger possibilities emerge for any given situation. Diaconal ministries can be lodged for potential engagement in any of these levels and to work towards building assets vital for bridging work.

Richmond asserts that John Paul Lederach has "made one of the most important theoretical contributions to the peacebuilding debate" by highlighting who local actors are and what the roles are for local actors towards a particular "construction" of peace.²⁴ In large part, it is Lederach's work that has paved the way for the "development of multidimensional peace operations" and diverse discourses on peacebuilding mechanisms.²⁵ This diversity provides significant opportunities for imagining diaconal spaces.

The work of reconciliation and restorative justice

In a conflict and trauma impacted world, the work of reconciliation is essential for communities to flourish. Yet, this also means that reconciliation is challenging to set in motion. Is it something that occurs only once peace has been restored? If viewed as part of the transformational process, it becomes part of the goals incorporated into the long-term vision of sustainable peace. Reconciliation involves addressing the impacts of harms existent within community relationships. In pursuit of this, the field of restorative justice has emerged out of conflict-impacted environments as a community-oriented journey towards healing multiple rifts.²⁶ Theologian John W. De Gruchy, speaking out of the context of South Africa, observes that for reconciliation to occur "a fundamental shift in personal, and power relations" is needed before change begins to emerge.²⁷ Reconciliation is part of the long, and necessary, journey towards peace.

Conclusion

Diaconal engagement that strives towards peacebuilding and reconciliation becomes a possibility when people have the opportunity to express their needs and tell their stories. The reconstruction of lives and society requires attention to peace and justice, the existence of violence, and the need for the reparation of structures. Reconciliation requires creativity and the ability to look outside of the normal confines of traditions. As Jesus'

²³ See Lederach, *Building Peace*, p. 39.

²⁴ Richmond, *Transformation of Peace*, p. 103.

²⁵ Richmond, *Transformation of Peace*, p. 105.

²⁶ Restorative justice focuses on repairing the harm of crime and engaging individuals and community members in the process towards healing. For a classic statement, see *Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice* (3rd ed. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2005).

²⁷ John W. De Gruchy, *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), p. 3.

followers, God “has given us [entrusted to us] the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18, NRSV). Robert Schreiter asserts that a Christian’s calling and identity are “shaped by the understanding of reconciliation.”²⁸

Diaconal work, as reconciliation work, is sacred and holy work. It holds the possibility of creating “spaces of safety and trust in a society which has been unsafe and not trustworthy.”²⁹ To move past injustices, to live within the efforts of building peace, the steps towards reconciliation are required – the work of naming truth, considering reparations, making apologies, and finding ways for forgiveness. It is here that God’s healing can be found and where something can be offered for the “rebuilding of society.”³⁰

The relational focus is significant, yet without structural analysis and change, barriers to authentic relationships will linger. This entails considering the role of justice, attending to issues of violence, committing to nonviolence, recognising orientations to power, noticing the nature of relationships, and discerning which contexts and whose voices are present in the discourse. Thus, the diaconal ministry of the church sits within a holistic juncture of rootedness in “care and empowerment” and the “need for a prophetic expression” that grapples with unjust systems and suffering.³¹ Here, diaconia lives in the space of peacebuilding and reconciliation.

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²⁸ Robert Schreiter, *Liberation and Reconciliation as Paradigms of Mission* (Sundbyberg: Swedish Mission Council, 2003), p. 22.

²⁹ Schreiter *Liberation and Reconciliation*, p. 22.

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³¹ Agnes R. M. Abuom, “Foreword,” in *Diakonia as Christian Social Practice*, p. ix.

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66. DIACONIA AS PEACEBUILDING AND RECONCILIATION

Vladimir Fedorov¹

Introduction

This chapter presents an attempt from Russian Orthodox perspectives to briefly answer the question, what is the mission of the church in terms of peace-making and reconciliation? The Church, the ecclesia, is called to communicate Christ to the nations. The Church exists for celebrating and articulating the word of God that the kingdom may come. This is her primary service, her diaconia, and by this mission her vocation is defined. The Church is a servant. She is nothing without diaconia, her mission. At first glance, the topic Peacebuilding and Reconciliation does not seem to belong to the traditional range of the tasks of diaconal ministry. However, if we take diaconia to be more widely defined as “responsible service of the gospel by deeds and by words performed by Christians in response to the needs of people”,² such a topic suggests itself and its relevance is beyond doubts.

The Crucial role of the St Petersburg Orthodox Institute of Missiology, Ecumenism and New Religious Movements

The proposed idea is based on the experience of the post-communist revival of church life in Russia in the last decade of the 20th century. More specifically, it is the experience of the St. Petersburg Orthodox Institute of Missiology, Ecumenism and New Religious Movements (PIMEN).³ At the very establishment of PIMEN in 1994, a peacekeeping resource, the Irenicon Centre was opened. The Institute PIMEN was a product of close co-operation with the diocesan diaconal organisation, the Christian Interfaith Diaconical Council, which in turn was an agent of the diaconal structures of the churches of the Scandinavian countries. At that time, the need for peacekeeping activities was absolutely obvious for us. In 2004, the Irenicon Centre realised five projects: A Peace Week, Peace Routes, a Peace Park, an International Peace Camp, some of these projects were performed in co-operation with Pax Christi Internationalis and other organisations. It was clear to the heads of the Centre that the most important factors of peacebuilding should be interconfessional co-operation and inclusion of peacekeeping topics in theological and religious education. Our interconfessional co-operation greatly benefitted from the fact that, in St. Petersburg (in Russia, only in St. Petersburg), there are not only Orthodox theological educational institutions, but also a Roman Catholic seminary and a number of Protestant educational settings. It is easy to suggest that it is just thanks to the activities of the Irenicon that the concept of the missionary activity of the Russian Orthodox (2007) states that reconciliation is one of the five general directions of the church mission.⁴

Although church mission is a multi-directional and multifaceted reality, many people in our society and in our churches reduce mission to Christian missionary activity aimed at the geographic spread of Christianity, that is to Christian preaching (in the narrow and literal sense) to a non-Christian world. No doubt, such a task of witness, proclamation, self-expression, and growth does exist; it is a natural and intrinsic process within

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² Teresa Joan White, “Diakonia” in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva: WCC publications, 2002), p. 305.

³ About PIMEN see: Vladimir Fedorov and Gerrit Noort. “PIMEN and Evangelisation as Education” *Sharing Good News. Handbook on Evangelisation in Europe*. Gerrit Noort (ed). (Geneva: WCC, 2017), pp. 195-204.

⁴ Концепция миссионерской деятельности Русской Православной Церкви (2007) <https://azbyka.ru/katehizacija/kontseptcija-missionerskoj-dejatelnosti-russkoj-pravoslavnoj-tserkvi.shtml>.

the church life. According to a traditional definition of mission at the beginning of the last century in Russia, “Mission is preaching of one religious teaching among people of another faith.”⁵ As a rule, such a definition summed up how people understood missionary activity among the pagan peoples of the far-flung Russian Orthodox state, or even beyond its borders. It was always assumed that Russian people, living in a country where the church was tightly linked to the state, were deeply Orthodox. Such an understanding was not adequate then and, in the current situation, it compels us to an even greater degree to deepen our understanding of mission. Sadly, today Russian society remains as it was during the period of state atheism. The Church that used to exercise a foreign, external mission is faced with the task as well of an internal mission for which it needs a new, contemporary understanding of the mission of the Church. For this purpose, we need to be able to see the phenomenon of Christianity in contemporary society through secular eyes: it is very important to know how Christianity and Christian mission are perceived by society if we want this mission to be successful.

One of the first priorities of reconciliation should be preventing aggression in conflicts between believers and unbelievers. Their confrontation is ever exacerbating in today’s Russia.

Reconciliation is the Mission of God and the Mission of the Church

The Mission Concept of the ROC from 2007 outlines five areas of the Church’s mission, one of which is reconciliation. This is very important for our understanding of diaconia as mission:

“In the modern world in which globalisation processes, social stratification, mass migrations of people are accompanied by heightened violence, manifestations of terrorist extremism and ethnic and confessional tensions, evidence and proclamation of the possibility of reconciliation between people of different nationalities, ages and social groups, should become one of the key contents of the Orthodox Mission”.⁶

The concept of mission as *Missio Dei*, that was well developed in modern western missiology, later came to be understood in terms of reconciliation being the primary content of God’s mission: “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in [the Son], and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” (Col. 1:19-20).⁷

The theme of “Reconciliation is the Mission of God” is also well developed in Catholic missiology. It implies that the mission model for a globalised and pluralistic world carries an important and essential dimension, which is the concept of reconciliation.

The American theologian Robert Schreiter developed an application of the concept of reconciliation in the contemporary missionary model. He considers healing and reconciliation as the most important dimension of the missionary activity.⁸ According to Schreiter, the possibility of healing and reconciliation in a divided society is one of the most important messages of the Gospel in today’s world.

⁵ *Complete Orthodox Theological Encyclopedia Soikina*, vol 2, p. 1572. [*Polnyii pravoslavnyi bogoslovskii entsiklopedicheskii slovar*]. T.2. <https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/Spravochniki/polnyj-pravoslavnyj-bogoslovsko-entsiklopedicheskij-slovar/1350>.

⁶ On the Mission Concept of the ROC and the process leading to it, see: Valentin Khozuharov, “Mission in an Orthodox Christian context: “Witnessing Christ as Pastoral Responsibility,” available at <https://www.dneoca.org/files/Mission/ValentinKozuharov.pdf>; also “Kontseptsia missionerskoi deyatel’nosti Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi na 2005-2010 gody,” in *Missionerskoe Obozrenie*, No 4. Belgorod, 2007, 4-19 (“Concept of the missionary activity of the Russian Orthodox Church for 2005 to 2010,” in *Missionary Review* 4, Belgorod, April 2007, 4-19).

⁷ See also 2 Corinthians 5:17-20a; Matthew 5:44-45; Galatians 3:27-28.

⁸ R.J. Schreiter, “Reconciliation and Healing as a Paradigm for Mission,” *International Review of Mission*, 94(372) (2005) 74-83.

Peace-making Education

Regretfully, peace-making and reconciliation are not paid enough consideration in theological and religious education. One cannot but agree with a well-known psychologist, specialist in creative thinking, Edward de Bono, who notes:

“Whatever the conflict – internal, interpersonal or international – Christians have the means to settle it. Then why, with the growth of the Church, does not peace add to our long-suffering planet? Among a multitude of answers – sociological, spiritual, prophetic – there is one that cannot be avoided. A reason that the world does not become calmer is that Christians have lost sight of the ways to peace and the skills of peace-making.”⁹

The Ecumenical Movement as an Interconfessional Mission of Reconciliation

Ironically, under the domination of the atheist ideological regime in Russia, in 1961, the Russian Orthodox Church joined the World Council of Churches and actively participated in many ecumenical events; it was also a co-founder of the Conference of European Churches. But after the change of political regime in 1991 with the attendant liberalisation that, among other things, allowed religious freedoms – ecumenical tendencies came up against numerous protests.

A number of Orthodox newspapers and books claim that ecumenism is among the worst heresies of the 20th century, that some Christian denominations which have long been included in the ecumenical movement are nothing but sects, and so on. Therefore, for Christian peacekeeping, interconfessional tensions and conflicts should be the subject of special attention. The strategy of ecumenical education is today one of the most important missionary and, therefore, diaconal tasks. No productive interfaith dialogue is possible without progress in interconfessional communication.

In 2005, the Department of Crisis and Extreme Situations Psychology at the Faculty of Psychology of the St Petersburg University invited the head of the Irenical Centre to give a lecture course in the psychology of ethno-religious conflicts. Later, it became clear that there is a demand to single out a special direction, namely, “religious conflictology”, from the well-developed and somewhat overgrown discipline of “conflictology”.

It is important not only to analyse religious conflicts, but also to search for religious resources to overcome and prevent them. Science and the relevant academic discipline in the field that came to be called irenology are needed in Russia to work out tactics and strategies for reconciliation.

“Moral theology” has always been one of the basic subjects in Orthodox theological education and it covered some topics of social ethics, such as attitude towards war. However, in the late twentieth century, in an era of ever-increasing globalisation, there appeared a need to seek Christian answers to many problems besides globalisation per se: ecology, bioethics, economics and finances etc. With the new experience of world wars, the Churches began searching for Christian strategy and tactics of service to the world preventing a new world war which threatens a global catastrophe. There was an obvious need to extend theological education by including in the programme such subjects as sociology, political science, social psychology and some other branches of psychological science. After teaching Church History, Comparative Theology, and Mission and Ecumenism at the Orthodox Theological Academy, it seemed to me useful to professionally engage in social psychology. In two or three years, it became clear to me that a course in conflicts should be also introduced as a special subject into theological curriculum.

⁹ де Боно Эдуард, Конфликт и примирение. Издатель: ИРХЛ, 112 стр.

Modules of a Course on Conflictology

In secular liberal arts education, for many years, there has been the subject “Conflictology”. Today, it comprises of a lot of special branches: General Conflictology, Social Conflictology, Political Conflictology, Ethnoconflictology, Pedagogical Conflictology, Regional Conflictology, Economic Conflictology, Conflictology of International Relations, Organisational Conflictology, Legal Conflictology. It was natural to develop Religious Conflictology as an addition to Ethnoconflictology.

As a lecturer in Church history and ecumenical issues, I always wanted to dwell upon non-theological factors of the conflicts (condemnation of heresies, the schisms, interconfessional and interreligious tensions). Over time, the educational process made it clear that it was necessary to create a space for discussing these topics, for searching for the wording of the position of the Churches on issues of public concern.

The experience of simultaneous teaching at the Faculty of Psychology of a secular university and the Orthodox Theological academy of the subject Ethno-Religious Conflicts prompted a deeper immersion into the study of the psychological mechanisms of various kinds of conflicts, and special attention was paid to the problem of reconciliation.

A year ago, it was decided by the Academy body to introduce an original course in Religious Conflictology into the Master’s programme of the Church Practice Department of the Academy. The closest in content to this course academic discipline in the anglophone world is “Peace and Conflict Studies”.

The first undergraduate academic programme in Peace Studies in the United States was developed in 1948 by Gladdys Muir, at Manchester University in North Manchester, Indiana. A 2008 report in the *International Herald Tribune* mentions over 400 programmes of teaching and research in peace and conflict.

Chapter 1 of the course under discussion is devoted to the search for the principle of organising a multi-ethnic society. The three models to be considered are multiculturalism, a melting pot and a salad bowl.

The rest of the Chapters of the course are the following:

- What is conflict? Types of conflicts;
- Ethnic, religious and ethno-religious conflicts. Religious wars;
- Ethnic conflicts. Ethnos and ethnicity;
- Nation and national culture. Ethnocentrism. Nationalism. Patriotism and confessionism. Messianism and missionism. Chauvinism. Xenophobia and religious xenophobia. Racism. Genocide;
- Anti-Semitism as xenophobia and as an ethno-religious conflict. The Holocaust;
- Conflicts within Christianity. Separations, heresies, schisms, sects;
- Interfaith tensions. Conflicts within other religions;
- Religious fundamentalism as a psychological attitude that engenders conflicts;
- Tolerance and intolerance. Religious tolerance. Diametrically opposite strategies of political correctness and tolerance;
- The concept of religious pluralism. Prospects of education in the culture of religious pluralism;
- Religion and violence;
- Pacifism and nonviolent methods of conflict resolution. Discussion about the use of force in the fight against evil in Russian religious and philosophical thought. Pacifism;
- Psychology of religious extremism;
- Psychology of religious fanaticism;
- Ecumenism as a search for a peaceful removal of inter-confessional tensions and misunderstandings. Christian peace-making;
- Psychological, religious and educational, peacekeeping and other forms of practical efforts that reduce aggression and provide a preventive effect.

It is natural to figure out the problems of ethnocentrism, nationalism, patriotism which, of course, should not be confused with nationalism. The danger of it is obvious when you come across the extreme form of the latter, chauvinism. In Christian theological education, there is a parallel with differentiation between the

concepts of confessionalism and confessional chauvinism. It is useful to recall that as early as 1925 at the Royal College in London, in the days of the 1600th anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea, the outstanding Russian Orthodox theologian-exegete professor, Glubokovsky spoke of “malicious confessional chauvinism”.¹⁰

Analysing the danger of confessional chauvinism, we have to admit that the basis of such a phenomenon is the psychological factor that forms the fundamentalist consciousness. Such a consciousness cannot recognise tolerance as a value, it cannot allow creative initiatives in the confessional culture (in particular, in Orthodox Russia to allow the translation of the worship into modern Russian). Therefore, in the course under discussion the central place is given to the theme, fundamentalism. In the chapter on tolerance, the causes of rejection of tolerance by bishops and clergy as positive values are analysed and the main reason is found in mistaking tolerance for political correctness.

In the discussed course, it would be worth adding a section on “Religious irenology”, i.e. peace studies: an interdisciplinary effort aiming at the prevention, de-escalation, and resolution of conflicts by peaceful reconciliation which is a multi-valued concept. It may imply restoration of harmony after the conflict or the end of hostility between the two sides. For Christians, reconciliation refers to a process that begins with forgiveness of past deeds and ends with peace. Understanding the world as a value, striving for the reconciliation of man with God, man with man and man with nature as the creation of God, is inherent in all Abrahamic religions. In the second half of the twentieth century, a number of theological texts appeared in Christian theology which they began to call “theology of peace” and designated this trend “irenology”, a word with a Greek root. It is not superfluous to note that fundamentalists, fighters against modernism, are very sharply against this line of theology.

Conclusion

The task of reconciliation arises in all kinds of conflicts: intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup; related and not related to religion. However, religious resources, which are spirituality, practices of abstinence, patterns of mental exercises and ways of praying belonging to different traditions, not only make up a special religious personality, but also can contribute significantly to peace and reconciliation. For a Christian, what is essential is the revelation that Christ is the King of Peace: Jesus Christ does not give us the same peace that this world gives. While the peace that this world offers is the absence of conflict which often results from a positive way of thinking, the peace that God gives us is the state of being confident in knowing that He is in full control. Knowing that Jesus Christ is not only the Prince and Ruler of Peace but also the King of Peace gives us the confidence under any circumstances that we do not have to fear the present nor the future. He gives His peace to those who accept it as a result of the Holy Spirit working in their lives.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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67. DIACONIA AND THE CHALLENGE OF FUNDAMENTALISM AND EXCLUSIVISM

Aled Edwards¹

As a new millennium approached, the UK, having received a mandate through referendums in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, brought into being two democratically elected assemblies and a parliament. Informed to some extent by the faith embraced principle of subsidiarity, these three democratic institutions found on the western edge of Europe, belonged to what appeared to be a prevailing political paradigm. That paradigm upheld the importance of constitutionality, the rule of law and a commitment to the progressive values of paying due regard to human rights, equal opportunities for all people and sustainable development.

Since 1999, that democratic order appears to have faltered. Over two decades, a return to authoritarianism identified by a fundamentalism and exclusivism, has gained strength. Not alone, but perhaps totemic of a global shift, the Arab Spring has sadly shivered into a winter. The nativism nurtured and deployed by the Brexit cause in the UK and the Donald Trump *Make America Great Again* campaign in the USA have prevailed through electoral mandates.

From within now deeply fractured societies, Christian traditions have continued to speak prophetically and striven to provide for the vulnerable and different through an array of invaluable diaconal acts of care. They have done so at times with considerable integrity. However, Christians in western democracies have also been complicit in the othering of those who are different. In March 2019, Pew Research found that “white evangelical Protestants” continued to overwhelmingly support Donald Trump. Most other religious groups were as divided as the American people as a whole.

Different communities defined by faith now appear to be parting ways into mutually excluding bubbles: those of an open and inclusive diaconal commitment to the stranger in our midst and others who seek the security of a familiar identity and faith shaped by exclusive and protective tendencies. These two identities pose a generational challenge for ecumenism.

The consequences of the fracturing can be severe. The consequences can be deadly. A new power now also roams in our midst: the deployment of vast social media technologies purposely designed to know who we are, where we are, what we think, what we should buy and more especially how we should vote. How we should vote may increasingly be determined by those who decide who we should fear and be encouraged to hate.

On the extremes, those who are already prone to acts of violence are targeted to receive and perpetuate hate. The sting of this dynamic has become increasingly apparent to people of faith. Christchurch, New Zealand on a Muslim Friday, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on a Jewish Sabbath and Colombo, Sri Lanka on the most holy of Sundays: all visited by a lord of sorts: a giver of death. Horrendous acts of violence are shaped by a fundamentalism that cannot now comprehend or believe in the possibilities of otherness.

To the backdrop of this societal shift, the diaconal nature of the relationship between faith communities and devolved politics deserves some exploration. Wales has no established or state church. The nature of the engagement has therefore never rested on power or privilege but on the reputation of serving a nation and its people.

Cytûn: Churches Together in Wales,² as a national ecumenical instrument within the broader framework of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI),³ had prepared for the creation of the National Assembly

¹ Aled Edwards, Ordained Minister of the Church of Wales, Chief Executive Officer of CATYN, Churches Together in Wales; also: Chair of the Welsh Refugee Council (2005-06), a member of the Equal Opportunities Wales Advisory Committee, and was Wales’ Commissioner on the Commission for Racial Equality (2006-07). He is Chair of Displaced People in Action.

² <http://www.cytun.co.uk/hafan/en/home/>.

³ <https://ctbi.org.uk/>.

for Wales.⁴ Some would even argue that Cytûn played a part in the Assembly's creation and especially in the articulation of its core values.

In 1993, Welsh church leaders responded to a public challenge issued by the then Secretary of State for Wales, John Redwood, to discuss 'the moral fabric of Welsh society'. A meeting between him and ecumenical leaders triggered a reflective process that produced a key report moderated by Archbishop Rowan Williams: *Wales: A Moral Society?* (1996). The document explored issues around family life, education, health and social care, housing and homelessness, and work and economic policy. Building upon broad church teachings concerning subsidiarity, it dared to envision the establishment of an outward looking assembly that:

Would enable the people of Wales to work, through their own political and civic structures, not only for justice, freedom and peace within Wales, but also for our sisters and brothers within the family of nations in Europe and world-wide.⁵

From the establishing of the National Assembly in 1999, the space created by devolved governance allowed faith communities to shape public policy in an unprecedented manner. A formal partnership agreement with the breadth of the Welsh voluntary organisations also brought a wide range of key stakeholders together.

The devolved dynamic also allowed a meaningful engagement with civil servants. Many of us were totally new to the experience of sitting around the table of government. Crucially, following the '9/11' New York terrorist attack in 2001, the Welsh First Minister called for the setting up of the Welsh Interfaith Council.⁶ From that point onwards, all the most significant world faith communities with a presence in Wales have met formally with the First Minister at least twice a year.

This deepening relationship enabled churches to respond ecumenically in a highly effective manner to both domestic and international issues. The devastating foot-and-mouth crisis which hit the UK in 2001 offers a case in point. Over six million cows and sheep were slaughtered resulting in the impoverishment and isolation of farming families. In Wales, it was reported at the time that churches working with Welsh Government officials and the rural charity, the ARC Addington Fund, had distributed over £3 million to farming families experiencing that isolation and need. This co-production was deeply diaconal in nature.

Significantly, international issues came into play with the civic response in 2001 to the placing of asylum detainees under remand conditions in Cardiff Prison. The trigger for the civic response was seeing the detainees being taken for health checks to the University of Wales Hospital, Cardiff in handcuffs. Following the exertion of considerable pressure from civic groups, faith communities and the National Assembly on a cross party basis, the detainees were removed from Cardiff Prison.

That early interplay with devolved politics concerning immigration issues opened a door to more long-term diaconal initiatives. The pioneering Welsh Refugee Doctors training scheme,⁷ initiated in 2002, has by now trained over 200 doctors and dentists who have sought sanctuary in Wales enabling them to work in the National Health Service. Following a church-led ecumenical initiative, the Welsh Government has now also committed itself to making Wales a Nation of Sanctuary and is making progress in delivering its action plan.

Such narratives of engagement have appealed to sections of the church committed to a diaconal ministry of care. It has, in contrast, also brought faith communities into conflict with an emerging nativist populism, with all its fundamentalisms around identity.

The closeness and the effectiveness of the relationship between church policy officers and civil servants in Wales is also worthy of note. Internationally, the craft of professional civil servants who have applied skill

⁴ <https://www.assembly.wales/en/Pages/Home.aspx>.

⁵ *Wales: A Moral Society?* (1996) Cytûn: Churches Together in Wales. p. 65.

⁶ <https://www.interfaithcouncilwales.cymru/welcome/>.

⁷ <https://psu.walesdeanery.org/refugee-doctors>.

and integrity to the art of government is changing. On the sleeve of his recent book *The Fifth Risk: Undoing Democracy* (2018), Michael Lewis has this line about government partly in tribute to nameless civil servants who actually make things work: ‘People don’t notice when stuff goes right. That is the stuff government does. It manages everything that underpins our lives [...]’⁸

Twenty years on, it remains the case that Wales’ national ecumenical instrument continues to work well with Welsh Government officials, not only in terms of public policy but also in helping a nation to shape its civic ceremonies, marked by celebration and sadness, but the wider context for that engagement has now changed. Michael Lewis, reflecting on the Trump administration’s approach to government departments in the USA adds that ‘Now, government is under attack. By its own leaders.’⁹

A few days before the departure of the UK from the European Union, Welsh civic society gathered in its rich diversity in Cardiff City Hall, in the Welsh capital, to mark Holocaust Memorial Day. For some civic leaders present at the ceremony, bidding farewell to the staff of the European Commission’s Office in Cardiff Bay the previous week had been a difficult experience. Wales had by a narrow margin voted to leave the EU in the 2016 referendum. The percentage remain vote in Cardiff was however on a par with that of London. The prevailing view of Wales’ elected representatives in its National Assembly had been that the UK should have remained in the EU. The majority of voters, however, disagreed!

On Holocaust Memorial Day 2020, thoughts focused on the future direction of the European continent and how the Welsh nation would redefine and sustain relationships in a rapidly changing world. Ensuring peace, justice, social harmony and due regard for the environment in the face of the rise of populist nativism – with its fundamentalist and exclusivist tendencies – throughout the European continent focused the minds of civic leaders in an open and inclusive ceremony expressed through the medium of three languages: English, Welsh and Hebrew. Revisiting the horrors of a holocaust and more recent acts of genocide in places such as Srebrenica, gave rise to concerns that history should not be repeated.

At the Holocaust memorial ceremony in Cardiff, I found it difficult not to be concerned and fearful. What I observe about the rise in race and faith-based hate incidents in my own national context gives increasing cause for alarm. The troubling stories told by some of Wales’ black and ethnic communities of discrimination and abuse on the streets also offer a warning that it is not beyond possibility that history will indeed be repeated. It is also my discernment that Wales’ Muslim and Jewish communities feel increasingly troubled. Some of their leaders say this explicitly.

Yet, I would conclude this discussion on a hopeful note informed by two distinctive experiences shaped by the outstanding diaconal care offered by the Christian community in two places where, for the world’s refugee communities, life is experienced at its most vulnerable.

My thoughts are shaped by two deeply moving visits. The first was in 2015 to a small Greek village on the border with Macedonia, called Eidomeni, which became one of the main crossing points for thousands of Syrian refugees fleeing the civil war. The second was of volunteering, in 2018, with the Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande helping hundreds of central American asylum seekers process their claims in the United States. They had spent time in the now notorious detention centres, had been deprived of their belts and laces and had acquired a distinct political identity on Fox News as *The Caravan*.

Both in Eidomeni and McAllen, Texas, I observed churches working ecumenically to care for others. In such places, the transformative power of the modern narrative of diaconia is immense despite the suffering. Churches will feed, provide clothing and care for the world’s most vulnerable refugee people at enormous cost to themselves.

On the last day of a sabbatical in the USA, around the time of the Mid-term elections in 2018, I enjoyed good and thoughtful company in a Washington DC bookshop, ploughing my way through a set of essays in a

⁸ Michael Lewis, *The Fifth Risk Undoing Democracy* (London: Allen Lane. 2018).

⁹ Michael Lewis, *The Fifth Risk Undoing Democracy*.

fascinating book *Defending Democracy in the Age of Trump: Fight for Liberty* (2018).¹⁰ American scholars and activists are looking for remedies.

In a perceptive piece on *The Digital Assault on Democracy*, Massimo Calabresi, the bureau chief of *Time* magazine frightened me a bit by opening his thoughts with a bold line: ‘Not long from now, a clever programmer will fully automate the dark art of propaganda.’¹¹ Soon, artificial intelligence will know us so well, it will make sure that millions will vote as its programme decides.

Regardless, I read on and was fascinated to read that the word propaganda was coined by Pope Gregory XV in 1622. He was displeased by the fact that Protestants were issuing tracts around Europe by means of a frightening new technology called printing. I reflected on the fact that if it was not for those tracts and the capacity to print Welsh language prayer books and bibles, it is doubtful anyone would still be speaking Welsh today. Humanity has a history of mastering technology.

The answer to the challenge of social media is for government to do what government has always done: break up monopolies and regulate large services. Concerning breaches of electoral law and the possible hiding of dark money, government has to legislate and provide sufficient resources to investigate breaches. Perhaps we should not dwell too long on what our democratic legislatures can do for us. The question now is: what we can do for democracy?

Working alongside the National Assembly for Wales for twenty years has taught me that the human spirit has an extraordinary capacity to prevail and to do good. The best asset available to nations has always been their people. In doing government, renewing our world is not beyond us if we set our hearts and minds to the task of statecraft for the public good. Ecumenism has a role to play. The human spirit, no matter how difficult the task or how awful the circumstances are, has a fantastic capacity to gather together, to prevail and to build anew.

The night the National Assembly for Wales celebrated its first twenty years, the American news agency NBC covered a story that, despite borders being closed to displaced people all over Europe, a nation had chosen to define itself by the sanctuary it was willing to offer. Twenty years on, that is how the world’s journalism chose to see Wales. Just for a while, global politics watched and noticed.

Recently, with colleagues from the refugee charity Displaced People in Action, I listened to the latest batch of refugee doctors telling their stories. The women were particularly powerful. They always are. Their stories can be horrific but empowering. That day in Cardiff Bay the mid-day sun shone through the window and it rained a little. Suddenly, the room filled with colours and a rainbow grounded literally at everyone’s feet. We should take heart and dare to believe that just perhaps, there’s someone other than NBC News watching.

Suggestions for Further Reading:

Cytûn: Churches Together in Wales: *Wales: A Moral Society?* 1996.

Doe, Norman. *A New History of the Church in Wales: Governance and Ministry, Theology and Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.

Lewis, Michael. *The Fifth Risk: Undoing Democracy*, London: Allen Lane, 2018.

Lasswell, Mark, Ed. *Fight for Liberty. Defending Democracy in the Age of Trump*, NY: Public Affairs, 2018.

¹⁰ Mark Lasswell (ed), *Fight for Liberty. Defending Democracy in the Age of Trump*, see: <https://www.publicaffairsbooks.com/titles/mark-lasswell/fight-for-liberty/9781541724167/>.

¹¹ Massimo Calabresi, *The Digital Assault on Democracy in Defending Democracy in the Age of Trump: Fight for Liberty* (2018) p. 101.

68. THE NEED FOR A THEOLOGY OF RESILIENCE, COEXISTENCE, AND HOPE¹

Antje Jackelén²

Introduction

In many countries of the world, people are drinking from a dangerous cocktail made up of poisonous ingredients, all starting with the letter *P*. For quite some time, I have been speaking of four of them: *polarisation*, *populism*, *protectionism*, and *post-truth*. When I, some months ago, talked about this at the general assembly of the Church of Sweden Youth Organisation, a young woman got up and said, “I think there is a fifth one: patriarchy.”

And I think, she is right. *Patriarchy* is not as much a sign of precisely our times as the others are, because it has been around as a constant factor throughout history – more or less as a constant background noise; nevertheless, it also develops a specific synergy with the other *Ps*.

The Five Poisonous *Ps*

Polarisation tears apart whole societies as well as smaller communities. This happens in terms of increasing income gaps, as well as gaps in education and health status. We see increasing polarisation between political blocks, between generations, and between urban and rural areas. This situation provides a fertile ground for populism. *Populism* gets its energy from pitting people against each other. Populists claim that they are the voice of the people – which is supposed to have just this one voice – and that they speak out against the elites – elites that they claim have lost touch with the people, pampering minorities instead. The populists put their own people above all others, thus promoting nationalism. In the so-called Christian West, they urge the churches to become part of the nationalist, anti-Muslim, and (beyond the surface, even) anti-Semitic project. If they resist, they are accused of no longer being Christian but having become political.

Protectionism is one of the consequences of populism. It puts one’s own group, nation, country first, at the expense of common interests. “America First” and Brexit are examples. In both cases, we know that the campaigns were built on lies – on false facts, masked as “alternative facts” – which brings us to *post-truth*. The insight that democratic elections or referendums can be won even though it is clear that the facts are wrong and key campaigners are lying is quite shocking. According to moral standards, a person who is found out to have lied should be ashamed, confess, and do better. If a person found out to have lied instead displays shamelessness, proceeds with even more lies, and wins – this shakes some of the foundations of democracy. Democracy can only work if there is a certain level of consensus on certain values, some of them being a reasonably honest culture of debate, equal participation, respect for human rights, and accountability not only toward the voters but also to moral values.

Patriarchy, finally, is the disturbing background noise throughout history. Although progress in gender equality has been made, not least during the 20th century, we hear about backlashes in many places. Although we know that societies and communities with gender equality do better than others, there still is old and even new resistance. Churches are known to not always have championed gender justice. On the basis of God creating men and women in God’s image, and in light of the apostle Paul’s word in Galatians 3:28, objecting

¹ Reprinted with permission from the office of the Archbishop from: Ecumenical Review January-April 2019, 71(1-2), April 2019. See: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/erev.12404>.

² Rev. Dr. Antje Jackelén is Archbishop of Uppsala and primate (prima inter pares) of the Church of Sweden, the national church in Sweden.

to gender justice is a deviation from the Biblical message. Therefore, rightly so, churches see gender justice as part of their mission in today's world.

Drinking from the poisonous cocktail brings out a behaviour that manifests itself as being against refugees and migrants, against climate action, and against equality and gender justice. We know how often the Bible talks about justice; we know that care of creation has been entrusted to us; we know that caring for the stranger is at the heart of the biblical love command. Therefore, we cannot do other than work against this poisonous and dangerous cocktail. In order to do that, we need to make use of the resources we have in spirituality and theology. I will exemplify with a resource I see in the theology and spirituality of the Lutheran tradition.

Dialectics

In fact, it is characteristic of Lutheran theology that it comes across “couplewise,” that is, in pairings of concepts: for example, two kingdoms or regiments, law and gospel, humans as simultaneously justified and sinners (*simul iustus et peccator*), God's alien work and God's own work (*opus alienum* and *opus proprium*), God hidden and revealed (*deus absconditus* and *deus revelatus*), a person before God and a person before humans (*coram deo* and *coram hominibus*), the theology of glory and the theology of the cross (*theologia gloriae* and *theologia crucis*), or freedom and service. It is always about a relationship between two poles. Sometimes it is about a both-and relationship, as with *simul iustus* and *peccator*; sometimes it is an either-or relationship, as with the theology of glory and the theology of the cross. It is a hallmark of good theologians that they can deal with these differences and relationships in the right way.

This sense of dialectics is something that Lutherans can bring as a gift to the ecumenical family. Someone once said that Lutheran physicists were needed to formulate quantum theory. After all, the insight that something can be simultaneously a particle and a wave presupposes an understanding of dialectics – in other words, the ability to see that statements that ostensibly rule each other out can actually reveal more truth than statements that are unambiguous and free of contradictions. Now, the significance of Lutheran theology for quantum theory may be somewhat exaggerated, but we should not underestimate the value of constantly having to deal with dialectic structures – an antidote to the poison spread by the five Ps.

Overlapping Consensus

Overlapping consensus can be a good starter in dealing with diversity within and between faith traditions. This creates energy. I experienced that energy at a conference held in Rome in September 2018, jointly arranged by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Vatican. We were about two hundred representatives, from different Christian denominations and other faiths from all over the world, gathered together to discuss xenophobia, racism, and populist nationalism in the context of global migration.

The conference *bridged* two important aspects of being a church today: on the one hand, the critical and self-critical work within and between faith traditions; on the other hand, the focus on the (unique and critical) contribution of faith communities to the common good of the world at large. Let me exemplify:

First aspect: Critical and self-critical homework. The conference message clearly states that racism is a sin (para. 6c).³ It emphasised that our faith traditions contain theologies and structures that legitimate xenophobia, racism, and nationalist populism, even though these are contradictory to the very core of our traditions and very much at odds with the Golden Rule. Therefore, the message calls for “leadership in raising critical consciousness among Christians of the complicity of some theologies in xenophobia and racism, for a radical

³ “Message from the conference ‘Xenophobia, Racism and Populist Nationalism in the Context of Global Migration,’” 19th September 2018, WCC website, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/message-from-the-conference-xenophobia-racism-and-populist-nationalism-in-the-context-of-global-migration-19-september-2018>.

disengagement from such theologies, and for the church to fully assume its role as conscience-keeper in this context” (para. 13c).

Second aspect: Focus on the common good. The conference message also claims that we need to acknowledge the fears that arise in the context of migration. Whether these are fears of loss of security, of economic status, or of cultural identity, they need to be reflected on theologically. The aim should be to meet narratives of fear with narratives of hope, narratives of hate with narratives of love (para. 8b). Churches are called to be places of memory, hope, and love (para. 13e). On this basis, the message states, “Claiming to protect Christian values or communities by shutting out those who seek safe refuge from violence and suffering is unacceptable, undermines Christian witness in the world, and raises up national boundaries as idols” (para. 7b). When faith communities get together within one or between several faith traditions and reflect on their public role, they will always end up being engaged with and in the world, at least to some extent.

When Pope Francis received the participants of the conference, he reminded them that to be a Christian is to go against the flow, which these days implies reacting against the growing suspicion, fear, and contempt of other people and to object to politicians who exploit people’s fear and hatred. Or, as a Catholic bishop said, “We need to contribute with what we think is right, rather than with what is acceptable.”

Understanding of the Secular

Our ways of being “church in the world” – the legacy of the WCC assembly in Uppsala 1968⁴ – require us to have a proper understanding of what the secular is and how it works. Without such understanding, it will be hard or even impossible for a diverse society to harvest the fruits of the life and work of faith communities. The secular has come to be an important factor in describing many Western countries. Sweden is often said to be one of the most secularised countries in the world. By some standards that may be right. Nevertheless, it has also been shown that Swedes are less secularised than they tend to think of themselves. The surface may look very secular, but if you scratch just a little, you may come across not only religious sentiments and rites, but also more or less conscious faith convictions. In as much as Sweden is secularised, it is secularised in a Christian, or even a Lutheran way.

Sometimes, there is quite some confusion about whether *society* as such is secularised or not. Clearly, it is not. It never is, as long as there is one single believer. However, the state is secular and should be so. This insight is one of the fruits of the Enlightenment; moreover, it is in harmony with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A secular state can and must guarantee freedom of religion.

Diversity creates challenges for social cohesion in societies. Cultural and religious diversity, however, is so much more than problems that ought to be integrated away. Rather, diversities are the raw material from which to build networks of criss-crossing relationships, building bricks for a socially cohesive society.

The message from the Rome conference mentioned above reminds us that people of faith are an important, if not necessary, part of society. (This was also reaffirmed by the UN leaders present for the opening of the general assembly of the ACT Alliance in Uppsala in October 2018.) This means that people of faith need to *act* as each other’s neighbours, if we really want to see a world where we can live as good neighbours. It also means that the world needs the strength and energy from people of faith:

We are called to accompany and hold accountable those who exercise power and participate directly in decisions that affect the future of the human community, at national and international levels. The advice that all believers can offer may be inspired by the “golden rule”, common to different traditions, according to which one should “do to others what you would have them do to you” (Mt. 7:12). This “golden rule” is reflected in fundamental human

⁴ On the Uppsala assembly, see Annegreth Schilling, “The Ecumenical Movement and 1968: The Uppsala Assembly as the Beginning of a New Era?” *Ecumenical Review* 70(2) (July 1968), pp. 194–215.

rights, which are conditions to be achieved for others as well as for ourselves, and call for the construction of social cohesion. Only an inclusive approach that considers all dimensions of the human being and calls for the participation of each and every one in society can effectively fight against discrimination and exclusion. (para. 10)

Romanticising the roles of faith communities is not useful. We have been culprits, and acted in alliance with culprits, not only in the past. Hence, we should work more diligently with the quality of our engagement than with the amount of our engagement.

Being Church in the World

Good solutions in many areas require cooperation between the best scientific, technological, and theological knowledge and skills. Religion, its doctrinal expressions, and its rites are robust and changeable at the same time. New challenges will shape new alliances across religious communities. In the process, the religious geography of this world may be up to some surprising changes. This holds true in the face of the demands that climate change will put on humanity as well as in the face of the blessings and the woes of what often goes by the name the fourth industrial revolution (digitalisation, artificial intelligence [AI], and so forth).

We live in a difficult time for humankind and for the earth. Violent conflicts, extremism, social and political unrest, economic crises, and climate issues are threats to the livelihood of women, men, and children around the world. The five *Ps* are endangering the solidarity between people and between states – a solidarity so badly needed in order to cope with today’s and tomorrow’s challenges.

A World of Neighbours

As a counter-example, I would like to briefly sketch the contours of the programme, *A World of Neighbors – Interreligious Praxis for Peace*. It is an initiative, spearheaded by the Church of Sweden, which seeks to collect best practices and to deepen the relationship between religious communities and faith-based organisations working for social and spiritual sustainability in Sweden and Europe.

What is specific about this initiative is its focus on the practical work at the grassroots level, rather than dialogue among religious leaders. Our staff have established contacts in a number of European countries, such as Scotland, England, Germany, Italy, Greece, Hungary and Poland. The stories they bring home are both amazing and heart-breaking.

This being said, and looking to the future, my point is that we need a theology of resilience, a theology of co-existence, and a theology of hope. This requires some explanation.

A Theology of Resilience

A theology of resilience will enable us to make sense of the fights of women and men for the health, wellbeing, and future of their children. We will be able again and again to draw God’s mercy into this world with our words and actions. Be it words of prayer and words of advocacy for human rights, equality, peace, justice, and reconciliation. Be it humanitarian help and support for development. With a theology of resilience, we will be able to confront the trends and powers that hamper our constructive engagement with the greatest challenges of our time. We will be able to confront polarisation that tears apart what should belong together and work together. We will be able to resist populism that pits people and so-called elites against each other. We will be able to counteract protectionism that puts one’s own country, one’s own people, and one’s own interests first, at the expense of the common good. We will be able to fight against post-truth, the contempt of truth that disfigures the vital triad of the true, the good, and the beautiful. Furthermore, we will be able to

overcome patriarchy, which deprives the world of the full flourishing of women and children, and in the end dehumanises men as well as women.

A Theology of Co-existence

With a theology of co-existence, we will be able to revisit some of the borders that are harmful to our working and living together as one human family, also within the ecumenical family. We will be able to foster more adequate views of nature and will listen to the groaning and longing of creation for the revealing of the children of God (Rom. 8:19-23). This will put us in a more effective position to address climate change in a holistic way. With a theology of co-existence, we will be more eager to hear the stories of those who are suffering and will be suffering from the degradation of their environments and livelihoods. We will be better at listening to the voices of Indigenous peoples.

A Theology of Hope

With a theology of hope, finally, there is reason to expect change. Underlying all those major questions of our time, for believers and non-believers alike, is the pressing question: “What may we really hope for?” Clearly, as Christians, we have a special vocation to respond in honest, empathetic and intelligible ways:

Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. (1 Pet. 3:15)

This may be the right time to revisit the great theologians from the 1970s onwards, such as Jürgen Moltmann, Johann Baptist Metz and Dorothee Sölle. Their emphasis on the nature and necessity of hope may also prove relevant for us today. It seems to me that we need to find theologically sound ways of accounting for at least three components in what we call “hope”, namely *anger*, *courage* and *humility*.

Suggestion for Further Reading

Jackelen, Antje. *God Is Greater: Theology for the World*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2020.

69. DELIVERANCE, MENTAL HEALTH, AND PROSPERITY: A HOLISTIC DIACONIAL PERSPECTIVE FROM INDONESIAN CONTEXT

Jaharianson Saragih¹ and Parulihan Sipayung²

Introduction

This chapter aims to integrate theology, psychology and cultural insights into doing diaconal-holistic ministry. In Indonesia, the context of this essay, diaconia is not only understood as the care for the poor and the oppressed but it includes the issues of mental health, deliverance ministry, and prosperity or in short, to live an abundant life (John 10:10). In this setting, the issues of contextual diaconia cannot ignore the belief system where the people admit that the spiritual reality (either good or evil spirit) can intervene in the life of the living.

These spiritual beings are commonly engaged in people's daily lives through the help of shamans. People use them to gain fortune, to succeed in their political agenda, business, career and so on. The problem is, instead of giving prosperity this practice leads to deeper suffering, mentally, physically and spiritually. Dealing with these issues, I propose a "both-and" paradigm that includes holistic aspects of human life.

In this article, I would like to expose the theological shift that demands a different response from the Global North to the Global South. The issues of these themes in Indonesia and their similarities with other Asian-African contexts are also analysed. I also try to depict the various paradigms encountered by the churches in Indonesia. In the end, I expect to fill the gap of "either-or" – the dualism paradigm to "both-and" paradigm by proposing the Psycho-Del-Si approach that integrates the perspective of theology, psychology, and culture.

Global Numerical and Theological Shift

The gravity of Christianity has significantly shifted from the Global North to the Global South and East. Philip Jenkins in his phenomenal book, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* has elucidated the growth of Christianity in Asia, Latin America and Africa. He argues:

If we extrapolate these figures to the year 2025 and assume no great gains or losses through conversion, then there would be around 2.6 billion Christians, of whom 633 million would live in Africa, 640 million in Latin America, and 460 million in Asia. Europe, with 555 million, would have slipped to third place. Africa and Latin America would be in competition for the title of most Christian continent.³

Moreover, in another book, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South*, Jenkins argues that, in 1900, 70% of the Christian population resided in Europe; now, two-thirds are in the Global South and East. He reveals that the number of African Christians has grown from 10 million in 1900 to 360

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² Rev. Parulihan Sipayung is also a GKPS pastor. He is doing his doctorate programme in Global Institute of Theology, Yonsei University, Seoul, South Korea.

³ Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 2-3.

million in 2000.⁴ It shows that Christianity is growing in the Global South and East but is declining in the West. Lamin Sanneh believes that secularism has replaced the Christendom model in the West.⁵

From these brief statistics, we can conclude that the centre of Christianity is moving to decentre Europe. The shift shows not only in the numbers but also in the theological paradigms.⁶ It demands a humble approach to listen and learn on the emerging theological issues particularly on deliverance, mental health, and prosperity of the Global South.

Issues of Deliverance, Diaconia, and Prosperity in Indonesia

Deliverance, diaconia, and prosperity are closely related. Deliverance is the divine intervention to spiritually release the people from the bondage of the curse and the influence of the evil. Deliverance is not only about physical illness but also mental illness caused by the intervention of the evil. On another side, diaconia is charitable care to transform the life (physical, economic) of the poor, while prosperity is the result of all: spiritually, mentally, and physically plenty. I argue that diaconial ministry causes a little impact if we ignore the spiritual and mental realm of the person as well as the community. As I experience and practice, the “deliverance” should come first then the diaconia will necessarily follow. It is an inseparable link that we cannot conduct diaconial ministry without embracing the issues of deliverance, mental health, and prosperity.

In his well-known book, *Sumatra: Its History and People*, Edwin M. Loeb, elucidates that the people of Sumatra (even in Indonesia) are characterised by beliefs in witchcraft, shamanism, and totemism.⁷ These characteristics are frequently seen in daily life. They are commonly used in politics, financial matters, careers, and health.

Moreover, Amich Alhumami in his research argues that “Indonesian society experiences contemporary politics in a context that combines values and practices of political modernity and secular rationality with those of witchcraft, sorcery, and the occult”.⁸ He found that for rulers and political leaders, sorcery and witchcraft are seen as magical tools to enable a person to stay in power for a long time.⁹ They are applied to multiple purposes such as protecting the body, killing personal foes, eliminating political opponents, causing illnesses through creating diseases, making bad luck, creating marriage problems, and such like.¹⁰ This practice is commonly used in parliament, even in the presidential election.¹¹ Even President Yudhoyono

⁴ Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 4.

⁵ Lamin O. Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity?: The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub, 2003), p. 2.

⁶ Parulihan Sipayung, *Hosah: Theology of the Holy Spirit in Indonesian (Simalungun) Indigenous Perspective* (Seoul: Yonsei University, 2020), pp. xi-xii. On another side, WCC recently issues the new motto: “*Mission from the Margin*” in Jooseop Keum’s newly book, *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* which claims a new option where mission can be started in the peripheries and move towards the centre. Mission from the margin in the context of shifting Christianity to the Global South and East is a challenge to propose a relevant vernacular theology and practice of diaconia in the setting of world Christianity. Cf. See, Jooseop Keum, *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (Geneva: WCC, 2013).

⁷ Cf. Edwin M. Loeb, *Sumatra: Its History and People* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

⁸ Amich Alhumami, *Political Power, Corruption, and Witchcraft in Modern Indonesia* (Ph.D Unpublished Dissertation, University of Sussex, 2012), p. i.

⁹ Amich Alhumami, *Political Power, Corruption, and Witchcraft in Modern Indonesia* p. 24.

¹⁰ Amich Alhumami, *Political Power, Corruption, and Witchcraft in Modern Indonesia* p. 17.

¹¹ Amich Alhumami, *Political Power, Corruption, and Witchcraft in Modern Indonesia* pp. 69-73.

delivered a speech proclaiming that he had received *serangan sihir* (sorcery attacks) during the months of public campaigns.¹²

Economically, witchcraft and sorcery are also used to gain benefits in business in trading and to acquire fortune from farming and office-working. Sometimes, people meditate in “sacred places” like mountains and caves to seek good fortune before they conduct any crucial performances for their careers. The people also see that there are two kinds of diseases: medically conditioned and spiritually conditioned diseases. In his research, Alhumami observed the case of Fatah who ran for a parliamentary election. He has an uncommon earache. He had visited some doctors to get some opinions but the doctors were all confused. He writes, “Strangely, the audiologist who treated him found nothing related to the pains he was enduring; the audiologist diagnosed Fatah’s swollen head and detected earache on both sides, but he had no idea what to do since he did not find even a single cause of illness”.¹³

This is a common case in Indonesia. There is a famous acronym in society: 3D (three-D) which are *dukun* (shaman), doctor and *domino*. It means if a person has an illness, firstly they will ask for help from a shaman. If this does not work, they will go to a doctor and, finally, if there is no more hope, they will go to *domino* or pastor asking for prayers. This means that the pastor or church is the last resort. This phenomenon critiques a type of diaconia by the churches as it seems to be irrelevant to the people and their conceptual mindset.

Asia-Africa Cultural and Theological Considerations

Asia and Africa have unique contexts and widely differ from the West. The theologies constructed in Europe could not simply be imported and applied in these contexts. I have been actively involved in some international conferences, listening and sharing views regarding these issues. For instance, in our United Evangelical Mission community, we thoroughly reflect on the relevance and irrelevance of theological concepts and models of diaconia coming from western churches. This encourages us to consider the importance of listening carefully to our cultural framework and the concerns of the people and to properly learn about witchcraft and sorcery from the churches in Global South. As a result, a think tank on *Magic, Witchcraft, Demon Beliefs and Deliverance* was conducted in Asia (Dumaguete, Philippines – February 2012) and in Africa (Rwanda, 2012).

The profound theological discussion in Asia proposed that deliverance ministry should be one of the forms of a contextualised ministry in Asia “to set free in the name and power of Christ those who are either possessed, controlled, used or influenced by demonic/evil powers”. We also encouraged the churches to practice this ministry because Jesus and the disciples in early churches also did this. These ministerial needs are also affirmed by the experiences of congregations with phenomena attributed to demonic powers as characterised by spiritual death, by illness – both physical and mental health, by demon possession, conflict, and struggles in economic and social life.¹⁴

On another side, the think tank in the Africa region discussed and proposed some important theological issues such as deliverance ministry as a call, a gift and a task for Christians. We need to discern whether a disease is demonic, or psychologically conditioned, or of medical nature and then to refer the patient either to a doctor or a psychologist. If the client also visits a witchdoctor or a Muslim cleric, we need to proclaim to

¹² Amich Alhumami, *Political Power, Corruption, and Witchcraft in Modern Indonesia* pp. 74-75. This report was also broadcasted on all TV channels on 3/7/2009, as well as online and printed media, such as Kompas, 4/7/2009, Media Indonesia, 4-5/7/2009).

¹³ Amich Alhumami, *Political Power, Corruption, and Witchcraft in Modern Indonesia* pp. 70-71.

¹⁴ Jaharianson Saragih, Wahyu Adipungkas et al, *UEM Asia Region Think Tank on Magic, Witchcraft, Demon Beliefs and Deliverance Theological Basis for a Deliverance Ministry in UEM Member Churches*, Dumaguete: UEM Unpublished Documents, 2012.

https://www.vemission.org/fileadmin/redakteure/Dokumente/Asia_Region_Theological_Basis_for_Deliverance.pdf.

them that proper healing only comes from the Triune God. We affirm that Christians, even pastors, themselves also need deliverance because they can be possessed, traumatised, and oppressed (1 Cor. 3:1-4; 5:1-2; John 13, 10). Finally, this conference also agreed and recommended that the deliverance ministry can be done both in a personal setting, in a group setting and during Sunday services, while at the same time making sure that there is sufficient following up of the clients in order for them to grow holistically.¹⁵

Considering the context of Indonesia, as well as the reality of Asia and Africa, I found that there is a strong relationship between the belief in shamanism or evil powers and a holistic concept of mental health and well-being (prosperity) of the people.

The Two Paradigms: Plato – Aristotle

What makes any theology unique in either the Global North and Global South is the underlying paradigms. The Global North to some extent is influenced much by the renaissance – scientific, rationalistic, and materialistic view (“either-or” paradigm). According to this paradigm, the world is occupied only by human beings. The presence of the spirits may be acknowledged, but they exist distant from human beings and cannot intervene in our daily life. This is called an Aristotelian paradigm.¹⁶ In this paradigm, demon possession is considered to be merely a physical phenomenon and deliverance ministry is considered to be absurd or questionable. This paradigm would fail to see the relation of a holistic approach to diaconia with the issues of deliverance, mental health, and prosperity.

Another paradigm, the Platonic view,¹⁷ believes that the world is occupied by humans and spirits. Spirits can intervene in our daily life. This paradigm shares the characteristic of Asian and African worldviews (“both-and” paradigm). It also represents the teachings of the Bible in which, in the New Testament, Jesus, the disciples and the early churches also practiced this holistic diaconal ministry.

Derek Prince has argued that the later paradigm follows the pattern of a holistic ministry in biblical evangelism. He elucidates that “the Gospel is preached and the multitudes hear; they see the miracles and casting out of demons and they believe; they are baptized and the Church is established”.¹⁸ We should not ignore the fact that the demons not only harmed the human spirit but also the body, including the mental health of a person. It affects the mind, their behaviour and their feelings. It causes depression, anxiety, hopelessness, emptiness, and other psychosomatic illnesses. Thereby, casting out demons also signifies holistic healing in human life. Furthermore, Derek Prince also criticises the western model of evangelism and diaconia: “If evangelism is seldom conducted with these results in the Western world, we need to ask who has changed. Is it Jesus? Or the demons? Or the Church?”¹⁹

Psycho-Del-Si: An Indonesian Emerging Perspective on Holistic Diaconal Ministry

Psycho-Del-Si stands for psychology, deliverance, and spirituality. It is an emerging approach as well as intervention in counselling that combines psychology (counselling), deliverance (cultural aspects) and

¹⁵ Peter Jonas Bendera, Martin Evang, et. al., *UEM Africa Region Think Tank on Magic, Witchcraft, Demon Beliefs and Deliverance Pastoral Guidelines for a Deliverance Ministry in UEM Churches* (Rwanda: UEM Unpublished Documents, 2012). https://www.ve mission.org/fileadmin/redakteure/Dokumente/Africa_Regions_Pastoral_Guidelines_for_a_Deliverance_Ministry.pdf.

¹⁶ Jaharianson Saragih, “Deliverance Ministry as Practice at Experience at Abdi Sabda Theological Seminary, Indonesia”, *Witchcraft, Demons and Deliverance: A Global Conversation on an Intercultural Challenge*, Claudia Währisch-Oblau, Henning Wrogemann (Eds), (Zurich: Lit Verlag, 2015), p. 267.

¹⁷ Jaharianson Saragih, “Deliverance”, p. 267.

¹⁸ Derek Prince, *They Shall Expel Demons: What You Need to Know about Demons – Your Invisible Enemies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 1998), p. 24.

¹⁹ Derek Prince, *They Shall Expel Demons* p. 26.

spirituality (theology) in analysing the root of the problem.²⁰ Many experts have discussed the integration of theology and psychology. Others have contributed in the area of deliverance ministry. However, the integrative approaches that combine theology, psychology and cultural insight in the diaconal practice of deliverance ministry are a rarity in Asian and African cultural contexts.

Based on my personal experiences going back to 2004, after finishing my dissertation on Counselling and Psychology at *De La Salle University*, Philippines, I realised that there are multiple facets to the client's problem which could not be solved by a single approach. The multiple factors involved are always on different levels, physical, medical, spiritual, mental health, evil power (witchcraft) and combinative factors.²¹

I wondered why the first five of my clients who were intervened with the previous counselling theories were neither healed nor changed. One of my clients had a serious headache. He has visited the best hospital in our country as well as some abroad. Strangely, after an intensive medical checkup by CT Scan (*Computerized Tomography*) and MRI (*Magnetic Resonance Imaging*), the doctors did not find a single problem.²² Medically, the doctors concluded that he was healthy and could immediately return home. After some analysis and considering the opinion of the medical staff, I intervened in his case with the psychodelsi approach and I found that he got much better and eventually healed.²³

Psycho-Del-Si posits that, in order to understand the client's problem with witchcraft and sorcery, we often have to go beyond just the medical and psychological dimensions.²⁴ In other words, it is beyond science. This approach acknowledges that the cause of the client's problem or illness might not only medical or psychological but also can be related to their interference with the power of evil spirits in various forms, using the services of a shaman.²⁵ That is why a single approach or intervention tends to be ineffective.

Abdi Sabda Theological Seminary, the college where I teach, has become the training centre not only for dealing with different ways of encountering the problem of witchcraft in this cultural context, but also issues of demon possession. Since 2006, Abdi Sabda has put the subject of deliverance ministry on the syllabus because of the outcome of a faculty meeting. We also conduct an annual group deliverance that is usually attended by about 250 to 350 students.²⁶ During the session, various manifestations happen. Some

²⁰ Jaharianson Saragih, *PsychoDelSi: Psycho-Deiverance-Spiritual, Kaca Mata Baru dalam Melihat Masalah Klient* (Medan: Abdi Sabda, 2019), p. 1.

²¹ Jaharianson Saragih, *PsychoDelSi: Psycho-Deiverance-Spiritual* pp. 1-2.

²² The case is similar as experienced by Fatah in his dissertation research. "He had been deeply engaged in a great number of social activities during the very busy months of the 2009 general elections, since he had to focus on it in order to win the contest. However, such an illness seemed to be uncommon, as it became far worse in the days that followed. When he had not yet recovered from the fever, Fatah contracted another sickness: earache and it was much more serious than the fever. Just within a few days, Fatah's ear disorder worsened, and he developed a swollen head, so he went to an aurist to cure it. Strangely, the audiologist who treated him found nothing related to the pains he was enduring; the aurist diagnosed Fatah's swollen head and detected earache on both sides, but he had no idea what to do since he did not find even a single cause of illness. Fatah was obviously such an unusual case with his ear disorder, so he went to another aurist to have a second opinion; and received a similar diagnosis on it. The earache and swollen head was so painful that it eventually forced Fatah to end engaging in campaigns and he just stayed at home for the rest of the weeks. He then consulted his relatives about an alternative way of medication through spiritual treatment by an orang pintar (which literally means smart person, an idiom for those who have spiritual knowledge and skills). When visiting Fatah at home to see the ailing legislative candidate, his cousin, Anwar, suspected that the earache that was causing so much pain was man-made sickness – it was a kind of *santet* (witchcraft)". Amich Alhumami, *Political Power, Corruption, and Witchcraft in Modern Indonesia* pp. 70-71.

²³ Jaharianson Saragih (ed), *Pelayanan Pelepasan dan Dampak Positifnya* (Pematang Siantar, L-SAPA, 2016), p. 285.

In my recent book, I also share some of our experiences related to this issue. Jaharianson Saragih, *PsychoDelSi: Psycho-Deliverance-Spiritual* pp. 49-143.

²⁴ Jaharianson Saragih, *PsychoDelSi: Psycho-Deliverance-Spiritual* p. 6.

²⁵ Jaharianson Saragih, *PsychoDelSi: Psycho-Deliverance-Spiritual* p. 6.

²⁶ Jaharianson Saragih, "Deliverance Ministry as Practice", p. 264.

manifestations were visible in crying and shouting which describe the deep burden in the mental health system caused by psychological factors (e.g. agony, painful or traumatic experiences in the past that need professional intervention by the psychiatry). Other manifestations could be guilty feelings caused by spiritual factors (such as a particular sin that needs repentance and forgiveness). We are convinced that the medical illness needs to receive medical treatment, but there are other problems which have to do with situations where a patients seems to be possessed (totally controlled) by a demon and influenced by evil spirits which need to be released and liberated by the power of Jesus.²⁷ These various manifestations demand different responses either with psychology, deliverance, medical approaches, or by a spiritual approach. Psychodelsi offers a holistic counselling perspective responding to this gap.

After annually conducting this ministry, we made a survey in order to observe the impact of this approach. The clients reported experiencing a significant change in their life that encompasses both spiritual aspects such as prayer, bible reading, and attending worship, but also moral aspects such as positive behaviours,²⁸ psychological aspects such as becoming reconciled with traumatic factors, and cultural aspects such as experiencing real deliverance and being released from the bondage of evil spirits. Shortly, it is holistic healing that becomes the foundation of prosperity and mental health.

Considering the impact of this approach, the United Evangelical Mission (UEM), the mission body in which I am actively engaged, has recommended all seminaries belonging to UEM partners in Asia, Africa, and Europe to include this theme in their curriculum. I enthusiastically believe that this approach would be a viable future paradigm which will significantly contribute to the holistic well-being of the people.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to affirm that diaconia is a holistic ministry. It embraces many aspects of human life. Deliverance from evil, mental wellbeing and a prosperous life are an inseparable single unit. A diaconal approach that ignores dealing with the spiritual and psychological realm is ineffective in transforming the lives of the people in our cultural contexts. In Indonesia, we experience that to care for the poor and oppressed by only providing physical needs is not able to transform lives in a comprehensive manner.

Furthermore, the psychodelsi approach that I propose in this article is a model of contextual religious diaconia which aims at enabling people to experience holistic wellbeing. Its integrative approach allows one to deal with multiple cases including deliverance ministry, mental health, and prosperity. I expect this approach would enrich the diaconal practices in our multiple contexts.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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70. CONTOURS OF CHALLENGES FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH DISABILITIES IN LOCAL CHURCHES WITH EXAMPLES FROM CAMEROON

Félicité Ngnintedem¹

Facing Disability as a Fundamental Paradigm Shift and Life Changing Experience

On a Saturday in June 2011, as I stood discussing things joyfully with my mother in a city in Cameroon, I had the sudden impression that her look was fixed, like someone targeting something with her eyes. She was still, she had stopped speaking and even my calling her did not change anything. Then I saw her body falling progressively to the ground. With my heart beating intensely, I quickly stepped into the collapse process and placed her carefully on the ground. It was the beginning of an endless story. The medical doctor confirmed my presumption: It was a cardio-vascular accident that left her seriously paralysed on her left side. The reality was right there, she had to be in a wheel-chair. She had become, so to say, a handicapped, a disabled person. In the beginning, I convinced myself that this was not going to be a big deal. I had seen heavily disabled people before, who could not afford a wheel-chair, and I felt my mother was lucky to have us to pay the bills and to offer her a wheel-chair. To be honest, I expected her to be thankful.

But the days ahead and her deep sadness and depression proved that disability is not absorbed when the external needs or necessities are met. Rather, there is an internal battle instigated by the refusal to bear an identity as a disabled person, by the fear of having to cope with harsh living conditions and the sense of complete dependency. Furthermore, the predominant idea of becoming “unproductive” increases the psycho-social misery of the disabled person. This calls for close attention, particularly to the psycho-emotional dilemmas and pains as well as the social considerations associated both with the disabled persons and likewise with the people in the surroundings.

Facing my mother’s sudden handicap reinforced my understanding of what it means to be a human being: a dignified being, created in God’s own image and resemblance, irrespective of disabilities or abilities. I had lived with a regard of “pity” for the disabled, but my mother’s condition produced a vital paradigm shift: it was not about pity, but about justice, consideration, respect, honour and values. The echoes of all that I have heard about disabilities and handicaps tortured me, and not only did I acknowledge my own disabilities, but as an ordained minister, I started questioning the work of the church in terms of what it does for the disabled. This was my awareness instigator. I started being curious in terms of searching for all the mechanisms and structures within the church, that speak or stand in favour of the disabled. What does it then mean to be a church with the mission of proclaiming the Gospel for the holistic wellbeing of people when the disabled among us do not have appropriate paths, seats, toilets, special Bibles, sign language? Before formulating some diaconal actions that are necessary for a better inclusion and consideration of the disabled in the church context of Cameroon, it would be necessary to elaborate shortly on some cultural and societal apprehensions around disability in our context.

Cultural and Social Considerations about Disability in Cameroon.

Disability cuts across all world regions and the disabled are often subjected to different “judgements” and “stereotypes”. Although mentalities have considerably evolved, the disabled are still considered in many cultures as “sub-humans” or “minor people”. In Cameroon, as well as in many African countries, the disabled are subjected to rejection and isolation. In some cases, depending on the degree or type of disability, they are

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even considered as punished by the gods or simply cursed by evil powers. The oral traditions of many ethnic groups in Cameroon still hold on to the view that having no child is sometimes better than having a disabled one.

These considerations can be grouped under the terms of stigmatisation and discrimination and have a logical consequence of disempowerment, dehumanisation, and social exclusion of the disabled. These phenomena are fed and supported by the overall impression that the disabled are incapacitated and a burden on others. Reporting on the situation of people escaping from violence in the North-West region of Cameroon, Human Rights Watch narrates:

The mother of a three-year-old boy with physical and developmental disabilities said that she fled her village, Benakumam North-West Region, following repeated clashes between separatists and security forces in July 2018 and that she contemplated leaving her son behind: “we walked for one day. Then we took a bus to Bamenda. My son became weaker and I feared he might die. My duty as a mother is to ensure his welfare by staying with him. But [at times] I felt I could have carried more luggage instead of carrying him. I felt like he was a burden. He slowed us down and forced us to leave most of the useful things home.”²

This is a clear picture of what disability is: the dilemma between feeling responsible for the disabled and the unintentional feeling that this person is a burden, and that if a choice were to be made, physical belongings would be preferred! It is a way of saying that the disabled, the child in our example, is not representative of hope, of future, of help and of productivity. Rather, it is an additional and unwanted consumer of energy and time. In this light, a disabled child often is devalued and degraded in its human dignity.

Corroborating the harmful beliefs that surround the lives of the disabled, the United Nations present a number of factors, in their *Toolkit on Disability for Africa*, that contribute to the formation and perpetuation of negative beliefs about them. These include:

- Lack of understanding and awareness of disability;
- Misconceptions or social constructions concerning the causes of disabilities;
- Ill-informed and insensitive media coverage that perpetuates negative views;
- Reinforcement of prejudice and fears through law and policy that may affirm harmful beliefs about disability.³

The Toolkit goes further to highlight that, in many cases negative beliefs about disability differ based on types of impairment, and prejudices are often particularly pronounced in the case of psychosocial disabilities. Beliefs may vary based on how a disability was acquired. A person born with a physical impairment may experience greater bias than a person who later acquired their impairment, for example through an accident. In some cases, those who acquire impairments in the course of military service may be honoured. Socio-economic issues can also affect attitudes to disability; for example, economically disadvantaged persons with disabilities may face more stigma than their wealthier counterparts.

Regardless of the social categories of the handicapped, it is obvious that they face a series of discriminations and degradations. Those who face acquired disabilities brutally step into a new form of life which is full of serious challenges. Consequently, they become traumatised and vulnerable. There is a clear sense of emergency which requires urgent diaconal action that will seek to affirm the full dignity of the disabled on the one hand, and will suggest means for their inclusion in the faith community on the other.

² <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/08/05/cameroon-people-disabilities-caught-crisis>.

³ United Nations (DSPD and DESA), *Toolkit on Disability for Africa: Culture, Beliefs and Disability*.

Diaconal Actions for the Support and Inclusion of the Disabled and Associates

The question about disability is a global one, because it concerns all spheres of lives. It must therefore be handled not only from the perspectives of the disabled people themselves, but also from the perspective of the generally forgotten associates, that is the direct family members or the social environment directly affected and concerned by disability. Below are a number of diaconal actions that can be implemented by the Church as a support process.

The psycho-social and emotional support of the disabled

The first reaction towards a disability usually is medical attention. The psycho-social and emotional dimensions tend to be generally forsaken. My mother's adamant refusal to be fed, to wear diapers, to be bathed, brought evidence to the fact that apart from receiving medical attention, there was no particular focus on her emotional and psychological damages. The church as an instrument of care has the responsibility to develop and foster innovative forms of special support. Prayers play a vital role as a non-tangible support medium. Prayer however is not enough, as it does not necessarily enable the disabled to express their own feelings, fears, disappointments, etc. The church must seek to create room for communication, for listening sessions, a frame-work of encounter where the disabled really tell their stories, talk about their vision and understanding of life, narrate their own struggles and how they cope, and finally express their needs and the special forms of assistance they require or which might alleviate their situation.

This psycho-social and emotional care helps in the deconstruction of the false identity of a self-negating personality that the disabled tend to internalise, in order to make room for an alternative construction of their true personality. Each encounter can thereby become a sort of "exorcism" of the true inner being of people trapped by fear, shame and abuse, just to name a few.

Pastoral and social accompaniment of associates

My mother's disability definitely induced and showed us our own disability. We quickly came to the reality that our lives were henceforth to be organised according to her condition: time schedules were made, so that someone is always available for her. And sometimes, having to stay back home to take care of her, was at some point, very honestly, a frustration. None of us was prepared for that. It is only then that the shortcoming both of the medical system as well as the church as a spiritual and social instrument were manifested. No one considers the family members as "disabled" because of the disability of one of its members. Pastoral accompaniment as a diaconal act oriented towards the Affected or Associates helps them to face the disability and to face its challenges. In the case of an acquired disability, the drama into which the family steps brings a handful of traumatic experiences that can be better managed if they were, just like the disabled themselves, appropriately counselled and equipped to address their own "disability".

The church as a place of affirmation of dignity

Cameroon, as Eva Jacqueline Etongue⁴ rightly reminds us, has agreed and signed many conventions around human rights. One of these is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which stipulates in articles 1, 2, 7 and 25 that: "*All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights [...] Each one can boast of all his rights and freedoms [...] without any distinction [...] All are equal before the law and have rights without distinction, to equal protection before the law. All have rights to equal protection against discrimination [...] and against all incitement to such discrimination [...] everybody has the right to a satisfactory standard of*

⁴ Eva J. Etongue Mayer reports on "Study on the Rights of People with Disabilities in Cameroon", by African Union of the Blind and the Cameroon National Association for the Blind, in Partnership with Disability Rights Promotion International and Swedish Association of the Visually Impaired. Available at: <http://www.yorku.ca/drpi/files/DRPICameroonRepEn.pdf>.

living that guarantees his/her health, his/her well-being [...] especially [...] right to security in case [...] of disabilities". The identity of the disabled is generally degraded through their simple appellation, the way they are referred to. Often, they are simply called by the names of their disabilities. This means that, from birth, they carry the stigmata of an obsolete identity that diminishes their dignity. The church's responsibility is therefore, to affirm the inalienable dignity of all people, their equality before God through teachings and other sensitisation campaigns aimed at reaching people with an inclusive Gospel. The ordinary evangelisation campaigns that the Evangelical Church of Cameroon organises most often could become the basis of such an action reaching towards the public affirmation of the disabled.

Inclusive church buildings

During the period when my mother lived in my house with me, my Sunday mornings became moments when I was expected to help managing her wheelchair through the rough staircase of my parish. That staircase had never been a problem for me until I had to struggle to carry my mother up and down again every Sunday. She and I depended on the "pity" of the strong young men who willingly offered their help, and we praised them as our priceless benefactors. However, the solution could be different, if my church had thought about accommodating disabled people during the construction period in order to make proper provisions for them. The disabled are therefore even nowadays in the Evangelical Church of Cameroon (ECC) considered a minority, and their pleas are not seriously taken into consideration. Special seats, adapted toilets, etc, are completely missing. An inclusive church must seek means of valuing her own internal disabled members by giving them the feeling that they are at home with the church premises. The fact that many families refuse to bring along their disabled members to Sunday worship is a silent way of denouncing the absence of proper accommodation.

Special language in the church premises

The first step of the diaconal action usually is oriented towards people who are deaf or mute, or those with special needs. For decades now, the Cameroonian Government has been promoting sign language. This is a golden opportunity that the church in Cameroon ought to grasp to equip members for a more holistic spread of the Gospel, but also finally to have the possibility of communicating with those people, whose "voice couldn't be heard", although they actually can now "speak" in their own language. The absence of using such a proper sign language forces the disabled of this category often to remain mere figurants.

No braille Bible exist in my congregation, which is found in Cameroon's capital city of Yaounde, and this reveals the complete indifference vis-a-vis the visually impaired who manage to find their way into the parish premises.

Deanonymising the Disabled by giving them responsibilities

Most of the above points lead to the reality that the very fragile and rare communication around disability renders the disabled completely anonymous. They have become used to a kind of silence in which they grow up as objects of pity and thereby tend to become invisible even in the faith community. A young man with a motor disability once reported: *"when I am walking, people look at me with pity, some give words of encouragements, a few offer a ride, to which I always say no, because I don't need a ride, but a better road where I can easily manage my legs. But what baffles me is in the church. I joined the Young Men's Christian Fellowship. Curiously, even after so many years, people still look at me as not being able to take responsibilities in office. The question I constantly hear is: considering your condition, can you do it?"* This is a clear example of the fact that sadly disability is more evident and more considered by others than the person himself. A diaconal church in Cameroon has the responsibility to highlight the potentials of the disabled, by entrusting them with decision-making capacities to build their confidence on the one hand, and by alerting the "Able" to the reality that they are an integral and vital part of the community.

Conclusion

Living with people with disabilities is a challenge, be this due to a born or an acquired disability. The cultural context of Cameroon increases that challenge by considering the disabled, with regards to the degree of impairment, as a curse. In some areas, they are associated with witch-craft. Therefore, they constitute objects of shame and a burden to their families. Although the Ministries of Social Affairs in Cameroon has done its best in terms of sensitisation to avoid the murder of such people at birth, and although mentalities have greatly evolved, there is still a big gap between the legal dispositions in favour of the disabled and the social, emotional and cultural environment in which they live. The lack of proper infrastructures and technological assistance still hold many of them far from a good education and consequently from the possibility of a good job and joyful life. The church has also failed in her role of affirming their dignity. The predominant deep silence of the Church vis-a-vis the disabled seems to say that the Evangelical Church of Cameroon is a church that does not stand firmly for social justice and does not speak sufficiently for the weak. Rather, her reluctance tends to confirm that the disabled are mere anonymous persons that deserve “pity”. The diaconal perspective highlighted above is an attempt to break-down the vicious circle of pity so that the reign of justice can render to the disabled their dignity and beauty, their potentials and appropriate means of accommodation for their holistic wellbeing. In this light, the Church could really become, as it is supposed to, a church for all and to all, a meeting point of all, Abled and Disabled, on the way to the Kingdom.

Suggestion for Further Reading

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71. AN ECUMENICAL DIACONAL RESPONSE TO DISABILITY: THE JOURNEY OF EDAN

Anjeline Okola¹

Introduction

This essay looks at the journey of the disability work in the World Council of Churches and how this has led to disability discourses in Churches and in theological education. It emphasises the impact that EDAN's quest for inclusion of persons with disabilities in all aspects of the church and society has made by providing spaces for people with disabilities to express themselves in its spiritual, social and development life. It also gives a rational explanation as to why EDAN came up with a two-fold response, firstly by ensuring that the leadership of the church was engaged in discussing disability as a vital part of the witness and mission of the Church; and secondly, by realising that since Theological Education bears a formative mark on the careers of religious leaders, it was necessary to focus on the training of ministers. This paper highlights the fact that, within theological education, the challenge ahead is the lack of sufficient experience with the subject matter of disability. Through working with Associations of Theological Institutions in Africa, we have come up with curriculum and study resources for teaching disability in the various theological seminaries and faculties of theology in some of the Universities in Africa.

Beginnings of the Ecumenical Response to Disability Issues in the World Council of Churches

The Ecumenical Response to issues of disability in the World Council of Churches started in the 1960s, interestingly enough as part of an ecclesiological debate and the relation between the unity of church and the unity of humankind. That is the diaconal challenges were articulated as core issues in terms of the understanding of the church. In 1968, during the 4th General Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC), the churches explored the need for a Church to be a more inclusive community. This gained momentum afterwards culminating in the Commission on Faith and Order held in Louvain, Belgium, August 1971, which discussed the theme "Unity of the Church and Unity of Humankind." A part of the statement from the Commission reads as follows:

In practice, Christian communities whatever their traditions are open to the handicapped only to a very limited extent. The churches have done considerable work in building special institutions. They have contributed greatly to encouraging society at large to make greater efforts. But have they really included the handicapped in their own communal life? Mutual acceptance of "normal" and handicapped members is the test of true community, and the answer to God's love lies in our acceptance of others as he accepted us. So, is it not the place which we give to the handicapped that indicates the degree to which our community is really the community of Christ?

And so we talk about the unity of the Church. It may seem strange to regard the question of the handicapped in this context because the unity of the Church is generally thought of as a question of teaching and order. It demands agreement on baptism, Eucharist and ministry. Certainly it does. But at the same time, it demands much more. For how valuable would be a unity in which handicapped people had no part? What would be the sense of a celebration

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at the Lord's Table if persons with handicaps did not have access to it? It would be a curtailed and wretched form of unity.²

The document produced from this Commission meeting then proposed that the theme of unity of the church and unity of humankind be explored and contextualised in plenary addresses and discussions by WCC under 5 sub-themes, not in order to "solve" the concrete problems as such, but rather to "examine the question of unity in the light of these situations". The following five subthemes were formulated: The Struggle for Justice in Society; the Encounter with Living Faiths; the Struggle against Racism; the Handicapped in Society; and Differences in Culture – an impressive list of core themes for a contextualised ecumenical ecclesiology. This was the turning point for the issue of disability discourse in the churches as this formed the basis of incorporating persons with disabilities in their wider mission and agenda. Since then, efforts were made to include persons with disabilities and to advocate for their recognition among the member churches, councils of churches and Religious Ecumenical Organisations. This was further emphasised at the 5th General Assembly in 1975 in Nairobi which issued a statement on "The Handicapped and the Wholeness of the Family of God." Parts of this declaration stated that:

The Church's unity includes both the "disabled" and the "able". A church which seeks to be truly united within itself and to move towards unity with others must be open to all; yet able-bodied church members, both by their attitudes and by their emphasis on activism, marginalise and often exclude those with mental or physical disabilities. The disabled are treated as the weak to be served rather than as fully committed, integral members of the Body of Christ and the human family; the specific contribution which they have to give is ignored. This is the more serious because disability as a worldwide problem is increasing. Accidents and illness leave adults and children disabled; many more are emotionally handicapped by the pressures of social change and urban living; genetic disorders and famine leave millions of children physically or mentally impaired. The Church cannot exemplify "the full humanity revealed in Christ", bear witness to the interdependence of humankind, or achieve unity in diversity if it continues to acquiesce in the social isolation of disabled persons and to deny them full participation in its life. The unity of the family of God is handicapped where these brothers and sisters are treated as objects of condescending charity. It is broken where they are left out. How can the love of Christ create in us the will to discern and to work forcefully against the causes which distort and cripple the lives of so many of our fellow human beings? How can the Church be open to the witness which Christ extends through them?³

At the WCC's Sixth Assembly in Vancouver, Canada in 1983, 21 people with disabilities were invited as part of the Assembly participants. Subsequently, Dr. Lynda Katsuno from the United Church of Canada was appointed as a full-time consultant for issues of disabilities from 1984-1991. When Lynda Katsuno left the WCC staff in 1991, no one was appointed to follow up her work, but a task force was set up to continue carrying out her responsibilities in this area until 1994, when Ms. Ye Ja Lee was appointed consultant for persons with disabilities. Ye Ja Lee's presence helped the staff of WCC to be more aware of this issue and to plan awareness-raising programmes through visits, worship services and exhibitions. Ms Lee worked closely with the Disabilities task force which had been formed earlier. Through her efforts, contacts were re-established with member churches, national and regional ecumenical bodies, and church and secular agencies working with persons with disabilities.

In 1997, an interim statement on the "Theological and Sociological Understanding of the Issue of Disabilities" was prepared by the working group and brought to the WCC Central Committee for adoption. It

² See a report from Faith and Order Conference in Louvain 1971 in: <http://cdn.theologicalstudies.net/33/33.1/33.1.2.pdf>; The full study report is available in: Faith and Order, Louvain 1971, Study Reports and Documents (Geneva: WCC, 1971); see also: Commission on Faith and Order. Minutes of the Meeting of the Commission and Working Committee, July/August 1971 (Louvain: WCC, 1971) (e).

³ David M. Paton (ed), *Breaking Barriers*, Report from Nairobi Assembly, 1975, pp. 61-62.

was received and discussed. With the new title of “Interim Statement on the Theological and Empirical Understanding of the Issue of Disabilities”, this document was sent to member churches, regional ecumenical organisations and national councils of churches. In his accompanying letter, the WCC General Secretary wrote: “This document presents what may be a new perspective for many churches: that congregations need the presence of people with disabilities. ‘The parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable.’ (1 Cor. 12:22).”

Efforts to change the consultancy to a permanent position did not materialise due to lack of adequate funds. The programme on Persons with Disabilities was therefore discontinued in 1996. The stream coordinator and Disabilities task force worked hard to get the participation of persons with disabilities as advisers at the WCC’s 8th Assembly in Harare. The Task Force had also endorsed a person with a disability’s involvement in the Assembly Planning Committee representing their concerns. The Task Force also recommended that the WCC should change the terminology from differently abled persons to “people with disabilities”. The recommendation was accepted by the WCC Central Committee in 1997.

Changing the Profile of Disability Work in the WCC

In 1998, the WCC invited a number of people with disabilities from different parts of the world to participate as advisors on disability concerns in its 8th Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe. These ten advisors decided to form a network known as the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN). This would carry out the WCC’s work on disability further to the respective regions where each individual came from. After the Assembly, EDAN as a network and initiative of persons with disabilities was considered by WCC as a model idea for work with persons with disabilities. WCC proposed to support the work through an ecumenical partner with both the interest and the working structure necessary for this kind of work. The National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK), which had been running a fully-fledged desk for persons with disabilities for nine years, was chosen as suitable host as it was one of the councils that was already doing work on disability. The idea of offering administrative support through an ecumenical partner with both the interest and necessary working structure was another way to consolidate the move towards regionalisation. The NCCCK gladly agreed to provide staff-time for this effort and Dr. Samuel Kabue working at NCCCK and one of the ten advisors who had been at the Assembly was requested to coordinate the work. As a further demonstration of its commitment to disability work, the WCC invited three people with disabilities to its June 1999 Central committee: Rev Dr Arne Fritzon, Rev Kathy Reeves and Dr. Samuel Kabue.

Afterwards, a one-week consultation was organised in Nairobi in December 1999, under the theme “From Charisma to Institutionalisation.” This consultation agreed on objectives to guide the work and to set up the necessary structures in accordance to the guidelines provided by the WCC. A Strategic plan was put into place by the staff in consultation with the Justice Peace and Creation Coordinator of WCC and in accordance with the WCC plan cycle. Funds were made available for the implementation of the plan following the guidelines and issues identified at the Nairobi consultation. An International Reference Group was set up which met for the first time in August 2000 in Geneva, examined the strategic plan and approved it. It also laid the grounds for the theological discourse work with the churches.

Due to pressures of work, the consultant opted to leave NCCCK in March 2003 to concentrate on EDAN work. EDAN continued to operate under the auspices of NCCCK as per the WCC arrangement. Working under the auspices of NCCCK while a key staff member was no longer available, was considered limiting and this led to new discussions between the WCC and the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) to enter into cooperation in disability work. This was in line with the WCC decentralisation process, where they place some of its work under the cover of Regional Ecumenical Organisations. It was also felt that EDAN would have greater impact and visibility operating under a Regional body. A Memorandum of Understanding between the two bodies was signed and EDAN moved its offices from the National Council of Churches of

Kenya to be hosted at the AACC Headquarters in Nairobi as of June 2004. This is where the offices are still currently based.

Since the 9th Assembly, Porto Alegre, Brazil (2006), EDAN has been fully integrated into the work of the WCC. At its 10th Assembly in Busan, South Korea (2013), the WCC fulfilled the initiatives from Harare and Porto Alegre in support of individuals, churches, and their ministries for the inclusion, participation, and contributions of persons with disabilities expressly in accepting human diversity, vulnerability, and the limits of mortality in all facets of its ecumenical work for peace and justice. Operating at the guidance of the WCC structures and governing organs, the Programme Executive Secretary was to be assisted at that level by an International Reference Group. They were to assist in the envisioning and regular monitoring and evaluation of the work. He was also to work with eight volunteer Regional representatives drawn from each of the eight regions under which WCC work was to be implemented, namely: Europe, North America, Latin America, the Caribbean, Middle East, Africa, Asia and the Pacific. The Programme was to report on its International work to WCC through the then Justice, Peace and Creation Team and later through Programme 2, Unity, Mission, Evangelism and Spirituality alongside with other Justice and Inclusive Community projects.

Theological Reflections on Disability

One of the key activities of EDAN is to engage in theological reflection on the issue of disability to provide a foundation on which the churches' engagement may be secured. This took the form of theological engagement and reflection. Together with the WCC's department for Faith and Order, they worked over a period of three years to come up with a WCC policy statement "*A Church for All and of All*" which was commended to all the member churches by the WCC Central Committee in its August 2003 meeting for study, reflection, feedback and action.⁴ The document highlights the fundamental theological issues that affect persons with disabilities and which, if addressed, would challenge the church to become holistic and inclusive in its relationship to disability issues. The document is available in English, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Swedish, Arabic, Romanian and it is still being translated into various languages by churches, individuals, national and regional ecumenical organisations.⁵ The document has also been shared with secular disability organisations for their reflection.

In the years since, EDAN learnt that *A Church of All and for All* had been useful to many of WCC's member churches, and that theological seminaries had used it widely in their teaching. Persons with disabilities realised that they have grown in their capacity as agents of change, also within the ecumenical community and EDAN's position had changed in this respect. During a Consultation to update the document in 2013, it was concluded that in view of shifting positions, it would be better to write a new document, and to opt for an approach in which the realities of "disability" experience are interpreted from the perspective of creation, making the notion of human creature-liness central to our theological reflections. This led us to a new document entitled "*The Gift of Being: Called to Be a Church of All and for All*."⁶ The document was presented to the Central Committee of June 2016 who commended it to the members for study, reflection, feedback and action. This Policy Statement is addressed to the ecumenical family of churches and their communities. Our greatest hope is to be part of a church whose communities know how to receive the gift of being the body of Christ, and celebrate the rich variety in the giftedness of *all* of its members.

⁴ See: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/ix-other-study-processes/a-church-of-all-and-for-all-an-interim-statement>; see also: <https://www.edan-wcc.org/>.

⁵ See: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/2016/the-gift-of-being>.

⁶ <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/2016/the-gift-of-being>.

Disability in Theological Education

For the last 60 years, the World Council of Churches has been involvement in theological education. Theological institutions and seminaries are the primary sources of leadership for the churches or local congregations. This is where many issues and problems facing the congregations or the local churches such as poverty and the great disparity of wealth, racism and racial conflicts, unemployment and homelessness, child abuse, oppression of women, marginalised people, alcoholism, drug addiction, crime and many others can be discussed.

The focus of theological education has been identified as ministerial formation. The goal of ministerial formation is to provide a spiritual community of motivated and equipped people for a life of service. The training programme must then combine learning and life, knowledge and commitment. The education experience needs to be a wholesome process that combines academic learning with appropriate lifestyles. The total ethos of an institution, learning and teaching, administration and structures, community life inside and openness to society, all have significance in the process. There must be coherence and consistency between what is taught and what is experienced. A mutual stimulation of theological reflection, community living, and Christian service becomes essential.

Realising that greater impact would be achieved if disability concerns were addressed at the ministerial formation stage, EDAN and the WCC Ecumenical Theological Education Desk embarked in August 2000 on engaging theological institutions in disability discourse. This led to a meeting in Limuru, Kenya in 2014. During this meeting, the participants comprising of representatives from select theological institutions such as St Paul's United Theological College in Kenya, Asia Theological Seminary in Philippines, United Theological College of West Indies in Jamaica, Stockholm School of Theology in Sweden and Drew Theological Seminary in USA were particularly concerned that women and men who are trained to work in churches, lay training centres, theological and ecumenical institutions not are well prepared and equipped to address the pastoral, theological and ethical concerns that are voiced by people with disabilities. As one participant put it: "The problem is not that we have people who are deaf, mute and blind (and with other disabilities) among us, rather the churches and church-related institutions are usually deaf, mute and blind towards our concerns and needs."

Despite the talk about contextual and ecumenical theologies, these institutions were yet to be inclusive, sensitive and relevant to people with disabilities, their families and their care-givers (part-time or full-time depending on circumstances) in the church and the society. Even when asked who is missing at the ecumenical table, rarely do we remember that people with disabilities are not represented. During this meeting, it was agreed that theological institutions and lay training centres must be challenged to address this important and urgent matter as they had the duty and responsibility to prepare and equip women and men to be critically aware of the pastoral care needs of all people in the community. This was done through the development of a co-curriculum in disability studies to prepare ministers at the training stage for pastoral work with persons with disabilities. A prototype curriculum which is subject to adaptations by different institutions was produced during the consultation.

It is a known fact that that a theology of disability is the result of our actual experiences. The two basic lines which we take as the starting point in our theological reflection are: the existential experience of our own quest for identity, and our experience of faith, always lived out on the margins of power and authority.

Working with Associations of Theological Institutions

To bring about a long-term impact on the life of the Church and Society, EDAN started its journey with theological education in 2004 with the aim of influencing inclusion of persons with disabilities in theological institutions both as students, faculty members and, more importantly, to improve the attitudes held by the churches and society on persons with disabilities. In Africa, we have worked with the West African

Association of Theological Institutions (WAATI), Association of Theological Institutions in Eastern Africa (ATIEA), Association of Theological Institutions in Southern and Eastern Africa (ATISCA), Association des Institutions d'Enseignement Théologique en Afrique Occidentale (ASTHEOL) and Circle of African Women in Theology amongst other groups.

The immediate reasons as to why we were engaging with the theological institutions on increasing their understanding of disability are as follows:

1. Different concerns and issues have emerged in recent years and these issues have been properly included and integrated in theological education. Among already known concerns like women, HIV/AIDs, Christian Muslim Relations, disability is another important concern to be addressed and we are therefore asking that a space be given to persons with disabilities to participate and articulate theology.
2. There has always been a focus on three aspects of theological education – ministerial formation, personal formation and academic formation. However, it is observed that although there are three aspects, the present theological education focused mainly on the third one. Personal and ministerial formation need to be taken seriously in curriculum development.
3. Theological methodology needs to be changed. The curriculum should be contextual. The present department or discipline-oriented approaches to theological education give very little room for contextual issues.
4. Theological education in general, and theological literature in particular, is the work of persons without disabilities for persons without disabilities. There are theological reasons for this phenomenon. As Dr. Kabue once put it, “there is an emphasis of the values of “perfection”, “power”, “might”, etc. Therefore, society has no place for persons with disabilities who they deem to be weak and feeble. In a similar way, theological terms affirm the construct of God as warrior, ruler, etc. Such concepts cannot speak to persons with disabilities. We need to re-symbolise the divine power not as a dominating and controlling power but as liberating power and love. Thus, the symbols and metaphors used should resonate with our experiences. Therefore, such theological articulations have to be challenged; we have to develop a relevant theology for, and a meaningful ministry to, persons with disabilities.”
5. Contextual theology should provide the methodology for doing theology in relation to disability. Such an endeavour would require commitment to the cause of persons with disabilities: walking with them, giving expression to their struggles, engaging in their liberation.
6. Discourse on disability should articulate theology from the perspective of persons with disabilities. Theology is discourse on God and theological concepts and language are all metaphorical and are culturally and socially constructed.
7. A theological discourse on disability would have to shift from the Greek philosophical framework with its emphasis on unchangeable essence to a re-symbolisation of God as a liberative power with compassionate love. The focus would be on a suffering, crucified God, on the pain of God and the pathos of suffering people.

Towards this, EDAN has been involved in curriculum development with the Association of Theological Colleges, seminaries and Schools. In Africa, we have worked with ATIEA, ASTHEOL, WAATI and ATISCA to influence curriculum development to include disability.

Along the way, we realised however that we did not have resource books to teach disability in theological institutions. Therefore, we developed a process of bringing together theologians, educators and faculty members from universities and colleges teaching theology to research and publish articles on theology and disability to provide resources for the teaching of the same.

From these forums, EDAN has been able to print and disseminate the following theological education materials:

1. *Embracing the Inclusive Community: A Disability Perspective, 2010*
2. *Doing Theology from Disability Perspective, 2011*

3. *First Latin American Consultation on Theology and Disability*, 2011
4. *Disability, Society and Theology: Voices from Africa*, 2011
5. *Disability Discourse for Theological Institutions in Indonesia*, 2011
6. *Sprouts of Disability Theology*, 2012, Printed by National Council of Churches in India – EDAN provided financial support to facilitate the round table that produced the contents of this book.
7. *A Theological Resource Book on Disability: Is God Disabled? Teaching Theology from Disability Perspective*, 2012
8. *Like a Single Flower We'll be: Latin American discussions on disability*, 2013.
9. *Perspectives on Disability: Resources for Theological and Religious Studies in Africa*, 2016
10. *Disability in Africa: Resource Book for Theology and Religious Studies*, 2016.

Conclusion

The Learning Journey of EDAN shows that deliberate efforts for the inclusion of people with disabilities can have remarkable results for the life of churches, for diakonia and for theological education. Still, there are more deliberate efforts needed on the part of scholars in Religion and Disability Studies which should also engage persons with disabilities and the Disabled Persons' Organisations. This is because the standard type of seminary training tends to create a professional elite – separated from the ordinary membership. This line of criticism leads to the final point that the standard type of seminary training tends to align the leadership of the Church with the privileged elements in society instead of staying with the poor and the marginalised. Disability education and inclusion thus are a crucial means for a continued process of reform and broadening inclusion in both local congregations, theological education institutions, diaconal projects and ecumenical organisations.

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72. THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL, HIV, AND #BLESSED: DIAKONIA AS LIBERATING PRAXIS IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

Beverley Haddad¹

Prosperity theology emerged and was popularised in the United States of America from the 1950s onwards and has grown considerably with globalisation, particularly since the 1990s. Employing the forces of capital and using the media of mass communication, riches and wealth are spiritualised and “*mammon*” is re-signified into “financial blessing”.² Heuser argues that the rise of the prosperity gospel in large parts of Africa, including South Africa, from the 1970s-1990s, tended to depend on the stature of individuals such as Benson Idahosa in Nigeria and Ray McCauley in South Africa.³ The increase in this teaching and the rise of mega-churches, particularly in large cities, continues unabated in post-apartheid South Africa where there has been “a sudden infusion of commodities, an explosion of new forms of wealth, and a simultaneous shrinking of the labour market”.⁴ John and Jean Comaroff refer to this phenomenon in our neoliberal context as “millennium capitalism”, which has a strong focus on consumption rather than production.⁵ With the demise of the stable labour market, this form of capitalism elicits both “hope and hopelessness” as the world becomes a place “simultaneously of possibility and impossibility”.⁶ As the unemployed look on from the outside, prosperity theology “praises the immediacy of desire”, making material gain synonymous with the unmediated power of God. This impulse towards the accumulation of wealth represents an act of “sacral consumption”.⁷ This sacral consumption takes place in the context of neo-liberal capitalism where there is an erasure of family and community, a loss of human integrity, and growing commodification of persons and their bodies.⁸

Within the South African context, this growing commodification of the body, particularly women’s bodies, is most obviously demonstrated through the emergence of the #Blessed community of young women who seek out transactional sex with older men. These young women are motivated, not primarily by survival needs, but out of a desire to attain economic prosperity and a lifestyle promulgated by neo-liberal capitalism that would otherwise be unattainable. The term “Blessed” emerged in 2015 in South Africa on social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter when young women “claimed to be beneficiaries of a ‘blesser’ who has ‘blessed’ them with luxurious gifts” using the hashtag #Blessed.⁹ This #Blessed community of young women are agentive in their use of their bodies as they engage in transactional sex and as they choose to use hetero-patriarchy for their own ends. Yet, while they experience economic independence through this

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² Andreas Heuser, “Charting African Prosperity Gospel Economies”, *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72, no. 1 (2016), p. 3. [Accessed 16th March 2018], [Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i1.3823>].

³ Heuser, “Charting African Prosperity Gospel Economies”, p. 3.

⁴ Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, “Privatizing the Millennium: New Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism in Africa, and Elsewhere”, *Afrika Spectrum* 35(3) (2000), pp. 293-312: p. 299.

⁵ Comaroff and Comaroff, “Privatizing the Millennium”, p. 279.

⁶ Comaroff and Comaroff, “Privatizing the Millennium”, p. 306.

⁷ Heuser, “Charting African Prosperity Gospel Economies”, p. 4.

⁸ Comaroff and Comaroff, “Privatizing the Millennium”, p. 306.

⁹ Roya Varjavandi, “#Blessers Must Fall: Youth-led participatory action research and photo story creation on teenage pregnancy, transactional sex and gender-based violence” *Agenda* 31(2) (2017), pp. 87-98: p. 89; See also, Jasmine Garsd and Andrea Crossan, “What it Means in South Africa When You Are #Blessed”. Public Radio International, 10th August 2017. [Accessed 15th March 2018], [Available at: <https://www.pri.org/stories/2017-08-10/what-it-means-south-africa-when-you-are-blessed>].

agentive transactional behaviour, they are not freed from econo-patriarchy.¹⁰ This particular form of agency does not seek to destabilise hetero-patriarchy, it is not based on solidarity with other women, and there is no concern for the structural transformation of the globalised economy in contexts of vast economic disparities such as South Africa.

Significant to any theological discussion of the “blesser” phenomenon is the question as to why a theological notion such as “blessing” has been popularised to symbolise financial blessing acquired through transactional sex.¹¹ Much of the popular literature on “blesser” relationships assumes that the spiritual connotations are obvious, given the rise of the prosperity gospel with its emphasis on material blessing. Stephan de Beer, in a popular piece in the weekly South African newspaper, *Mail and Guardian*, during early stages of the “blesser” phenomenon in 2016, stated that the similarities between the financial blessing of the prosperity gospel and the “blessing” enjoyed by women “blessees” was obvious. He suggested that “[i]n both cases relationships are reduced to transactions, in which integrity and morality are traded for instant blessing with success and gratification”.¹² However, it is important to acknowledge that the trading of “integrity and morality” in the case of transactional sex is usually within a context of unemployment and survival. What is particularly significant in the “blesser/blessee” relationship, however, is the fact that survival sex for basic necessities has shifted into commodified sex for the instant gratification of the desire for luxury goods and opulent lifestyles, the “new needs” of modernity.¹³ Despite the overt use of theological language, the church has been strangely silent on the matter. There has been almost no consternation in the public realm let alone prophetic witness and action by the church. This is not surprising as the church has shown little interest in addressing gender concerns within its own patriarchal practice and has been mostly quiet in the South African context of high rates of intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and links between gender violence and HIV, an issue I addressed almost twenty years ago.¹⁴ Not much has changed since then. The church remains one of the most patriarchal institutions in society with a reluctance to transform its structures to reflect gender inclusive leadership and practice.¹⁵

Patriarchy portrays women as helpless and subservient to men who are the active agents in all decision-making processes. Poor women, in particular, experience marginalisation in society and struggle to survive. Liberation theologians have argued for a liberatory trajectory in Scripture that undeniably indicates a preferential option for the poor and marginalised.¹⁶ The prosperity gospel contradicts this teaching, condoning the accumulation of wealth and suggesting that material blessing is a sign of faith. Given that the roots of this theology lie in Pentecostalism, patriarchy is foundational to church leadership with stereotypical gender roles

¹⁰ This term evolved through a discussion between Gerald West and myself as we sought to find a phrase that would reflect aspects of ‘patriarchy as economic power’. We have both coined the term ‘econo-patriarchy’, riffing off the more familiar ‘hetero-patriarchy’.

¹¹ Beverley Haddad, “‘Taking the Wanting out of Waiting’: HIV, Transactional Sex, and #Blessed in the Context of Neo-liberal Christianity”, *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 161 (2018), pp. 5-17.

¹² Stephan de Beer, “Blessees Dethrone the God of Compassion to Install a God of Greed and Gratification”, *Mail and Guardian* 18th July 2016. [Accessed 5th April 2018], [Available at: <https://mg.co.za/article/2016-07-18-00-blessees-dethrone-the-god-of-compassion-to-instal-a-god-of-greed-and-gratification>].

¹³ Suzanne Leclerc-Madlala, “Transactional Sex and the Pursuit of Modernity”, *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies* 29(2) (2003), pp. 213-233.

¹⁴ Beverley Haddad, “Gender Violence and HIV/AIDS: A Deadly Silence in the Church”, *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 114 (2002), pp. 93-106.

¹⁵ See, for example, Miranda Pillay, “Women, Priests and the Anglican Church in Southern Africa: Reformation of Holy Hierarchies”, *Consensus* 38(1), Article 10 (2017), pp. 1-13. [Accessed 30th January 2018], [Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol38/iss1/10>].

¹⁶ Rasiah S. Sugiirtharajah, *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World 25th Anniversary Edition*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016.

of male dominance over subservient females in the home perpetuated.¹⁷ Thus, poor women find themselves marginalised by prosperity theology on two fronts. Given the prevalence of Christianity in South Africa and the importance of religiosity within communities, there is no doubt that there are participants of the #Blessed community who are members of churches preaching the gospel of prosperity. These young women commodify their bodies in order to attain opulent lifestyles so prevalent in “prosperity” churches and thus become recognised as “blessed from God”.¹⁸ Yet these young women who feel “blessed” fall within the age range of 15-24 years, the group who have the highest rates of HIV in South Africa. In this age and gender group, there are approximately 2000 new HIV infections weekly, more than double the number seen in young men the same age.¹⁹ The need for the church to become involved in prophetic diaconial action to address the rising number of HIV infections amongst adolescent girls and young women is ever more urgent.

Prophetic diaconial action arises out of the theological conviction that the mission of the church must be in continuity “with the mission of Jesus and his incarnated presence in the world”.²⁰ It is thus a call to be an incarnated presence in the world “that implies a radical option for or with the poor, following the example of Jesus who healed, dignified and empowered the excluded of his time”.²¹ Kjell Nordstokke argues that prophetic diakonia is intrinsic to the “mandate and authority that God has given the church and its diakonia”.²² For him, such diaconial action is never silent, but is consistent with the tradition of the biblical prophets who always spoke out against injustice. However, Nordstokke argues for a distinction between what he calls “political” and “prophetic” diakonia. For him, prophetic diakonia is not primarily aimed at secular political institutions as is the case with “political diakonia”, but rather at the religious community.²³ I am uncomfortable with this distinction, and want to argue that all prophetic diaconial action has political implications, both for the religious community and for political and social structures outside the church. Prophetic diakonia speaks of the need to be advocates of justice that lead to the transformative action of the church that brings about structural institutional change where there is injustice. With feminist theologian Letty Russell, I would argue that any discussion of the diaconial action of the church must shift from an *ecclesiocentric* to an *oikocentric* perspective that brings us to a more modest claim about our task in the world. Rather than being the medium of God’s action, the church should see itself as “a sign or instrument of that action, which is taking place in and through all parts of the groaning universe”.²⁴ This is the mission of the church and exemplifies diaconal praxis. Our diaconal praxis must engage the current reality of our globalised world and it is into this reality that we must *speak* and *act* against injustice. Latin American liberation theology has helped us to understand that theory and praxis are deeply related. All theological reflection must be an engagement with the lived reality of those who are poor and marginalised, including women.²⁵ Hence, Carlos Ham has argued that for diakonia to be transformative, it has to have a “bottom-up” approach which recognises that all diaconial action

¹⁷ Maria Frahm-Arp, “Singleness, Sexuality, and the Dream of Marriage”, *Journal of Religion in Africa* 42 (2012), pp. 369-383.

¹⁸ Cheryl B. Anderson, “Negotiating the Prosperity Gospel and Methodist Denominational Identity in the Age of AIDS”. In Ted A. Campbell (ed), *Wesleyan Communities and the World Beyond Christianity* (Nashville: Wesley’s Foundry Books, 2018).

¹⁹ UNAIDS, “South Africa Launches Campaign for Young Women and Adolescent Girls”, Update 24th June 2016. [Accessed 23th March 2017]. [Available at:

http://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/featurestories/2016/june/20160624_south-africa].

²⁰ Kjell Nordstokke, *Liberating Diakonia* (Trondheim: Tapir Akademisk Forlag, 2011), p. 49.

²¹ Nordstokke, *Liberating Diakonia*, p. 49.

²² Nordstokke, *Liberating Diakonia*, p. 51.

²³ Nordstokke, *Liberating Diakonia*, p. 51.

²⁴ Letty Russell, *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), p. 89.

²⁵ For further discussion, see Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation History, Politics, and Salvation* (London: SCM Press, 1974).

has to be “from the margins, rather than to the margins [...]”.²⁶ For him, it is crucial to recognise the agency of the poor and marginalised in the transformation of unjust structures within the church and society in order to bring about *oikoumene*, “the alternative vision of the world”.²⁷

However, the #Blessed community of young women are not interested in an alternative vision of the world. As suggested earlier, they embrace neo-liberal capitalism and use their agency to gain material blessing, choosing not to destabilise hetero-patriarchy. Twenty years ago, Tinyiko Maluleke argued for the rediscovery of African agency and suggested that African theology has a unique role to play in acknowledging, valorising, interpreting and enhancing this agency.²⁸ He further argued that African women’s theology had to date engaged in the most passionate, vibrant and prophetic forms of praxis, taking initiative and resisting oppression.²⁹ Employing the work of South African black theologian Itumeleng Mosala, Maluleke asserts that liberative theology must emerge from within the black working class and peasantry with an emphasis on all levels of oppression, cultural, political and economic.³⁰ Crucial to this argument is the need for liberative theology to work hard at effecting an “ideological and theoretical break with dominant ideologies, practices and discourses”.³¹ All too often, says Maluleke, liberation theologies, “who despite their genuinely good intentions, nevertheless remain trapped in the ideological and theoretical frameworks of the very oppressors whom they seek to undermine and ultimately dethrone”.³² Thus, it is important that a thorough class analysis of society, church, and of theologians be undertaken. It is this form of critical theological analysis that is necessary given the conundrum that the agency of the #Blessed community of young women poses.

African theologian Musa Dube mounts a scathing critique of the forces of globalisation and their impact on the poor and suggests that for former colonised nations, globalisation is a “new form of imperialism”.³³ She argues that religions participate in globalisation both as a force of collaboration and as a force of resistance.³⁴ This assertion is premised on the fact that, in the first instance, Christianity colluded with the imperial forces indicating that Christian religious organisations are not exempt from the forces of globalisation. For Dube, collusion with this second wave of imperialism is best expressed in the “selling of American Christian fundamentalism” where “young people in particular align themselves with the glamour [...] of the prosperity gospel”.³⁵ It is therefore not surprising that the #Blessed community of young women understand that their “blessing” descends through consumer sex that meets their individual material need and fulfils the “immediacy of desire”.³⁶ As indicated earlier, these are the hallmarks of the prosperity gospel preached so prevalently in South Africa today.

There has been no resistance to imperial forces by the #Blessed community who in fact demonstrate quite the opposite. Not only do these young women collude with the imperial forces of globalisation and

²⁶ Carlos Ham, “Diakonia from the Margins”, Unpublished Paper, WCC Diakonia Reference Group, Geneva, February 2016.

²⁷ WCC, “Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in the Twenty First Century”, Document Adopted at the World Council of Churches Conference on “Theology of Diakonia 2012”, in *Resource Book WCC 10th Assembly, Busan 2013* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), para, 14.

²⁸ Tinyiko Maluleke. “The Rediscovery of the Agency of Africans: An Emerging Paradigm of Post-cold War and Post-apartheid Black and African Theology”, *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 108 (2000), pp. 19-37.

²⁹ Maluleke, “The Rediscovery of the Agency of Africans”, p. 31.

³⁰ Maluleke, “The Rediscovery of the Agency of Africans”, p. 33.

³¹ Itumeleng Mosala quoted in Maluleke, “The Rediscovery of the Agency of Africans”, p. 33.

³² Maluleke, “The Rediscovery of the Agency of Africans”, p. 33.

³³ See Musa Dube. “To Pray the Lord’s Prayer in the Global Economic Era (Mt. 6:9-13)” in Gerald O. West and Musa Dube (eds), *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000), 611-30; Musa Dube. “Looking Back and Forward: Postcolonialism, Globalization, God and Gender” *Scriptura* 92 (2006), p. 183.

³⁴ Dube, “Looking Back and Forward”, p. 181.

³⁵ Dube, “Looking Back and Forward”, p. 182.

³⁶ Haddad, “Taking the Wanting Out of Waiting”, 13.

hetero/econo-patriarchy,³⁷ but they use sex as their gateway to self-gratification. Of course, “sex” is notoriously taboo within most theologising, particularly within the African continent. Even African women theologians have been slow to theologise sex despite their central focus on the HIV epidemic. There has also been little intersection between sexuality and econo-patriarchy in their work.³⁸

The #Blessed community of young women poses new challenges to the “the re-discovery of agency” that Maluleke so whole-heartedly celebrated twenty years ago. But more so, that their actions collude with econo-patriarchy raises questions about the lack of prophetic diaconial action in an age where the prosperity gospel is rife. Poor and marginalised communities turn to prosperity teaching as a desperate measure against their poverty and unemployment. Yet the church is called to stand in solidarity with the poor, is called to reject the prosperity gospel, and to show by her transformative diaconial action that an alternative vision of the world is possible.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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³⁷ See Beverley Haddad, “Trans-actional Dilemmas: African Women’s Theologies and #Blessed Sex”, Forthcoming.

³⁸ Haddad, “Trans-actional Dilemmas”.

73. ADDRESSING THE SPATIAL TURN IN DIACONIA

Kaia S. Rønsdal¹

Introduction

My starting point is the *science* of diaconia. This means the theologies, philosophies and theories founding diaconia as a concept and also as reasoning of diaconia as practice. A challenge in these fields is related to what is seen as their source of knowledge. This is also related to their motivations and conditions. This essay concerns the *spaces* diaconia may concern itself with.

The goal of this essay is to show how perspectives and foundations from spatial theory let us understand everyday aspects of lives and spaces, and what can be learned through them, as researchers or as practitioners.

I will start by presenting my understanding of diaconia, followed by central spatial concepts. I will try show how the spatial can inform the development of diaconia.

Diaconia and Calling

The premise for my understanding of diaconia stems from Scandinavian creation theology, as a specific understanding where “Our relationship with God is not something that starts when we enter Church or a presumed religious territory, but always a reality given in and with life itself.”²

With that follows that the other human beings are part of this given reality. The common calling, which I see as a crucial part of diaconia is related to me, you, and all human beings, regardless of faith or creed. To be “called from the silent needs of the other, and the way God reaches out to all people behind the mask of the other human persons, are to be considered as two dimensions of one and the same reality.”³

Such calling can be discussed *from* a space, *through* spatial theory. The goal is to challenge and contribute to traditional and contemporary notions of calling and diaconia. I pursue ways of discovering the calling within a spatial framework that may lead to certain methodological reflections entailing a perspective that relates to the researcher as much as to the methods employed.

The roles and positions of people and groups may not be as set as one may think in an unpredictable and unclear public space – it may not be obvious, and basically depends on approach and perspective.

Searching for Space

The spatial premise for finding, understanding and discussing a space or material, is that of Henri Lefebvre’s production of space.⁴ Part of his elaborate work on this topic is his three-levelled mode of analysis, where spaces are analysed and understood. These analytical levels relate to how spaces are seen and interpreted from

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² Niels Henrik Gregersen, Bengt Kristensson Ugglå and Trygve E. Wyller, “Reconfiguring Reformation Theology: The Program of Scandinavian Creation Theology,” in *Reformation Theology for a Post-Secular Age: Løgstrup, Prenter, Wingren, and the Future of Scandinavian Creation Theology* (eds) Niels Henrik Gregersen, Trygve E. Wyller and Bengt Kristensson Ugglå (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht GmbH & Co 2017), pp. 11–36: p. 23.

³ Gregersen et al. “Reconfiguring Reformation,” p. 16.

⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, translated [first in 1991] by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell. 2007 [1974]).

different perspectives, such as how they are perceived, how they are conceived, and how they are lived. When spaces are analysed by this levelling, new details and perspectives are uncovered.

In the following, I will elaborate using a recognisable example. A public urban space has indistinct functions and uses. On the one hand, “everyone” is welcome and can use it, and on the other, many are using it wrong. Even though “everyone” is welcome, there are people forced to leave because they, for instance, are considered unfavourable for commerce. It may be a beggar, or a ruffled substance user. In many countries, begging is legal,⁵ and looking ruffled or even drugged is rarely illegal. Furthermore, some people will use public space for activities that we usually associate with the home, like sleeping, changing clothes, or cleaning off in water from a fountain.

To some degree, this relates to who “everyone” is, as we usually consider the acting person before we find their actions problematic. If we identify with the person, we assume the action has a natural explanation, and think little of it. If the person is different to us, like the beggar, we evaluate the actions differently. When we become uncertain of others in a space, it changes our experience of said space, and it makes us insecure. In other words, public space is not open and equal to all, at least not in practice. Furthermore, it is large and complex.

Another example is a public park on a sunny day. Some people are just moving through, others are sunbathing. There will be people playing sports, others are walking dogs, while some are having a picnic. Some will be having beers on a bench. Others will walk around asking for cigarettes or change, while some are resting in the grass. Everyone have their own experience and idea of the space, most thinking that their presence is legitimate. The friends having a picnic, as well as the people drinking on the bench, may think they are using the space for its purpose, but they may not enjoy each other’s company. They are all in the same park, but not necessarily in the same space.

Place and space are thus not the same in this context. The place is understood as the geographical placement. Its design and planned construction are significant, and it may be interpreted in many ways. Particularly the meaning for the people there. The place is consequential to space. When I write about space, I mean the social, formative spaces that appear as people encounter. It is social and spatial practice.⁶

When Lefebvre defines space, he does not just mean the place itself, as physical space has no reality or content without the energy that enfolds. Space becomes real through social processes, relations, and social practice.⁷ Thus, we understand that space is not something we see, rather it is something we *do*.⁸

If a beggar sits right outside the metro station, she sits in a space with unclear boundaries. She is in a public place (or semi-public), doing something that is not illegal. Nonetheless, even if it may be bothersome to passers-by, and many would have wanted that she was not there, she is part of this public space. Furthermore, whether we like it or not, through sharing this relational space in the passing, a common space is created. It is social practice that produces this space and makes it socially productive.⁹ It is the space, rather than the place, that is changed by the beggar. To elaborate on what this means, I will present Lefebvre’s model of analysis.

⁵ In the EU, only Greece, Hungary, Italy and Romania include an explicit begging ban in their national legislation.

⁶ Kirsten Simonsen, “Rumlig praksis: Konstitution af rum mellem materialitet og repræsentation,” from the anthology “Vendingen mot rummet,” *Slagmark* 57 (2010), pp. 35–58.

⁷ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

⁸ Simonsen, “Rumlig praksis”, p. 38.

⁹ Lukasz Stanek, *Henri Lefebvre on Space. Architecture, Urban Research, and the Production on Theory* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

The Production of Space

For Henri Lefebvre, practice is understood as continuous activities, not particular actions or professional practice, and these activities are both temporal and *spatial*.¹⁰ He asserted that humans enter into relations with each other through their practices and activities.¹¹ Spaces are never complete, finalised or exhausted. They are constantly in process and in continuous production.

Another central aspect to understand the model and for how to possibly interpret the space created by the beggar outside the metro station and those passing by, is by Lefebvre's rejection of binary logic. That means the rejection of thinking that something, whether a space, a relation or a case is *either/or*. Such logic limits thinking and development, and categories should always be opened for a possible third, a *both/and*. For example, the metro station is not only a place of travel, or a stop for the metro driver. It is a place of work for the person in the newsstand, the refuse collector and the security guard. It is shelter from the weather, safety for those walking alone, and much more. It is always possible to ask more and new questions about something: is there more to this than what I have already seen or thought? By asking this question, the interpretation of the case, or spatial conditions, is opened. As spaces are being continuously produced, never finished or completed, their interpretations cannot be limited by either/or questions.

Lefebvre's three-levelled model entails a clear demand that spaces can be *analysed* at all three levels, but they may never be *understood* at one level alone. All spaces are always all three levels, in a conceptual triad where different moments of social space is seen both as analytically separate and in inseparable unison.¹² The first level is *spatial practice*, and Lefebvre refers to society's production and reproduction and the concrete spatial structures in a society.¹³ Analytically, this level is also called the perceived space and entails spaces as we perceive our social surroundings. Simplified, this level entails the spaces as we experience them. If applied to the space of the beggar outside the metro station, the person who passes may perceive the space as unfamiliar due to the beggar's presence, which is one possible perspective in an interpretation of spatial practice. The beggar or another passer-by may have other perceptions of the same space; shameful, irritating, creative, diverse, rich, etc.

The second level is the *representations of space*. These are tied to representations of society's production and order.¹⁴ Lefebvre also called this level "conceived space", that is how the space is thought of, understood and represented. It is the level of science and thinkers, and may be represented as pictures, maps, architecture, plans, reports and other representations and images of space. This means that this level includes knowledge, power and ideology. Simplified, this analytical level points to aspects of the space as it is thought. My example of the beggar shows a described and concrete space, where my description represents society's production and knowledge through the expression of discomfort in the encounter with beggars.

The third and last level in the spatial analysis is the *spaces of representation*. This is the most complex level, tied to symbols and more covert aspects of social life.¹⁵ This means that it refers to other aspects of the space than the space itself, aspects that express and invoke social norms, values, and experiences.¹⁶ This level is also called *lived space*, and includes spaces as they are experienced and lived by those who are there, in

¹⁰ Simonsen, "Rumlign praksis".

¹¹ Christian Schmid, "Henri Lefebvre's theory of the productions of space: towards a three-dimensional dialectics", in *Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefebvre* (eds). Kanishka Goonewardena, Stefan Kipfer, Richard Milgrom and Christian Schmid (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008).

¹² Simonsen, "Rumlign praksis", p. 38.

¹³ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

¹⁴ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

¹⁵ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

¹⁶ Schmid, "Henri Lefebvre's theory".

everyday practice.¹⁷ In the example of the beggar at the metro station, the lived space is what occurs between the beggar, those passing by, and the surroundings.

My assertion is that even small social spaces may be interpreted through this mode of analysis, making a seemingly simple social encounter a complex space where the relationships are not necessarily as they may seem. The question is whether and how the details uncovered in these social spaces relate to the calling.

Understanding the Other's Space

A paramount notion in this context is that of being affected. What does being affected mean in relation to calling and to diaconia? Why is it important that researchers and practitioners sense with their bodies in the empirical spaces? What is the value of this embodied experience? The premise in relation to being affected is the body. This has to do with the understanding of what “being affected” means. I want to emphasise that I understand it as a physical experience. Kari Martinsen writes of the Good Samaritan that he felt pain in the intestines, and what he felt is the most physical, embodied expression. It means that he saw something and was affected in his entire body. The pain of the other impacted him, without any distance.¹⁸ This is what I mean – seeing, sensing, physically feeling with the entire body, consciously using it as tool. This is rooted in the emphasis on the body and being bodies in a common lifeworld – that is something common to us all regardless of our religious position. It also relates to the discussion on the universal as an ethical question.¹⁹

According to theologian Trygve Wyller, we “also need to understand and interpret religion as performed and exposed as third space [lived space]. Third space religion approaches the field of what does not matter, [...]. Conventionally, we do not think of the third space as significant and important.”²⁰ Lefebvre’s presentation of the level of lived space is complex and muddled, and in analyses of space, it tends to be downplayed and under-researched. However, this is where we may experience lived life, and we can only understand it and the people there when we enter and remain in this space attentively and consciously. Researchers and practitioners must become part of, and engage in and with the lived space of those they are interested in.

When we include the perspective in our research approach, we also focus on “the hybridity, the smells, the movements, the art representations, the encounters, etc. [We focus] on the self-evident practices that are just there and that do not count as being specifically important.”²¹ However, it is all this that is invisible and insignificant that *is* important. What Lefebvre is really focusing on are the life worlds where encounters connect people with each other and with nature. To be aware of that is also a methodological issue. This is an issue for a diaconia that is concerned with space.

I cannot, when I am doing spatial research, merely report from these spaces. Reporting is to represent the space, and to make the people present into objects. They require field presence to the everyday that is being researched or learned about. The researcher must be part of the field, and also report of her own experience there, embodied feelings and emotions, like how it smelled, and senses such as stress, fear, joy, etc. She is the only one who can say something about the level of the lived, as she was there and lived it. When we live the space with those there, we connect in other ways, we encounter embodiedly. We smell the same smells and touch the same things. We must live and focus on the connections, relations, strive to have an embodied awareness, to perceive all that is spoken and told without words.

¹⁷ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

¹⁸ Kari Martinsen, *Øyet og kallet* (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2014 [2000]) p. 19.

¹⁹ Cf. Trygve E. Wyller, and Hans-Günther Heimbrock (eds), *Perceiving the Other. Case Studies and Theories of Respectful Action*. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht GmbH & Co., 2010).

²⁰ Trygve E. Wyller, “Touching and Contamination: What the xenophobes want to avoid. Reflections from a Congolese borderland in South Africa,” in *Borderland Religion. Ambiguous Practices of Difference, Hope and Beyond* (eds) Daisy Machado, Bryan S. Turner and Trygve E. Wyller (Oxford: Routledge, 2018), pp. 87-98, p. 93.

²¹ Wyller, “Touching and Contamination,” p. 93.

We may experience seemingly powerless or marginalised people perform embodied powerfulness, resourcefulness, creativity and resistance. Often without a place, or a safe structure or a seemingly safe space. Unless we know the spaces, they remain unfamiliar or unsafe, or even invisible, and we fail to see the people of these spaces.

Concluding Remarks

I have aimed, through a simplification of Henri Lefebvre's production of space and recognisable examples, at showing the potential that lies in the use of spatial analysis, in our effort to learn about others.

This is important because it affects how we see and understand the people we encounter. Not the least within the field of diaconia. To learn and encounter means to enter into the spaces of others, with others, rather than demanding them enter ours. It is a manner of being present and open to the lives of those we encounter, that lets them speak in their own voice.

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74. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN MONASTIC ORTHODOX RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

Vladimir Fedorov¹

Is There a Conflict between Social Responsibility and Monastic Spirituality?

The Orthodox spiritual tradition attaches great importance to monasticism, its image and authority, hence special attention should be paid to the theme “Monastic culture and diakonia” in reflections of an Orthodox Christian on the culture and practices of diaconic ministry. The famous 6th century Byzantine spiritual author and ascetic, John Climacus would say: “The light to the monks is angels and the light to all people is the monastic life”. Monastic experience is a school of asceticism that is essential for the life of all Christian traditions. This is a culture of abstinence and self-improvement which is required for maturation of a Christian personality; thus, it serves the basis for maintaining a healthy Christian social climate in the community and society.

In the ancient world, the Greek word *askeo* meant the art of creating something more perfect from rough materials, e.g. clothing from the skin, figures made of stone etc. Such a handling was named asceticism; later, the same word began to be used to designate athletic exercises. In philosophy, this term meant an acquisition of virtue, using the analogy with the exercises of an athlete. Asceticism is certainly a feat, but every Christian should be ascetic to one degree or another. Nurturing a virtuous personality able to accept challenges ranks among the most important duties of social ministry. These duties can rightly be called a religious educational ministry of monasticism. If healing of a bodily ailment alone is a worthy goal, then healing of mental and spiritual pains is a social ministry, so monasticism as a school of austerities is certainly a diaconic resource. Yet, as a hundred years ago, one can hear nowadays accusations of the monks for their selfishness: “There is so much grief and injustice around, and they are only preoccupied with themselves”. Although, spiritual recovery even of one person is a gain for the whole body of the Church. A monk who is trying to heal himself is trying to heal one of the cells of the divine-humane organism. Some monks from those who managed to heal themselves, in the presence of certain abilities not everyone has, can by God’s will be sent to visible service to the world, and then the world will recognise the saints like Sergius of Radonezh and Seraphim of Sarov. Then the words “Save yourself and thousands will be saved around you”² by St. Seraphim will sound especially clear and convincing.

However, one should not be surprised that within the Orthodox tradition of asceticism, like any other theological discipline, there are some intra-confessional disagreements and some differences in preferences for the Church life strategies. For example, the memorable Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia, Alexy II noted at the 2004 Bishop Council of the Russian Orthodox Church: “Regrettably, it should be recognised that not infrequently, caring for external conditions of our monasteries becomes a priority over monastic work. This comes from misunderstanding of the very nature of monasticism which actually should be based on incessant repentance, prayer and suppressing one’s own will”.³ In fact, this is a consequence of a long-standing tension between two interpretations of the model of monastic life.

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² More often, they quote other sayings: “The true aim of our Christian life consists of the acquisition of the Holy Spirit of God.” and “Acquire the Spirit of Peace and a thousand souls around you will be saved.”
<https://iconandlight.wordpress.com/2015/01/01/acquire-the-spirit-of-peace-and-a-thousand-souls-around-you-will-be-saved-st-seraphim-of-sarov/>.

³ Алексий II, Патриарх <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/420130.html>.

As far back as the early 16th, St. Nil of Sora and his “transvolga hermits”, as they were referred to, objected to the ownership of land and property by monasteries; the latter at the time controlled almost a third of all lands. They were named “non-possessors”. They argued that the main task of the monks was to help people by serving for them an example of poverty and prayer, delegating the earthly care in the form of charity, to the laity. Their opponents, “possessors”, in the leadership of St. Joseph of Volotsk, advocated for the property of the monasteries: monks should help the sick and poor, and to do it effectively, they should own land and manage funds. St. Joseph’s words were reinforced by his deeds: he was known to have fed over 70 000 persons during a great famine. The controversy also touched on the relations between the Church and the state, and on some liturgical matters. A final victory of the “possessors”, with their emphasis on close relations with the authorities, had a strong impact on the history of the Russian Church. The Russian Orthodox Church canonised both of the opponents, accepting their positions as true and complementary.

Charity in Monastic Culture

In Russia, monasteries began to be established from the very beginning of the official spread of Christianity, that is after the year 988. The Russian Orthodox Church, which took its final shape in the reign of Yaroslav the Wise, established a charity centre at the Kiev-Pechersky monastery (1051 AD). The monastery came to be widely well-reputed for its mercy towards those in need. There was a free hotel for pilgrims, a hospital with 80 beds, and a free refectory for poor travellers. According to the Church historian A.V. Kartashev, a monk Theodosius, showing an example of “intercession and beneficence” to the victims of the unrighteous courts of the time, would send a weekly a cart of bread to the prison and sought the release of prisoners before the prince.⁴

Monasteries in a country that had just adopted a new faith, proved very influential in this period of Russia, both in economic and religious education terms. The founding of monasteries served as one of the best means for colonising uninhabited areas. Monks sought to seclude on new territory remote from human habitation. Soon people came to build their homes nearby and these subsequently grew into large settlements. Successful monastery households contributed to the expansion of charity, especially at the time of wide-ranged disasters. In the hunger years, a monastery could afford to feed several hundred people a day, sometimes up to a thousand. There were almshouses, hotels and hospitals set up nearabout. Sometimes, cloisters surrounded themselves with stone walls which served as a reliable stronghold against enemies. Such were Pskov-Pechersky, Solovetsky and Tikhvin monasteries and Trinity-Sergian Lavra. Thus, another type of social service was inherent in monasteries, i.e. defence.

Already in the pre-Mongol Russia (before the 13th century), the habitual practice was not only Church charity, but also privately giving alms and secular care for the poor and needy. During the period of Mongol invasion of Russia, the work of mercy was actually in the hands of the clergy as they were given rich donations for the poor, and who themselves were free from Mongol tributes and extortions. From the time Russia offered itself of the Mongol yoke, in the second half of the 15th century, a new stage in the development of charity activity in the Russian Orthodox Church began. In fact, it was St. Sergius of Radonezh who shaped the ideal of monastic activity purely focused on social service.

Orthodox Brotherhoods and Sisterhoods

The notion of brother- or sisterhoods needs some explaining. From the very beginning, Russian monasticism was based on the principles of common life that was understood as a brotherhood. During the Mongol invasion of Russia, the common life of the brethren was disrupted, and in places, cut short. By the 14th century, the

⁴ A.B Kartashov, *Ocherki po istorii Russkoj cerkvi*. T.1. – M. (1993) p. 201; 202; 208.

communal *modus vivendi* was practiced only in a few Russian monasteries. The dominant form of monasticism became a secluded life in an individual cell. The merit of reviving the communal mode of monastic life belongs to St. Sergius of Radonezh. In the monastery founded by him, Trinity Lavra,⁵ the spiritual fraternity of the inhabitants was reinforced by common prayer, common meals and common work.

Along with monastic communities, there were secular brotherhoods in old Russia that united laic Orthodox believers. From ancient Russian manuscripts, it follows that such associations existed in North-Eastern Russia as *bratchinas* as far back as the 12th century. Still, more is known about later unions of Orthodox lay brothers in the west of Russia, i.e. in Ruthenian, part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The earliest of them, the Lviv Dormition Brotherhood, was first documented in 1463. Such unions also existed in Wilno, Lutsk, Vitebsk, Minsk and Kiev. Although they adapted the structure of Western medieval fraternities, their activities, to a large extent, aimed at opposing the rising Roman Catholic proselytism and general Polonisation. Most of these associations were closed in the 18th century, but they had helped to preserve the national cultures of Ukraine and Belarus through the years of Counter-Reformation. By the end of the 18th century, when western Russia became part of the Moscow state, the political significance of the survived brotherhoods was almost exhausted. Yet, a high point of the Orthodox brotherhoods was still ahead of them. In the middle of the 19th century, during the “era of great reforms”, abolition of serfdom being the trigger, the number of Orthodox brotherhoods began to grow rapidly in almost all dioceses of Russia. By the beginning of the 20th, there were 159 brotherhoods, uniting some 40 000 members (*bratchik*). At the beginning of the 20th century, there also appeared brotherhoods of a very different political kind. Before the start of World War I, in 1914, there were 711 brotherhoods in Russia.

Soon after the October 1917 coup, the Orthodox brotherhoods were demolished by the communist power despite attempts by the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia Tikhon (Belavin; 1918-1925) to save the fraternal movement. The Patriarch appealed to the Russian clergy: “Make brotherhoods or soviets from well-intentioned parishioners – any union that benefits local circumstances”.⁶ However, it was impossible to stop the liquidation: thousands of the Orthodox *bratchiks* were shot, tens of thousands were sent to exile.

The revival of Orthodox brotherhoods in post-soviet Russia became perceptible in 1988, the year of celebrating the millennium of the baptism of Russia.

State Intervention in the Social Ministry of Monasteries

The complete submission of the Russian Orthodox Church under the state occurred under Peter the Great. The cause of public charity acquired a state nature. The Church philanthropy was brought under tight state control. Peter ordered shelters for the *miserables* to be arranged everywhere in the provinces, shelters for “shameful infants”, commonly known as “bastards”, to be ready in the town’s churchyards; he also took under his personal control the placement of disabled people in monasteries. In fact, Peter’s Church reforms put the Church at the service of the state, which could not but affect also the very character of the philanthropic work of the Church, henceforth becoming accountable to two governmental boards at once, the financial and judicial board. Still, the whole plan of Peter the Great for transforming the institution of charity of the Russian Church was destined to be realised only in the reign of Catherine II (1762-1796). In 1764, Catherine, supported by some Orthodox hierarchs, secularised a large portion of the Church lands. Nonetheless, from 1764, new monasteries began to open, having almshouses, shelters for the needy and travellers and schools with dormitories for the students. The reform of 1861 carried out by Alexander II, which abolished serfdom in Russia, deprived the monasteries of the peasants assigned to them. In 1864, the tsar adopted legislation on church fraternities and parish trusteeships which allowed and controlled the church charity. According to the

⁵ https://orthodoxwiki.org/Holy_Trinity-St._Sergius_Lavra.

⁶ Pravoslavnye bratstva i sestrichestva, see in: https://modern_religion.academic.ru/218/Православные_братства_и_

decree of 6th April 1866, signed by the Chief-prosecutor of the Synod, the presence of charitable and educational establishments at newly opened monasteries was mandatory. Founders of monasteries were to provide conditions for combining “the convenience of monastic life with a charitable or educational purpose”. In the three years following this decree, by 1869, there were 10 new monasteries set up all over Russia, together with schools, almshouses and shelters. From 1870 to 1886 another 37 monasteries engaged in charity work were commissioned. Altogether, in 1889 the Church had 660 almshouses and 480 hospitals at its disposal.

The Correlation between Spirituality and Practical Action in Monastic Life in the Russian Orthodox Church

The official position of the Church is currently clearly defined. The document “On the principles of organisation of social work in the Russian Orthodox Church” adopted in February 2011 by the Bishop Council of the ROC says that “as centres of ascetic feat and prayer, monasteries from the earliest times have been taking part in charitable deeds [...] Taking into account the specificity of their internal routine, monasteries can carry out the same types of social service as parishes.”⁷

The correlation between spirituality and practical action has always been in the focus of arguments within the Orthodox Church. While charity has always been among the values of Orthodox spirituality, personal asceticism has been given explicit priority. The way to salvation was often viewed as the feat of prayer and abstinence. As we have seen, giving alms has also been always viewed as an ascetic feat. Yet, while personal asceticism has always been the focus, there has been a lack of recognition of the fact that its principles are today becoming the only remaining way of salvation for the society at large, that is for all humanity. The culture of asceticism, that is of abstaining from what is not essential, is now the only way out of ecological and energy crises.

Noteworthy is a discussion conducted in theological printed media in the beginning of the 20th century. Mr. Kruglov, in his article “The Orthodox Ideal of Monkhood”,⁸ called for monks’ active participation in protecting the health of the nation, in Charitable Action in favour of the starving people, and in educating the people spiritually in schools. Archimandrite Nikon⁹, the publisher of the *Troitskie Listki* (Pages), was adamant in protesting against this. He pointed out that a monk must be solely concerned with his personal salvation, which was impossible without leaving the world for total solitude. According to the Archimandrite, the “egotism of salvation” was holy egotism, and the only way for a monk to serve the world was through a personal feat. A monk should not try and help the world even with a word. However, even then, such inhuman rigorism was condemned even by the conservative hierarchs. “There is no salvation without contributing to the good of the society. Separating the one from the other means misinterpreting, or interpreting against the Lords wisdom, either the one or the other”. These are the words of Anthony, the Bishop of Volynsk, a rather conservative Bishop.¹⁰ From that time until today there are monk-zealots in Russia who see “Renewing” tendencies in every initiative directed at the reorganisation of the life of parishes, in just about any contemporary missionary initiative, and in inter-denominational co-operation in particular. Today, there is a name for this kind of attitude – fundamentalism.

⁷ <http://moseparh.ru/o-principax-organizacii-socialnoj-raboty-v-russkoj-pravoslavnoj-cerkvi.html>.

⁸ “Serving the World means Serving the Lord”, *Soul Elevating Readings* (October 1902), pp. 186-193.

⁹ “The Orthodox Ideal of Monkhood”, *Soul Elevating Readings*, October, 1902, pp. 194-209; “More on the Ideal of Monkhood”, A Reply to a St. Petersburg Monk, January, 1902, pp. 107-120; “The Way of a Monk and the Way of the Lord”, A Reply to Archpriest Evdokim, February, 1902, pp. 330-355. These are the ideas of Anthony, the Bishop of Volynsk, a rather conservative Bishop – Metropolitan, first time chairman of the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia.

¹⁰ “What Serving Public Good has to Do With Personal Salvation”, *Complete Works*, Volume 3.

Monasteries and Brotherhoods Today, at the Time of Rebirth

Despite the fact that today, as ever before, fundamentalists can be easily found among monks (the freshest example are dissidents with COVID-19), almost all monasteries have social projects. This can be seen already by looking at the website of any monastery. The official position of the ROC on the matter is unambiguously articulated in the documents “On the principles of organisation of social work” and “Regulations on monasteries and monks”.¹¹

The latter states that the essential foundation of monastic life is the ascetic practice, first and foremost of which are prayer and repentance. All duties and penances must be subordinate to them. All external activities, i.e. missionary, social, spiritual educational and the like, should be performed by the monasteries and the monks in a mode that does not contradict the monastic way of life. Not all the above occupations belong to social ministry, but all of them relate to the field of social responsibility of the church. It is primarily about spiritual guidance and directorship. From ancient times, the educational work of the monasteries included the publication of spiritual literature and dissemination of the patristic heritage. Likewise, today, one can see Sunday schools and catechetical courses in the cloisters. Another side of the social ministry of monasteries is their care for socially vulnerable members of the society, such as the elderly, disabled or orphans. For many of them, in development of the traditional forms of social service, there are specially arranged almshouses and shelters.

It must be borne in mind that for many decades, monasteries were banned and destroyed under communist rule. By 1917, in 75 Russian provinces, there were 1105 Orthodox monasteries. Eighty years later, in 1988, there were only 22. At present, the country counts 972 Russian Orthodox monasteries (of them, 474 are women’s monasteries). There have been two waves of restoration of the monasticism. The first (1944-1953) was suppressed by the power (1958-1963), the second began in 1988 and continues to this day. The practices of the Russian Orthodox monasteries today include nearly all kinds of social ministries.

Special attention should be paid to the convents: even before the revolution, there was a certain “polarisation” of the directedness of their ministry in monk and nun communities. In men’s monasteries, preference was given to contemplation, while nuns were preoccupied with social work. This does not mean that monasteries were alien to the worldly needs of the society. For the most part, they developed economic household activities, proceeds of which were turned to charity. However, their main task was seen in the “spiritual nourishment” of the society.

The secularisation of the late 18th century, with the state confiscation of church and monastery property, had a very strong impact on convent life. When some of the convents were closed, some of the most active nuns who found themselves outside their habitual walls began to organise the first Orthodox communities. They were arranged similarly to a monastery, but focused on active service in the world. Laywomen followed the example of nuns in organising communities. They were assisted by inhabitants of the nearby towns and villages in need of spiritual and social help. Such sisterhoods, with rare exceptions, adhered to the commune model of life and held some small capital. They lived by selling their own production. Their common prayer gradually led to the introduction of a regular monastic service. Priests from nearabout parishes were invited to perform divine liturgies. It is just from these para-monastic communities that numerous forms of diaconal ministry were developed, such as the sisters of mercy or various sister- or brotherhoods.

In post-communist times, the brotherhoods sprang up from informal religious-philosophical circles. Sharp political disagreements led to a split in the “Union of Orthodox Brotherhoods” which was organised in 1990. By 1992, there were 94 brotherhoods in different regions of the former USSR. The phenomenon of the

¹¹ <https://pravoslavie.ru/108817.html>. There are two co-ordinate structures in ROC which help to realise social work of monasteries and each of them has a distinct website: Synodal Department for Church Charity and Social Ministry <http://www.diaconia.ru/and> Synodal Department for Monasteries and Monasticism <http://www.patriarchia.ru/en/tag/Synodal%20Department%20for%20Monasteries%20and%20Monasticism>.

appearance of non-parish brotherhoods in Russia is very interesting. Three types of brotherhoods are distinctly distinguished: spiritual unions, socially oriented religious organisations, politicised fundamentalist organisations. The latter are not only intolerant and, at times, aggressive, but also the least open to diaconic work and, especially, to interfaith co-operation.

One of the most striking examples of the search and implementation of new forms of the ancient tradition of the Orthodox spirituality of the laity in Russia today is the Transfiguration Brotherhood (Fellowship of Minor Orthodox Brotherhoods) which incorporates several dozen minor brotherhoods in Moscow, across Russia and abroad. Each minor brotherhood consists of communities and groups. They bring together people from different age groups as well as professional, social and educational backgrounds.

The brotherhood way is embedded within the church tradition. It has always provided both married and celibate people with an opportunity to serve. The brotherhood way is monastic in spirit: rather than sharing accommodation, the followers share their lives with each other in the spirit of love and trust. This is not a withdrawal from the world, but an effort to align every aspect of our lives with the Gospel, the effort to be Christian at all times and everywhere – at the church, in our families, at work and within our lives in society – and the effort to affirm the possibility of living a life of faith under any and all circumstances.

As to sisterhoods, it would be natural to call some communities sisterhoods, but the current context of feminist discussion makes us to rather refrain from this usage in our context.¹²

It seems reasonable to end this essay with an appeal to pay attention to a new form of activity of the laity which, during the last 50-70 years, has also become a resource of diaconal service nourishing their followers in the culture of social responsibilities. There are new Christian movements, both Catholic and Protestant, and even partially Orthodox which come together in a European platform and setting. In 2007, in Stuttgart, there was a Congress organised under the motto “Walking together” that was promoted by 250 Christian movements and communities.¹³ There are several parishes in Russia that show increasing interest in this new movement and networking. New forms of activity of the laity gradually emerge, including participants from the third orders, from brother- and sisterhoods and also from spiritual renewal movements. This is a sign of hope.

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¹² Usually the sisterhood in our context is understood as the community or network of women who participates in or supports feminism.

¹³ This refers to the congress of Christian movements and communities which started in Stuttgart and then had other meetings in Munich and elsewhere under the common motto: “Together4Europe”, which is interdenominational and unites Christian communities from Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant streams and also a clear wider European commitment: <https://www.together4europe.org/en/about/>.

75. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN PROTESTANT RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES – THE CASE OF KAISERSWERTH ASSOCIATION

Christa Schrauf¹

Preliminary Comment with a Brief Aside

My paper will focus on introducing Protestant diaconal communities and the contemporary, non-monastic type of deaconess sisterhoods, as developed in Kaiserswerther Verband member houses since the number of traditional deaconesses gradually began to decrease in the 1970s. I shall also examine what these communities and sisterhoods do at present. For over 100 years, the *Kaiserswerther Verband deutscher Diakonissenmutterhäuser e.V.* [Kaiserswerth Association of German Deaconess Houses] has been the umbrella association for deaconess houses / *Diakoniewerk* organisations [diaconal ministry bodies] and the diaconal communities linked to them, which owe their origins to the emergence of 19th-century diaconal houses. The diaconal communities I concentrate on here as an example of Protestant communities and their social responsibility are rooted in the Diaconal House and Deaconess Sisterhood movement that was founded by Protestant pastor Theodor Fliedner in 1836 in Kaiserswerth (now a district of Düsseldorf) in response to the social hardships of his day. Nowadays, most of the 1,600 deaconesses who practice this original form of diaconal life in the association's German member houses are now retired. Only a few are still involved in active service.

Diaconal Communities and Sisterhoods in the Kaiserswerther Verband

There are currently 3,400 women and men in the Kaiserswerther Verband's 65 German member houses. These diaconal sisters and brothers and contemporary deaconesses also understand their communities as spiritual communities, which, through their theological-diaconal, spiritual, and pastoral activities, inform the various fields in which their members work as full-time employees or volunteers in diaconal social and welfare undertakings. The sisters and brothers do not adopt a celibate, communal lifestyle, but choose to live in various forms of relationship (as a married couple, as a family, as single people etc.). All the communities have adopted binding ordinances that explain the conditions for membership, elucidate how each community defines itself and its goals, and describe community life.

Membership Requirements

In order to be accepted into a diaconal community, candidates must, over and above a period of familiarisation² and preparation, acquire a basic knowledge of diaconal issues and theology through training offered in the Kaiserswerther Verband's member houses. There is either a basic course on *diakonia* [charitable works in the diaconal tradition] or advanced training to become a contemporary deaconess. In addition, candidates must complete vocational training. The community's general orientation assumes members belong to the Protestant Church. Most communities are also open to members of other Christian churches. Once they have been admitted to the community, members must participate in community life (shared worship, Bible

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² Diakonissen Speyer-Mannheim, *Ordnung der Diakonischen Gemeinschaft der Diakonissen Speyer-Mannheim* (Speyer: Diakonissen Speyer-Mannheim, 2017), p. 7.

studies, retreats, mutual support) and in activities which promote the diaconal spirit in diaconal social and welfare undertakings, in the Church and throughout society. Members must also pay a membership fee.

Community: The Precondition and Driving Force for Social Commitment

Community is the prerequisite par excellence for human life, as well as being an a priori requirement and central element in Christian/diaconal practice in everyday life. Christian community is constituted through the Word of God. For Dietrich Bonhoeffer, this is “a reality created by God in Christ, in which we may participate”.³

This participation enables us to be in communion with our brothers and sisters in faith and with all other people. The diaconal community is a place where members can find spiritual and pastoral sustenance and experience the assurance and joy of faith. It is also a place where they can strengthen their own resilience when it comes to dealing with the world around them and fulfilling their everyday tasks, or, to put it in theological terms, it is a place where, in communion with God and with their sisters and brothers, they can find hope and encouragement to shoulder social responsibility for tangible diaconal service. Sr. Doris Kellerhals, Mother Superior of the Kommunität Diakonissenhaus Riehen [Riehen Deaconess House Community] Switzerland speaks in this context of “healing community”.⁴

The Hallmark of Social Responsibility

There is a very significant faith-based component in how sisters and brothers in Protestant diaconal communities understand social responsibility. Through their actions within society, they fulfil Jesus Christ’s commandment to “render testimony in word and deed”. The social dimension of faith, “tangible action in everyday life to help others”,⁵ lies at the heart of this. Diaconal communities live out their social responsibility in many different ways, within the community, in Diakoniewerk organisations [diaconal ministry bodies] and within the church and society. Most members are full-time employees and/or involved in voluntary service in a diaconal social and welfare undertaking and are active in a social or healthcare profession, education, counselling or other relevant fields. In their workplaces, they testify that social responsibility, as realised within *diakonia* [charitable works], is a consequence and a constitutive feature of faith. “We want to try to bear witness to God’s love in word and deed and thus to offer signs of hope.”⁶ Faith and deeds, proclamation of the Gospel and diaconal practice of love, contemplation and action go hand-in-hand.

Contribution to the Christian Dimension / Diaconal Profile of Social Action

Diaconal sisters and brothers view their mission as contributing to spreading the Gospel and helping to shape what it means to be a diaconal Church “within the resonance chamber of the Gospel”.⁷ By doing so, they reinforce the diaconal dimension of the social and welfare undertakings in which they are active. In keeping

³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, transl. John W. Doberstein (London: SCM Press, 1954), p. 15.

⁴ Doris Kellerhals, *Heilende Gemeinschaft in der Postmoderne unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Benediktusregel. Ein Beitrag zum Bau von kirchlicher Gemeinschaft* (Basel: Reinhardt Friedrich Verlag) 2008, p. 16.

⁵ Kaiserswerther Verband deutscher Diakonissen-Mutterhäuser e.V., *Kaiserswerther Unternehmenskultur: Diakonie geschieht im Alltag* (Berlin: Kaiserswerther Verband, 2013).

⁶ Diakonissen Speyer-Mannheim, *Ordnung der Diakonischen Gemeinschaft der Diakonissen Speyer-Mannheim* (Speyer: Diakonissen Speyer-Mannheim, 2017), p. 2.

⁷ Beate Hofmann, “Diakonische Kirche sein im Resonanzraum des Evangeliums”, in Beate Hofmann and Martin Büscher (eds), *Diakonische Unternehmen multirational führen. Grundlagen-Kontroversen-Potentiale* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2017), p. 164.

with this, the ordinances of Diakoniewerk Kropp's diaconal community state: "It opens up content-based spaces in which to experience meaningful purpose, religious assistance and pastoral care."⁸ The social work institution Diakonissenanstalt Flensburg says something similar: "We want to maintain and promote the Diakonissenanstalt's Christian and diaconal mission".⁹ Members of the Diakoniegemeinschaft der Evangelischen Stiftung Diakoniewerk Ruhr-Witten [Diaconal Community of the Ruhr-Witten Protestant Diaconal Ministry Foundation] also find that "their faith in Jesus Christ and his mission of charitable works" is rendered tangible in the areas in which the diaconal organisation is active.¹⁰ Further training courses in theology and diaconal issues for co-workers, such as those organised by the Diakonische Gemeinschaft [Diaconal Community] in Dresden, emphasise that faith and practical acts of charity go hand-in-hand.¹¹ The diaconal sisters and brothers' theological-diaconal qualification scheme has a strong focus on taking action, which becomes particularly significant in daily practice within diaconal areas of activity. Diaconal communities powerfully express the interdependence of trust in God's presence and the manifestation of His charitable kindness and love, strikingly displayed in social responsibility for others in everyday diaconal life.

The Ecclesiological / Denominational Dimension of Diaconal Communities

The preamble to the Kaiserswerther Verband's statutes states that the diaconal communities have an "obligation to understand their service as an expression of the life and essence of the Church".¹² The ordinances of the diaconal communities and sisterhoods explicitly state that they and their communities serve the Church, the regional Church in their area, which also blesses their members' service or consecrates them in their service. For example, the training scheme organised by Diakonissen Speyer [Speyer Deaconess Sisterhood] for candidates wishing to become a contemporary deaconess or deacon is carried out in close cooperation with the Protestant Church of the Palatinate.¹³

Diaconal communities embody the 4 basic dimensions of the Church: *koinonia* (community), *diakonia* (charitable works), *leiturgia* (liturgy) and *martyria* (bearing witness/proclaiming the Gospel). The rituals they practice and their spiritual outreach make Protestant ecclesiastical life tangible. They come together with other bearers of Protestant identity in the diaconal ministry organisations. As Protestant Christians, they, to some degree, represent the established Church within the context of institutional charitable works, bear witness to such *diakonia* as part of the Church and in many ways foster staff members' identification with the ecclesiastical aspect of charitable works or *diakonia*.

Diaconal Communities are a Valuable Resource in Diaconal Social and Welfare Undertakings

Diaconal communities' self-image and the actions arising from this help to secure the corporate identity of diaconal social and welfare undertakings. These communities can do this very effectively if they are also clearly rooted structurally in the diaconal undertaking, reflected in its organisational model and supported in keeping with their significance. In a situation in which staff members are becoming more diverse, have weaker

⁸ *Ordnung für die Diakonische Gemeinschaft der Stiftung Diakoniewerk Kropp und ihren Unternehmensverbund* (Kropp: Diakonie-Kropp, 2015), p. 1.

⁹ Diakoniegemeinschaft Flensburg, <https://www.diako.de/kirche-und-diakonie/diakoniegemeinschaft/wir-ueber-uns>

¹⁰ Evangelische Stiftung Diakonie Ruhr-Witten, *Ordnung der Diakoniegemeinschaft von Schwestern und Brüdern* (Witten, Diakoniewerk Ruhr, 2007), p. 10.

¹¹ Ev.-Luth. Diakonissenanstalt Dresden e.V., *Unsere Grundlage, Ordnung der Diakonischen Gemeinschaft* (Dresden, Diakonissenanstalt Dresden, 2013), p. 7.

¹² *Kaiserswerther Verbandes deutscher Diakonissen-Mutterhäuser e.V., Satzung* (Düsseldorf: Kaiserswerth 2011).

¹³ Diakonissen Speyer-Mannheim, *Ordnung der Diakonischen Gemeinschaft der Diakonissen Speyer-Mannheim* (Speyer: Diakonissen Speyer-Mannheim, 2017), p. 8.

denominational ties, are increasingly secular or belong to other religions and cultures, diaconal communities provide opportunities to identify with the diaconal undertaking's philosophy and spirit. They offer an important space for reflection and encouragement in a context dominated by commercialism, problematic staffing ratios and shortages.

Employees with strong denominational ties and key diaconal figures will continue to be needed to maintain this profile in the future. The diaconal communities are an exceptional resource in this endeavour, because their members are role models for religious practice and a Christian lifestyle, who keep the liturgical year alive in the undertaking, are competent in passing on traditions, and help to develop a diaconal corporate culture thanks to all they do. At the same time, as noted by Hans-Stephan Haas and Dierk Starnitzke from Brüsseler Kreis [association of non-profit social and health care companies], there is a need for "denominational pluralism of convictions as a corporate responsibility".¹⁴

Diakonia in communion, as manifested in daily life in contemporary diaconal communities and deaconess sisterhoods, is replete with a forward-looking force, making a strengthening, formative contribution to the unique features of diaconal corporate identity. That calls for constructive interaction between the communities and the diaconal undertakings, along with a continuous quest to find innovative and modern options to carry this successful idea, initiated in the 19th century, forward into the future.

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¹⁴ Hanns-Stephan Haas and Dierk Starnitzke (eds), *Diversität und Identität. Konfessionsbindung und Überzeugungpluralismus in caritativen und diakonischen Unternehmen* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer GmbH, 2014), p. 58.

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76. SOCIAL SERVICES AND RESPONSIBILITY IN CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES – THE EXAMPLE OF DIAKONIA WORLD FEDERATION

Sandy Boyce¹

The Diaconate – Origins

Diaconal ministry in the early church was built on the imperatives of the Hebrew Scriptures to care for the orphan and widow and to welcome the stranger. Jesus, the Jew, was faithful to that tradition. The early church, following the tangible witness of Jesus, also sought to embed that life of service into their communal life: radical inclusivity; a re-thinking about who was 'in' and who was 'out' in society; serving through acts of charity and compassion; radical hospitality, mutuality and reciprocity; and noticing the least and the last and naming them as God's beloved.

Against that context, the Diaconate, as such, began to take shape in the early church in response to a pressing human need within the church community. Stephen and six others were appointed in response to a complaint that Hellenistic (Greek ethnicity) widows were being neglected and discriminated against in the daily food distribution. It was an appeal for food justice. The early church leaders resolved this matter with the appointment of these seven, all with Greek names (so supposedly having a Greek background), to take responsibility for equitable food distribution. They were the first deacons.

The Charisms of the Diaconate

There is an important principle here – empowering and equipping people within the community to work out practical solutions to identified problems. The Lukan account of this episode in Acts 6 outlines key principles for those to be given such responsibility. They were to be:

- 'full of the spirit of God' – open to guidance by God's Spirit as they made decisions to ensure the well-being of all members of the church;
- people of wisdom, who would ensure the welfare of everyone in the community; and
- people with a good reputation – people with integrity and honesty, who could be counted on to do the right thing for the well-being of all members of the community irrespective of ethnicity, gender and socio-economic status – and not favour the Greek widows who had been ignored and overlooked, but would be equitable to both the Palestinian Jewish widows as well as the Greek widows.

This background lays an important foundation for diaconal ministry – the personal and spiritual qualities of people engaged in diaconal ministry, the imperative for justice and integrity to prevail over corruption and control, and community development principles for resolving issues by identifying the 'assets' to achieve positive outcomes within the community (sometimes referred to as 'asset-based community development').

The 'Parable of the Good Samaritan' has also been a powerful Biblical narrative informing the nature of the Diaconate. In the parable, the religious pass by on the other side of the street to the man in need. They have their own duties to attend to. It is left to an outsider from the religious establishment to care for the wounded man, going the 'extra mile' to have him cared for well after his compassionate intervention.

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The Evolution of the Diaconate

In the 19th century, another pressing need called for these same principles. The Napoleonic wars had left many widows and orphaned children struggling to survive in Western Europe. So many men had died that many young women had no prospect of marriage and therefore no means of support. In addition, the emerging industrial revolution escalated relocation from rural areas to the cities as people searched for employment – but all at a time when women were not allowed to work. The dense city living created a crucible for the rapid spread of infectious diseases, and pollution from factories created further health issues. Poverty and unemployment placed families under stress. The lives of single women were more desperate. The wider family and community support they might have had access to in rural areas was no longer available.

These pressing needs weighed heavily on a German Lutheran pastor, Theodore Fliedner. He had come to learn about the ancient church office of deaconess. In England, he had met with English social reformer, Elizabeth Fry, who worked among her nation's impoverished and imprisoned people. Fliedner adapted the model of the early Christian Church's diaconate, and ideas he had learned from Elizabeth Fry, and applied them to his own context. He developed a plan to recruit young women to a new form of diaconal ministry, creating a vocational pathway for women, initially to care for the sick. He established Kaiserswerther Diakonie in Kaiserswerth in 1836, providing communal housing for the new diaconate (the *Mutterhaus*, or Motherhouse), a training institute that integrated both theology and nursing skills and a hospital for the sick.

In 1851, Florence Nightingale spent 4 months training as a sick nurse in Kaiserswerth, learning from the progressive nursing approach, and passed her nursing examination. She went on to become one of the most important pioneers in modern nursing, modelling the servanthood, sacrificial ministry and professionalism engendered by Fliedner's vision.

Significantly, Fliedner's diaconal model, integrating vocational training with theological education, has spawned the establishment of hundreds of training schools, hospitals, orphanages, and other institutions around the world, responding as missionaries to pressing socio-economic and public health needs in local contexts, including remote areas, and often supporting local congregations in their local engagement.

Divergence

In the second half of the 20th century, an ecumenical and global movement emerged that led to a renewal of the diaconate and enabled fresh expressions of diaconal ministry, including in some instances establishing the diaconate as a permanent form of ordained ministry in its own right. It is clear that forms of diaconal ministry, both within a denominational tradition as well as across different denominations, vary tremendously. Some are well-established within an ecclesial structure, others are independent while retaining a connection with a partnering church. Some diaconal ministry has a primary focus on vocational work, others are practised primarily within the gathered church context, while others are engaged in the community in places where the church does not usually venture.

All of these expressions of diaconal ministry are represented in the member associations of the DIAKONIA World Federation,² which was formed in 1947 after the Second World War. Membership consists of associations, organisations and communities of deaconesses, deacons, diaconal brothers and sisters, diaconal ministers and other church workers. These associations are geographically diverse – in Africa from north to south, South America, North America, the Caribbean, Europe, the United Kingdom, Asia, the Pacific and Australasia (New Zealand and Australia). Members from these associations are in ministry within and sometimes beyond their own country. Some associations date back to the 19th century, and some were (re)formed as part of the renewal of the diaconate in the second half of the 20th century. Some associations have been formed only in the last few years in response to emerging needs in their context.

² <http://www.diakonia-world.org/>.

Diaconal World Federation

The World Federation of DIAKONIA describes itself in this way: ‘(it) is a link to bring understanding and acceptance. It is a place to learn to listen without prejudice. It is a place to develop a spirituality of receiving and giving, without colonialistic ideas. It encompasses and brings together the diversity of languages and cultures represented by its members around the world. It reveals one common identity as servants of Christ, our common goal of being God’s presence in the world. Through this unity we support each other in a broader vision of the world’s needs, we become partners and friends building new bridges. DIAKONIA brings into focus the world history of diaconal ministry which is our shared history. It will facilitate networking, sharing and support. It will be a source of encouragement and learning for new diaconates. It will join its voice in the struggle against economic domination and the power of bureaucracy. It will use power to empower others’.³

Formally, the aims of the DIAKONIA World Federation are to:

- reflect on the nature and task of diakonia in the biblical context;
- further the understanding of the diaconate in the global church;
- encourage member associations to explore their diaconal calling;
- link and gather those engaged in diaconal work worldwide, and strengthen a sense of community and understanding among all member organisations;
- encourage, support and empower the development of groups doing diaconal work;
- affirm the vitality of ecumenical relationships by providing a network of mutual relationships crossing church traditions and cultural boundaries;
- provide a forum for discussion of diaconal issues including social justice and reconciliation.

Gathering the member associations together is a key function of DIAKONIA World Federation. Once every four years, a World Assembly is held. The last DIAKONIA World Assembly was held in Chicago in 2017; it gathered Deacons, Deaconesses and Diaconal Ministers from every member association. The gathering challenged participants to see themselves as co-workers with God, to discern what God is up to in the world and to welcome fresh expressions of diaconal ministry. The gathering encouraged those attending to cradle hope in the midst of uncertainty. The DIAKONIA World Federation and its member associations continue to be a prophetic voice, calling the Church to exercise its servant nature, and to highlight the interconnectedness of people with each other and with the environment.

In 2019, each of the Regions held gatherings. The DIAKONIA Region of Africa Europe (DRAE) met in June in Scotland, exploring the theme, *For such a time as this*. The DIAKONIA Asia Pacific Region met in Fiji in July, exploring the theme, *Tides of Change*. In August, the DIAKONIA of the Americas and Caribbean met in Canada, exploring the theme, *Respecting Covenant: Risking the Journey of Reconciliation*. Each of these regional gatherings resourced those engaged in diaconal ministry with a theological framework for our time and place, that is prophetic, pastoral and pioneering.

A Unity Embracing Diversity

Expressions of diaconal ministry in the DIAKONIA World Federation vary enormously, and so does the ecclesiology in which diaconal ministry is couched. Some are formal orders of ministry, some are ordained, some are commissioned, some are consecrated. Some are part of the formal church structure, others are not. Some deaconesses live within a community. Some wear distinctive uniforms, some focus on nursing, some on assisting ministry within the church, and some live out the call to diaconal ministry through employment outside the Church as a way to make stronger links between liturgy and work. Some diaconal ministry needs greater recognition within the ordering of ministry, some diaconal ministry has equal recognition with

³ *Diaconal Reflections: How we experience our diaconal calling in our diversity* (a theological paper by DIAKONIA World Federation, 1998).

Presbyters (Ministers), and some diaconal ministry is primarily lived out beyond the walls of the church into the community. Some diaconal ministry is stipended, others receive no stipend. Some is transitional towards priesthood, while most formal diaconal ministry is permanent. There is no one way, but the DIAKONIA World Federation values the opportunity to learn from each other. Belonging to DIAKONIA creates a bond between people in a global diaconal community, across a diversity of cultures, political situations, and church governance and ecclesial structures. DIAKONIA thus contributes significantly to ecumenical relationships, particularly because of its practical focus.

Examples

Diaconal ministries include hospitals and health care, training institutions for nursing students, social service, public health education, schools, chaplaincies in prisons, hospital and aged care facilities, and working alongside First Nations peoples, those who identify as LGBTQI, refugees and migrants, and people with disabilities. Some work with welfare agencies, and others alongside those working for climate justice. Many ministries within the gathered church are undertaken by those in diaconal ministry, including children's ministry and music ministry, and fresh expressions and pioneering ministries. Others are called to leadership and public service as an expression of their diaconal ministry. It is incredibly diverse.

The breadth of ministry in DIAKONIA World Federation may be understood more fully with some examples from member associations. These are indicative; many more examples would need to be offered to fully describe the diversity and distinctiveness of member associations.

India

The Methodist Deaconesses in India are women assigned roles in a number of ministry areas including women's ministry, children with disabilities, children's ministry, hostels, aged care, hospitals and institutions, as teachers in schools and as lady evangelists, particularly in rural areas. The deaconesses convene workshops, seminars and training courses for local women, especially those in rural areas, where they can learn and utilise their skills. The deaconesses may receive remuneration, or not, but continue their ministry with deep commitment and a strong confidence in God's faithfulness.

The senior deaconess, Kasthuri Devaraj, is an inspirational person. She received the 'Mother Teresa Sadbhavana Award' in 2016, in recognition of her whole life in service to disabled children of an opportunity school. Now in her 80s, she continues to mentor and encourage younger deaconesses, and to seek international funding partners for projects. These deaconesses have responded to a call of God on their lives to support the poor, the marginalised and the oppressed. They undertake their ministry with such grace and deep compassion and conviction. The confidence and trust in God, despite the troubles and trials they face, weaves through their ministry. Their primary call is unshakeable: to give witness to the good news of Jesus Christ in and through their lives and service.

The Philippines

The four member associations in the Philippines primarily work within the church in children's ministry, Christian education and music ministry, and may be called upon to assist with relief efforts after a natural disaster hits the country. The socio-political context for diaconal ministry is challenging, and requires courage, conviction and wisdom in addressing issues, especially those that require advocacy for justice, equity and change. They share this challenge with a number of other member associations in other countries managing ministry in complex political and socio-economic conditions.

Korea

The Diakonia Sisterhood in Korea was formed in 1980, with strong connections with Diakonie Kaiserswerther. The community is small but very committed. While each of the sisters has an affiliation or membership with an established Protestant denomination, Diakonia Korea itself is not affiliated with a denomination. This can be seen as both a strength and a weakness. The sisters are able to have autonomy over decision-making and prioritise as a community, but also have the added responsibility of sourcing funding from partners to continue ministry. The sisters live in community, and have a daily rhythm including shared worship and service. One of their ministries has been establishing housing in a poor district, which they then gifted to the community. Currently, their work is focused on aged care, and they have established a home for vulnerable older people which they staff themselves along with community support.

The United States of America

A member of the United Methodist Order of Deaconesses and Home Missioners in the United States, Cindy Johnson, has been working with migrants on the border with Mexico for years. Her calling to diaconal ministry resonated with the commitment of the church to ‘love, justice and service’. Along with others, she advocates for those on the Mexican side of the border who live in overcrowded and unsanitary camps, offering practical attempts to ‘alleviate suffering’ (the first responsibility of Methodist deaconesses and home missionaries). Each week, she walks across the border to be with the migrants, buys food and medicines, and delivers other supplies. She takes seriously the responsibility of Methodist deaconesses to ‘eradicate causes of injustice.’ She is also a passionate advocate calling for policy change, highlighting the inadequate access to legal representation and the separation of children from their families. She is committed to being an enduring diaconal presence at the border. Her work opens the hearts of migrants to her, and her willingness to learn from them creates a reciprocal relationship, what she time again calls a ‘blessing’. Because of this, she is able to get more closely involved, and with deeper knowledge than a typical observer.⁴

D.O.V.E. (Diakonia Overcoming Violence Experience), is a targeted programme focused on finding ways to overcome violence in the world. It is hosted every two years by a member association in the DOTAC region (DIAKONIA of the Americas and Caribbean). It provides an opportunity to learn about overcoming violence through empowerment; being a strong ally; restorative justice approaches; toxic and healthy masculinities; advocating for and empowering sex trade workers; residential schools and relationships with First Nations people.

Australia

In the Uniting Church in Australia, the foundational understanding of diaconal ministry is that ‘Deacons [...] are called to be, along with the scattered members of the congregation, a sign of the presence of God in the everyday world; to be especially aware of the places in the community where people are hurt, disadvantaged, oppressed, or marginalised, and to be in ministry with them in ways that reflect the special concern of Jesus for them; to recognise, encourage, develop and release those gifts in God’s people which will enable them to share in the ministry of caring, serving, healing, restoring, making peace and advocating justice as they go about their daily lives.’⁵

Deacons were seen to have an important role to play in living out the hopes of the fledgling Uniting Church in Australia (inaugurated in 1977) to embody justice, reconciliation and service. The ministry of Deacon within the UCA is best understood as being directed towards the needs of the wider community and operating on the margins of church and community. To be effective requires cultural intelligence for cross-cultural and

⁴ Adapted from an online article Jenny Wiley Legath, <https://www.fromthesquare.org>.

⁵ Report on Ministry in the Uniting Church 1991 Assembly.

multi-cultural ministries and inter-religious relationships, and an understanding of, and capacity to challenge, systemic injustice and repressive structures that keep people poor.

Formally, Deacons in the Uniting Church are described as those who:

- hold up **service** as an inescapable response to the Gospel;
- **encourage** all God's people in their service of God inside and outside the church;
- **advocate** justice, sharing in the church's justice ministries;
- **stand** beside people who are disadvantaged or oppressed, encouraging others to work for justice and calling the church to costly action;
- are **carers** who offer support and encouragement, stand beside those who suffer, and encourage others to use their caring gifts;
- are **pioneers** serving on the fringes in areas of life where social, economic and political changes are exposing new needs which are frequently remote from the experience of church-goers;
- are **educators** whose special task is to educate the church on justice issues and community needs;
- are **enablers** who encourage other people to recognise and use their gifts of service;
- are called to be **prophets** prepared to challenge injustice and offer alternatives;
- are **bridge builders** between the church and the community.

Canada

Diaconal Ministers in the United Church of Canada articulate their call to diaconal ministry in this way: 'God calls us to diaconal ministry. The gospel of Jesus invites all to this ministry: to offer compassion and accompaniment, to work for liberation and justice, to act as advocates of creative transformation [...] Through education, service, social justice, and pastoral care, diaconal ministry in The United Church of Canada, encourages a growing faith, speaks truth to power, seeks mutual empowerment, proclaims prophetic hope, nurtures life-giving community, fosters peaceful, right relationship, within the church and the whole of creation wherever the Spirit may lead'.⁶

Diakonia and the Church

In her 2009 thesis,⁷ Rev. Dr Alison McRae, a Uniting Church Deacon, proposed that the ministry of Deacon in the Uniting Church is best understood as a 'de-centred ministry'. It challenges the understanding that diaconal ministry is a ministry of humble servanthood. Rather, McRae proposes that diaconal ministry should be seen as an ecclesial concept that helps us understand more about the nature of the church, since *diakonia*, upon which the ministry of Deacon is modelled, is central to how we are to understand both the church and its mission.

David Bosch defined mission as 'participation in the liberating mission of Jesus, the good news of God's love incarnated in the witness of a community for the sake of the world'. In identifying with the mission of Christ, the Church through its diaconal ministry is identifying with the suffering of the world, with the oppressed, the poor, the disenfranchised, the abused. Diaconal ministry is both prophetic and a witness to God's love.

Diaconal ministry embodies the World Council of Churches call for ministry 'from the margins' and not just 'to the margins'. This paradigm shift from the centre to the edges emphasises the imperative of working for all God's people, and for creation, in a way that transcends divisions and divides.⁸ Rosalin Brown, a

⁶ Adopted at DUCC National Gathering, April 2009.

⁷ De-Centred Ministry: A Diaconal View of Mission and Church, a doctoral thesis by Alison McRae (2009) [Available at: https://repository.divinity.edu.au/4/1/Alison_McRae_Thesis_copy_1_pdf.pdf].

⁸ "Together towards life: Mission and Evangelism in changing landscapes", by WCC's Commission on World Mission and Evangelism.

Deacon in the Church of England, suggests that the natural place for a deacon to be is on the margins, able to 'occupy space on the boundaries, to be [...] at ease alongside people who are at the edges of church and society'. This is not because they might have a preference for this particular lifestyle, but because the church itself expects them to be there 'simply because God is there'.⁹

The prophetic hope of diaconal ministry includes discerning God's intention for the creation, to critique what is going on the church and world, to protest against evil and injustice, and to call the Church and world – all people – to respond in ways that will bring transformation and liberation.

Conclusion

The breadth of diaconal ministry in the DIAKONIA World Federation makes it clear that there is not a 'one size fits all', nor one theological or ecclesial approach. Diaconal ministry finds its best expression when it is contextual, when it is related to community needs, or to a particular socio-political-economic situation. This direct correlation between context and diaconal ministry may become disconnected at times, and ministry may risk becoming institutionalised in a way that detracts from the efficacy of diaconal ministry.

It is necessary from time to time to step back from the immediacy of 'doing' ministry to evaluate what are the pressing challenges of our time – globalisation, the unjust distribution of resources, weapons of mass destruction, racism, terrorism, a global population explosion, inequitable sharing of resources, increasing disparity between the rich and the poor, complex inter-faith relations, accelerating climate change, the worldwide refugee crisis, to name but a few. The pressing overarching question may be, how can we use our efforts to live together in peace, and be of service that leads to transformation and liberation?

The particular question for the church may be, how do we respond most effectively to a particular context in which we find ourselves. This will be best served through both formally recognised orders of diaconal ministry (Deacons, Deaconesses, Diaconal Ministers) as well as through the ministry of the whole people of God. How might we orient our communal life in the church as co-workers with what God is doing in the world? In doing so, there is an opportunity for collaborative and collective action, that is, with what people within *and* beyond the church are doing together in response to the issues and needs of the day, including actions for justice, peace-making, reconciliation, and those calling for climate justice.

As we reflect on our contemporary context and the challenges in our global community, it is imperative to recognise afresh that God is already active in the world. Tim Dearbourn¹⁰ said, 'It is not the church that has a mission. It is the God of mission who has a church'. The great gift of the DIAKONIA World Federation is that together we strengthen the resolve to join in with God's transformative mission in the world, to embody the call to service, and to offer healing and hope.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Resources from the Diakonia World Federation (<http://diakonia-world.org/en/news/resources.shtml>) are worth checking. The website also provides relevant news from various contexts. Members of the federation are listed in <http://dwfmembers.org/> <http://dwfmembers.org/>.

⁹ Rosalind Brown, *Being a Deacon today: Exploring a Distinctive Ministry in the Church and in the World* (Norwich, Norfolk: Canterbury Press Norwich, 2005), p. 33.

¹⁰ Tim Dearborn, *Beyond Duty: A Passion for Christ, a Heart for Mission* (Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace, 2013), p.2.

77. CHANGING PATTERNS OF THE FAMILY – IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF CARE

Cornelia Coenen-Marx¹

One of the most fervent wishes of most people is to enjoy a happy family life and a stable partnership. 82% of all Germans want children and, in a survey by the pollster Allensbach Institute, 84% of the population stated that the ties between their closest family were strong or very strong.² Marriage and a close-knit family are still central values of the vast majority of the population; they are, however, in competition with other ways of life and have come under pressure through changes in society. It is debatable though, whether we can say that marriage has suffered a loss of importance; perhaps it is just that expectations are now higher. Perhaps the low birth rate reflects a very conscious parental responsibility. There is obviously a tension between the wish for stable marriages and families, on the one hand, and societal reality with high divorce rates and a large number of singles and lone parents, on the other. Here are some of the fundamental processes of change to which families have contributed, and some of the challenges they face:

First: Long periods of education and training, and difficulties in entering working life. The consequence is that women are having children later in life and delaying motherhood later and later. On average, women in Germany give birth for the first time at the age of 29, according to current figures. *The window of opportunity for founding a family has therefore become shorter.* 60% of children are born to mothers aged between 26 and 35. Reproductive medicine is playing an increasing role in this context.

Second: A third of all children are born out of wedlock, which is twice as many as only twenty years ago. There is a marked difference between the western and eastern parts of Germany: there the percentage of children born to unmarried parents is, respectively, 28% and 61%. The connection between marriage and births – and thus also between marriage and the family – is dissolving. While 72% of families still consist of two parents with children,³ families based on marriage are increasingly turning into patchwork configurations. *So, there is increasing diversity in family life.* The make-up of a family is not just a matter of fate – it is more and more a “do-it-yourself” community based on conscious, often tense decisions, from family planning to a patchwork family.

Third: The societal and economic gap is growing – not only because social milieus are rapidly falling apart. There is a striking polarisation in the way that single and double earner households are socially situated, particularly between those caring for children and those with no children to look after. Due to problems with their work-life balance, women often put off their career ambitions as soon as their children are born, and work part-time. At the same time, however, family work brings little financial reward. For that reason, too, single parents, who can hardly work full time, show above-average rates of income poverty.⁴

In terms of family policy, the German model is somewhere in the middle compared to other countries in Western Europe. On the one hand, with a high rate of women in employment, individual taxation, government-funded care and whole-day schools there is Lutheran Scandinavia with its strong public health system as well as secular, centralised France. On the other hand, an even greater privatisation of family and care services is taking place in Catholic Italy and Spain. Here, even more clearly than in a comparison of

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² Figures from Allensbach and Robert Bosch Foundation from 2013.

³ Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, Familienreport 2012, p. 22.

⁴ With one child, they have a 46% risk of poverty, with two and more children even a 62% risk. In households led by couples, the poverty risk is between 7% and 22%, depending on the number of children.

eastern and western Germany, we see that the birth rate is high where infrastructural services permit employment and, where they are lacking, it is particularly low. This is quite obviously independent of the picture of the family normally represented on religious grounds or as an ethical norm.

Fourth: The cultural diversity of families is growing. Just under 30% have a migration background, according to a 2009 microcensus in Germany, with a quarter of migrant families coming from Turkey. In inter-confessional marriages, in partnerships in which only one member belongs to a church and, in particular, in bicultural families with different religious backgrounds, it is a challenge to get to know the different traditions and, where possible, find common ways forward. That applies particularly with respect to ritualised rites of passage such as weddings, baptisms, circumcision, and burial. Where that does not succeed, the trend towards secularisation grows. Here lies a great challenge for both the church and mosque communities.

Behind the current statistics lie long-term processes of change. Globalisation, along with opportunities for travel and working abroad, is ever more frequently leading to partnerships across national and cultural borders. Furthermore, the medical potential for family planning has accelerated the women's emancipation movements. We live in a work society and the growing expectations of worker mobility have a centrifugal impact; they make it hard to keep families together in space and time. Many couples go through phases of life in which they are separated for long periods of time because of their work. This affects every third couple in their early working life – i.e. in the period of founding a family – and for many it is the natural price of professional mobility and a career. Fathers from declining regions are often away from their families during the week because they commute long distances.

Living alone has not been a transitory stage for a long time now. Remaining single seems to be the best way of living out the values of an individualist society, according to US sociologist Eric Klinenberg. Living alone means autonomy: freedom, self-fulfilment and self-control.⁵ In the declining regions, the buildings remain behind, along with older people, who find it hard to sell their houses, and mothers with small children – everyone who is particularly dependent on others. When their survival on the labour market is in question, everything that ties people together is in question – the town, house or flat, and the family. *For the first time, the majority of the population no longer lives in family households.*

In view of the low birth rate, the upcoming shortage of skilled labour and the deep-seated structural change on the labour market, individuals are not the only ones facing the issue of how to best combine education, gainful employment and caring for a family – alongside increased gender justice. This raises a great socio-political challenge, extending far beyond the field of classical family policy. After all, the dynamic of change is increasing and there is a growing expectation of mobility. While changes in jobs and status did occur from generation to generation, even up to the period after World War II, since the late 20th century, people have had several professions and often several partnerships in the course of their own lives. The sheer number of work and life relationships is rising and the possibility of putting down roots in one place is dwindling. It is no wonder that many people yearn to be able to find their place in the great, sometimes disturbing, transformation processes, to feel at home in a reliable community – in their family, home region, friendships.

But individualisation and acceleration also show up in a microcosm: the different rhythms of business life, school and leisure-time clash within the family. Often only Sunday or public holidays are left for family members to really enjoy each other's company – eating, talking and playing together. When families celebrate together – at Christmas or birthdays – memories of their common history resurface, changes become visible, and rituals help interpret experiences. At the same time, fixed expectations may lead to disappointments. After all, the structure of a family changes constantly; it is always having to take on a fresh shape and form.

While it is true that the family lost fundamental political, economic and legal functions with the onset of modernity, it is still of paramount importance for socialisation, social reproduction, mutual care and societal

⁵ Those living alone in the US have risen from 9% in the 1950s to 27%. In Scandinavia, the figure stands at 47%. Eric Klinenberg, "Vivre seul, mais pas solitaire", in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, March 2013.

cohesion. Passing on values and traditions, raising and looking after children, care and nursing, the sharing of common tasks and solidarity between the generations – all that is practised within families. However important it is to have a good infrastructure for a work-life balance, delegating care work completely to service-providers is unthinkable, nor is it desirable. This is because the necessary trained carers are in short supply and because financing such an infrastructure would lead to considerable social redistribution. Above all, it is because care tasks involve more than providing paid services. They enable the experiencing of community, for which social cohesion is essential. According to studies, mothers and fathers wish for a better combination of long part-time or short full-time work and family time.⁶ For that to succeed, the time people spend on upbringing and care must also be taken into account in legislation on taxes and social insurance.

Historically speaking, the care work done in the family has become increasingly invisible and disparaged. This happened first when it was known as “women’s work”, against the background of the traditional bourgeois concept of the family with its gender-hierarchical division of labour. It continued with the momentum of the work-oriented movement for women’s emancipation, which dissolved the traditional gender hierarchy in which women did the family work. Today, care work is still not highly esteemed by a society based on paid work and consumerism, in which what costs nothing is worth nothing. That applies to the activity of carers in the private sphere, but also to professional care, which continues to be much more poorly paid than work in production and administration.⁷ *If it is not possible to find new solutions then there is likely to be a care shortage, which will come at a great cost to families, the educational system and the working world.* It is not just a matter of the necessary tasks of bringing up children. Most elderly persons are still cared for in a home environment and 70% of family carers are women. While increasing numbers of professionals are needed in the care market, estimates at the same time give the number of those requiring home care in 2025 far higher than the present approximate two million. There is great pressure on women to take on this unpaid role and therefore growing tension between the working world, where both genders are expected to contribute equally, and the bias towards female caregivers in the family. One proposal of the German family ministry is to allow for a reduction in working hours for both men and women during the intensive phases of care work – not only in times of bearing and raising children but also of long-term care for elderly relatives.

The Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) in 2013 produced a reference text focusing on this area of tension “between autonomy and dependence”⁸ and underlined the importance of strengthening family-based caring communities. It regards the institution of marriage as a particularly suitable area of legal protection for this community; marriage also offers a legal setting for the economic support of care work. The booklet concludes, however, that the guiding line of a Protestant family policy must be a consistent strengthening of all caring relationships: “The framework in which people live as a family and in partnership must not be the main factor. All family relationships in which people freely bond with others, take responsibility for one another and enter into a reliable partnership must be able to rely on the Protestant church.”

What we understand by family is constantly changing, and it would be far too simple to understand this change as a story of decadence. After all, growing rights for women, children and same-sex partners have gone hand in hand with a great increase in freedom. In Germany too, European law with its protection from discrimination, has promoted individual equality and changed the relationship between e.g. legitimate and illegitimate children or homo- and heterosexual persons. Protection from discrimination has also changed the protection of marriage and the family as caring communities. Quite apart from the form they take, which has regularly changed over the centuries, the relations between family members are of such significance that,

⁶ See the Institute for Employment Research (IAB – the Research Institute of the Federal Employment Agency).

⁷ See also Anke Spory, *Familie im Wandel, Kulturwissenschaftliche, soziologische und theologische Reflexionen*, Waxmann Verlag (Münster, NY, München, Berlin), 2013.

⁸ *Zwischen Autonomie und Angewiesenheit: Familie als verlässliche Gemeinschaft stärken*, EKD. English press report: https://archiv.ekd.de/english/ekd_press_releases-pr_2013_06_19_resource_material%20_family.html.

throughout the whole Bible, they come to symbolise the relationship with God. They also form “the background without which a host of biblical stories and texts cannot be sufficiently understood”.⁹

Living together in the family has a decisive influence on the way that we understand God. The family is a vital place of learning faith. From the start, families and the Christian community were related. *The congregation enables an extended ‘familiarity’, which includes singles and can also support families in different ways.* In the 19th century, kindergartens and elderly care homes came into being in Christian parishes and the religious orders lived together in family structures. Mutual care-giving in biological families and elective families was an important factor for stabilising society at the time of industrialisation. For that reason, the New Testament statements critical of the family have an essential function – Jesus too stresses that a family is not primarily a blood relationship but an elective kinship in God (“Whoever does the will of my father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother”).¹⁰ That is why church communities were, and are, able to take on the role of a family – as was the case very early, in the monasteries and convents that were role models for the diaconal communities of the 19th century. Even today, in the second great transformation after industrialisation, the aim must be, above all, to enhance the well-being of all, in families and beyond, in neighbourhood networks and in caring communities.

Suggestions for Further Reading

EKD Study paper on the role of the family 2013: Zwischen Autonomie und Angewiesenheit: Familie als verlässliche Gemeinschaft stärken, EKD. English press report:

https://archiv.ekd.de/english/ekd_press_releases-pr_2013_06_19_resource_material%20_family.html.

German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, Familienreport 2012, English Version available at: <https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/meta/en/publications-en/family-report-2012/96018>.

OECD The Future of Families to 2030 A Synthesis Report, available at:

<https://www.oecd.org/futures/49093502.pdf>.

Spory, Anke. *Familie im Wandel, Kulturwissenschaftliche, soziologische und theologische Reflexionen*, Münster, NY, München, Berlin: Waxmann Verlag, 2013.

⁹ Evangelical Church in Central Germany (EKM): Im Blickpunkt: Familie, 2007, see in: <https://www.ekmd.de/attachment/aa234c91bdabf36adbf227d333e5305b/b26e91b7524e7528716ac04248a1902f/>

¹⁰ Matthew 12:50

78. ETHICS OF DIACONIA: THE RELEVANCE OF GOOD LIFE, COMMON GOOD AND GLOBAL JUSTICE IN DIACONIA

Johannes Eurich¹

To help and assist those who are in need has always played an important role in Christian community life. From the beginning, Christians followed the great commandment to love one another by caring for the sick and marginalised within their fellowship. They did so by taking up examples from the Jewish tradition, but they also developed organisations to better serve the needy as a unique Christian characteristic, no longer confined to helping those within the limits of one's own religion: the very first hospital is contributed to bishop Basil the Great at Caesarea in 369 AD. Christians cared for the sick and poor regardless whether they were Christians or not. This was one of the reasons for the tremendous growth of Christianity in the first centuries AD.² Preconditions for a good life for everybody thus played an important role for Christian communities throughout the ages. Specific knowledge of how to treat the sick was practiced and enlarged over the centuries and led to the development of specialised care in the nineteenth century and to professions like nursing in the twentieth century. Today, diaconia is understood in many countries as humanitarian aid on the grounds of neighbourly love. It can be carried out by individuals or local churches in everyday life as (mutual) assistance and care, as well as in highly specialised organisations like hospitals in professionalised services. The ethics of diaconia have to reflect both dimensions: individual ethics and organisational ethics. As a third dimension, the social reality has to be taken into consideration in social ethics. Diaconal ethics does this on the basis of the biblical notion of mankind and especially with a focus on destitute human beings.

Diaconal Commitment in Favour of the Poor and Notions of the Good Life

From a biblical perspective, human life is fundamentally perceived as a vulnerable and needy life. Life and especially a good life are not an undetachable possession, but are viewed as fragile. Life includes pain and suffering culminating in the complete loss in death of what distinguished a person in life. The starting point of theological reflections on the vulnerability of life is the conviction that God became man in Jesus of Nazareth and thus voluntarily exposed himself to human vulnerability. This is already evident in the circumstances of his birth: hardly born, Jesus' family with the newborn child must expose itself to the dangers of an escape to Egypt (Lk. 1:5-2:52), and finds its strongest expression in Jesus' violent death on the cross. However, from a theological perspective, it is important not to interpret vulnerability only negatively as something that should be avoided if possible, but to affirm it as a basic condition of human life. "Only a vulnerable self can love its neighbour."³ Theologically, this highlights an attitude that accepts one's own vulnerability as a condition for life. From this it follows to adopt an attitude of vulnerable openness to others and to discover in vulnerability a sign of humane life that inspires feelings of happiness as well as compassion, sympathy as well as the hope of overcoming suffering.

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² Cf. Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

³ Emmanuel Lévinas, *Ethik und Unendliches*. (Graz/Wien: Passagen Verlag, 1986), p. 73.

From this understanding, two ethical conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, because all human beings are on the same footing as vulnerable beings, there is a strong impulse to view all human beings as being equal. Secondly, from the vulnerability of human life follows the biblical commitment to poor and marginalised people who lack the basic life conditions others have. These two conclusions shall be elaborated in the following paragraphs.

(1) The asymmetry which seems to be inscribed in the act of helping between a “strong” helper and a “weak” person in need of help, which can easily lead to the so-called weak person being seen as an object, must therefore always be questioned and broken up where it has become entrenched. Basically, all people, so-called strong as well as so-called weak ones, are on the same level. Every life is a vulnerable life and is from the very beginning of life dependent on the help and care of others, without whom it would not survive.

(2) The commitment for socially disadvantaged people aims to be “a perspective for action at the co-execution of God’s way”⁴ and was theologically justified in the option for (and with) the poor. “The option for the poor is first and in a fundamental way God’s option. God’s preference is for the poor, not because they are particularly good or religious, but precisely because they are poor. This is so because where his image is dishonoured and where human dignity is trampled on, God himself is affected and dishonoured.”⁵ This theological option is reflected in the practice of the first Christian communities, where the celebration of the Lord’s Supper was combined with the feeding of the poor (cf. 1 Cor. 11:17-34). “(Divine) worship and diakonia are two sides of the same coin.”⁶

Biblical authors did not know the modern meaning of what we consider a “good life”, but it is obvious that they aimed at something similar: by the care for the sick and needy, basic life conditions should be met. The notion of a good life has become a focus point of (international) ethical discussions, today. There are different reasons for this: while in many open societies individual rights guarantee that a person can follow their own concept of the good life, there are other countries in which the basic conditions for a good life are diminished or are absent. Ethical reflections consider the conduct of life and qualify notions of it as good or bad. Diaconal ethics does this from the perspective of the underdog, of the poor, of the marginalised.

Today, the discussions around concepts of a good life stress that basic requirements have to be fulfilled in order for human beings to live a good life. In a world of complex societies, these basic requirements have to be much more detailed and specified – Martha Nussbaum, one of the foremost thinkers of a theory of a good life, lists ten human capabilities as a precondition for a good life:⁷ complete and satisfying life; bodily health; bodily integrity; senses, imagination and thought; emotion; practical reason; affiliation; other species; control over one’s environment. The list is not undisputed since critics say that it presupposes a certain understanding of what a good life is. Other concepts, like Rawls’ idea of basic goods, try to make a claim for a universalistic theory which is not interfering with individual concepts of a good life.⁸ Whatever side one takes in this debate, it is clear that diaconia today is challenged to work for the fulfilment of basic life conditions for each human

⁴ Gerhard K. Schäfer, *Die Option für die Armen als Herausforderung für die Diakonie und Sozialethik*, in: *Diakonie der Versöhnung. Ethische Reflexion und soziale Arbeit in ökumenischer Verantwortung*, ed. Arnd Götzelmann (Stuttgart: Volker Herrmann and Jürgen Stein, 1998), pp. 204-215, p. 206.

⁵ Schäfer, *Die Option für die Armen*, pp. 204-215, p. 206.

⁶ Wolfgang Maaser, *Öffentliche Diakonie im Spannungsfeld von Kirche und Gesellschaft*, in: *Johannes Eurich/Wolfgang Maaser, Diakonie in der Sozialökonomie. Studien zu Folgen der neuen Wohlfahrtspolitik*. (Leipzig: VDWI 47, 2013), pp. 40-74, p. 48.

⁷ Martha Craven Nussbaum/Amartya Sen (eds.), *The Quality of Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Martha Craven Nussbaum, “Human Functioning and Social Justice. In Defense of Aristotelian Essentialism”, in: *Political Theory* no. 20 (1992), pp. 202-246; Martha Craven Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Martha Craven Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice. Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*. (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press, 2006).

⁸ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1971); John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness. A Restatement*. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2001).

being, especially for the most vulnerable and needy people. Can this be achieved by mere acts of compassion or are legal frameworks necessary? What is the relationship between mercy and justice?

Mercy and Justice

The biblical perception of people in need – often referred to as widows, orphans, the poor and strangers in the Bible – is not limited to the action of helping that is necessary to meet the needs of persons. In addition to the call to take care of the needs of others through practical assistance, there is often the perspective of providing legal protection for people on the fringes of the social community. The social laws in Exodus 20ff are only one example of this. Characterised as a movement from mercy to law,⁹ a certain interest in sustainable help becomes visible here. Furthermore, the subjectivity of the person in poverty is also recorded in this way, at least as an objective: “He is not an object of help, but a potentially independent person, a bearer of rights, whose resources are to be secured by law.”¹⁰

Such legal safeguards go back to demands for justice and must be negotiated and fixed in each case in a contextual-historical way: What extent of protection is to be guaranteed by the general public (then: clan or tribe, today: socially via institutions or the state), what is the personal responsibility of the individual, where and to what extent should merciful action alleviate need? These questions mark an indispensable field of tension which again and again lead from the concrete provision of assistance to the debate about the design of the law. “Already in a biblical perspective the question of law includes that of the recognition, integration and resources of a sustainably independent life of the humiliated. Law aims at the recognition of the other as a subject and bearer of rights, who in turn is allowed to assert claims based on justice against the other subjects”.¹¹

One can therefore speak of diaconal commitment in favour of poor and socially disadvantaged people as a fundamental Christian maxim for action. This commitment goes beyond the direct provision of aid and includes the shaping of the content of the law for the poor. It asks about the concretisation of the conditions of dignity so that a person can have corresponding experiences of recognition: “To what extent must social, economic and cultural capital be distributed in a society so that also people threatened by exclusion can have real experiences of self-recognition and recognition by others?”¹² What institutional prerequisites must be in place for this? Diaconal associations are involved in this discourse by providing first-hand insights from their practical work as well as editing public statements that mark ethical positions or options with regard to the situation or specific challenges of people in need in a given society.

The Question of the Common Good

Already in biblical texts like in the Beatitudes of Jesus (Mt. 5:3-12; Lk. 6:20-23), people in poverty are not simply understood as needy people, but their situation in life is understood as “a mixture of material poverty, lack of participation in religious and general education, and social and religious ostracism [...]”.¹³ Life is perceived with regard to its material and spiritual aspects as well as with regard to social dependencies and educational challenges. It is the attempt to understand the complexity of individual living conditions and to counterbalance too simplistic answers. Poverty is never an individual problem alone but a societal one as well. Therefore, concepts of solidarity and mutual responsibility have evolved which form the underlying value basis of many modern welfare state systems. These concepts are under pressure in many countries today

⁹ Cf. Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013).

¹⁰ Maaser, *Öffentliche Diakonie*, p. 48.

¹¹ Maaser, *Öffentliche Diakonie*, p. 49.

¹² Maaser, *Öffentliche Diakonie*, p. 49.

¹³ Maaser, *Öffentliche Diakonie*, p. 47.

due to market pressures: “The ethical principles and cultural patterns that have legitimised and shaped the welfare state – social responsibility, equality, solidarity, justice – are deconstructed and functionalised [...]. The maximisation of self-interest becomes the ethical norm, competition and competition the best possible way of achieving goals. That is good morally, which is good for my particular interests.”¹⁴

The dispute about common responsibilities and individual interests touches the question of the common good. “The common good is an important concept in political philosophy because it plays a central role in philosophical reflection about the public and private dimensions of social life.”¹⁵ Since no one can live as a monad but is a member of a political community, all citizens stand in certain relationships with one another (“political” or “civic” relationships). “[T]his relationship requires them to create and maintain certain facilities on the grounds that these facilities serve certain common interests. The relevant facilities and interests together constitute the common good and serve as a shared standpoint for political deliberation.”¹⁶ Nevertheless, this concept gives rise to a number of questions: What is the nature and scope of the common good? Where do private interests end and how can the common good be differentiated from them? When should citizens make decisions based on the common good? “Many contemporary social issues turn on disagreements about when citizens may take up a privatised perspective and when they must reason from the standpoint of the common good. Social justice is often silent on these issues because people could, in principle, act as justice requires, whether they are moved by a scheme of private incentives or by a concern for common interests.”¹⁷ Why should members of society care at all about the common good? It is obvious that the concept of the common good is linked today to many other concepts like democracy, communal sharing, and competitive markets. Especially the latter have raised doubts on the feasibility of the concept of common goods: “For example, markets can lead citizens to make better use of land and labour in society, thereby generating more resources for everyone to use in pursuing their various ends. The problem is that market coordination involves a privatised form of reasoning, and the proper functioning of the market may require citizens *not* to reason from the standpoint of the common good.”¹⁸

Hence, the relevance of concepts like the common good depends on the political system of a country and the question of social coordination. From a diaconal point of view, however, common goods serve an important cause because common goods provide facilities to each member of society, especially for those who cannot participate in market processes because of a lack of resources.

The Importance of Global Justice

Social problems can no longer be solved by the nation state alone. A global analysis is necessary of why today’s challenges of international justice, scarcity of resources, economic systems and neo-colonialisation, sustainability and ecological burdens can no longer be adequately addressed by nation-state regulations and which global interrelationships must be taken into account. As a result, diaconia also faces social challenges that can no longer be dealt with only from a nation-state perspective. Social justice today must be thought of in the horizon of the whole world. The globalisation of problems means that the causes of poverty as well as the consequences of ecological crises must be dealt with in global cooperation, because they represent transnational trends. The nation-state framework cannot absorb the consequences of international crises on

¹⁴ Sabine Schäper, *Ökonomisierung in der Behindertenhilfe. Praktisch-theologische Rekonstruktionen und Erkundungen zu den Ambivalenzen eines diakonischen Praxisfeldes* (Berlin: Diakonik 5, 2006), p. 73.

¹⁵ Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: “*The Common Good*”, [Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/common-good/>] [Accessed 17/01/20].

¹⁶ *The Common Good*. Facilities can be material, cultural or institutional.

¹⁷ *The Common Good*.

¹⁸ *The Common Good*.

its own, as was made particularly clear by the example of migration and refugee crisis at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Climate change now appears to be the greatest global threat. The enormous amount of environmental pollution caused by the industrial age is leading to changes in the natural foundations of life in many countries of the world and at the same time threatening the biodiversity of the planet. Conflicts over resources are increasing, while at the same time food security is at risk. Landgrabbing is only one phenomenon demonstrating how development opportunities of countries in the South are threatened, and at the same time, it is evidence of increased conflicts for economic power. The globalisation of trade in goods has also led to a globalisation of wealth and poverty. Astonishing successes in the fight against global poverty have been contrasted by the expansion of the transnational consumer class, which has contributed to an internal polarisation of rich and poor in industrialised countries. The ecological and social crisis seems to be caused by the adherence to a growth model that enables resource-intensive economies and lifestyles in the industrialised nations.¹⁹ In the meantime, it has been confirmed that this model does not offer any possibility for a corresponding development also for the poorer countries, because it means an overloading of the carrying capacity of planet earth.²⁰ Instead of course corrections, there would have to be a change of course, which is currently only slowly taking shape due to international tensions. The guiding principles of such a change of course are an ecological model of prosperity which includes a sustainable competitive order, which provides for compatibility with nature and self-limitation as well as fairness in world trade and an upgrading of the lifeworld economy, and which prices in the environmental damage of industrial production, as well as the right to hospitality on earth for every human being on the basis of human rights.²¹ The latter includes, for example, rights to existence, which take precedence over liberalisation efforts, and participation as a human right.

From this, recommendations for action for a socio-ecological transformation of economy and society are obtained, whereby the churches and their diaconal activities are also called upon to establish an alternative practice and to show by example that a fair and common-good-oriented way of life and a life-sustaining economy are possible.²² “The goal of the church’s commitment to sustainable development must be to work worldwide towards ways of life, consumption and production that maintain the earth’s carrying capacity and which all people can follow on the path to a good life.”²³ Decisive for this goal is the basic theological conviction that a “life in full measure” (Jn. 10:10) must be possible for all people and so that near and far neighbours must be given the opportunity to lead a good life. Therefore, sustainable development requires that the economy serve life, is “committed to human well-being and the integrity of creation, with particular attention to the rights and entitlements of the poor and marginalised”.²⁴ Globally sustainable development can only succeed if co-operation between developing and industrialised countries is geared to changing standards of sustainability.

¹⁹ Cf. *Zukunftsfähiges Deutschland in einer globalisierten Welt. Ein Anstoß zur gesellschaftlichen Debatte. Eine Studie des Wuppertal Instituts für Klima, Umwelt, Energie*. ed. Brot für die Welt, Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst, Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland, Frankfurt/Main (2009), pp. 51-52.

²⁰ Cf. *Zukunftsfähiges Deutschland*, pp. 72-73.

²¹ *Zukunftsfähiges Deutschland*, 185ff.

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²³ Kirchenamt, *Neue Leitbilder*, p. 99.

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79. TRANSFORMATIVE DIACONIA: FROM EARLY CHRISTIANITY TO DEVELOPMENT CONCEPTS AND ECONOMIC GLOBALISATION

Jerry Pillay¹

The Church of Jesus Christ has normally understood diaconia to be an essential part of its mission task. This is normally evidenced in its care and concern for the poor and needy. However, over the ages this understanding of diaconia has come to the realisation that the root causes and effects of poverty, inequality and injustice must also be addressed to be able to change the material conditions of the poor and needy. Thus, over the years, the concept of diaconia has broadened to include involvement in the life of humankind, in making of nationhood, building of culture, structuring of society with its functions and institutions and in shaping the form and quality of political systems to work towards justice. This article aims to briefly show the changing trends in the understanding of diaconia in the church by linking it to the idea of development and globalisation; it also pays attention to the contributions of Reformed churches.

The Developing Concept of Diaconia

The Early Church

Bruce Winter² in his careful and well-documented discussion of public life in the first century shows how early Christians took part in the public life of the Greco-Roman communities in which they lived. He argues that “the early church in fact taught a civic consciousness among its members”. Christians were not to abandon life in the public sphere (*politeia*) but to address their obligations as citizens from the perspective of the Christian ethic. Every Christian had an obligation to promote the welfare of the city and help the poor, even without the rewards that were traditionally accorded the benefactor.

David Bosch³ points out that transformation (humanisation) has been a part of the Christian mission and influence in society right from the beginning. In a society described as “macabre, lost in despair, perversion, and superstition,” Christian communities emerged as something entirely new in the populous and expansive Roman Empire. The early church was on the periphery of society. It found many of its earliest adherents among slaves, women, and foreigners – people who had no influence on the shape of society. Yet it was to have an impact on society, especially over the next two millennia.

Christianity began by preaching and practicing the “gospel of love and charity” which included almsgiving and care for widows, orphans, slaves, travellers, the sick, the imprisoned, and the poor.⁴ Driven by the love of Jesus, believers went out and expressed their love for their neighbour. The early disciples showed true mercy and compassion. Generally speaking, the New Testament sees the ministry of mercy not only as an individual obligation, but also as a corporate endeavour of the church, to be carried out by the church itself. As the church spread through the Roman Empire, its ministries of mercy underwent considerable development. Social relief became a monopoly of the church in Rome and Alexandria, where it was

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² Bruce Winter, *Seeking the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens. First-Century Christians in the Graeco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1994), pp. 200f.

³ D.J Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Missions* (New York: Orbis Books, 1999).

⁴ A. Von Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* (New York: Harper, 1967).

manifested in distributions to the poor and in the establishment and upkeep of hospitals, orphanages, and homes for the aged. By the fourth century, the church was also bringing relief to people whom inflation had plunged into distress.

During the time of Constantine, the church enjoyed much favour. Constantine's attempt to create a Christian empire eventually resulted in the state taking over much that was the responsibility of the church. For example, the state now assumed as its responsibility the care of the poor, although the church continued with this on a smaller scale.

The emergence of a new cultural form both indicated and enabled broader societal transformations.⁵ In spite of what we have just noted, however, it can hardly be maintained that the early Christians deliberately attempted to restructure the empire in addressing matters of socio-economic justice. Instead, during the first two centuries when Christians constituted a small minority, their concern was to help those who were dehumanised and oppressed by providing practical help. Their concerns were motivated by compassion and characterised by communal justice and the love of God. Their input into changing society was essentially to provide charity and love as expressed in the Scriptures. Yet, they were to have a profound effect in helping the poor and neglected.

The medieval church

During the middle ages, the church advocated a moral code sometimes called the Christian corporate ethic, reflecting the fact that all of society was considered a single entity or corporation.⁶ This led to a strong paternalistic obligation toward the common people, the poor, and the general welfare of society. It was accepted that some were to be rich, and that the poor had to subordinate to the leadership of the wealthy. However, it was equally emphasised that the wealthy had an obligation to use their riches to help the poor. Hence, riches and wealth were not condemned but greed, selfish acquisitiveness, covetousness and the lust for wealth were consistently condemned by the Christian paternalist ethic. What we do see here is a concern for the poor. However, the support of wealth (and not greed or selfish acquisitiveness) was to obscure the absolute biblical focus on the poor that Jesus advocated.

The key figure to shape the medieval paradigm of mission thinking was Augustine of Hippo (354-430) although, strictly speaking, he preceded the Middle Ages, at least if one takes this period to have begun around 600 AD.⁷ Augustine maintained that God became human in order to save human souls that are hurtling to destruction. Hence, not the reconciliation of the universe but the redemption of the soul stands in the centre. The theology of Augustine could not but spawn a dualistic view of reality, which became second nature in Western Christianity – the tendency to regard salvation as a private matter and to ignore the world, though this was not the view of Augustine himself. This particular view gave rise to the tendency of seeing mission and diaconia as an attempt to develop the church rather than get involved with the world.⁸ Augustine, however, promoted the involvement of the church with the world. In this respect, he maintained that the church's involvement with social change in relation to the poor was personal charity. Augustine was the architect of the doctrine of charity: obedience to God required a genuine concern for the needs of the poor.⁹

⁵ J. Perkins, "Fictional Narratives and Social Critique", in V. Burrus (ed.) *Late Ancient Christianity, A People's History of Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), p. 46.

⁶ E.K. Hunt and H.J. Sherman, *Economics: An Introduction to Traditional and Radical Views* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), p. 6.

⁷ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 214.

⁸ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 216.

⁹ R. Sider "Evangelicals and Development: Towards a Theology of Social Change", *Contemporary Issues in Social Ethics*, Vol. 2 (Australia: The Paternoster Press, 1981).

The Middle Ages also saw the rise of the monastic movement which greatly contributed to the Christianisation of Europe.¹⁰ Monasticism seems to have saved the medieval church from acquiescence, petrification, and the loss of its vision and truly revolutionary character. At first glance, the monastic movement appears to be a most unlikely agent for mission and transformation. The communities were certainly not founded as launching pads for mission. They were not even created out of a desire to get involved in society in their immediate environment. Rather, they regarded society as corrupt and moribund, held together only by “the tenacity of custom”. Monasticism stood for the absolute renunciation of everything the ancient world had prized; it was an endeavour to refrain from the “sinful world”. It was “flight from the world, and nothing else”. Monasticism’s one objective, immediate as well as ultimate, “was to live in purity and die in peace”, and to avoid anything that could “agitate, harass, depress, stimulate, weary, or intoxicate the soul”.¹¹

In the light of the above, it may therefore sound preposterous to suggest that monasticism was both a primary agent of medieval mission and the main instrument in reforming European society. However, as Henry points out in his reference to the Benedictine Rule, it was “one of the most effective linkages of justice, unity and the renewal the church has ever known.”¹² The Benedictine monastery, for example, became a “school for the Lord’s service”, and was to have a profound influence in the centuries to follow. The monastic movement, from its inception, has been concerned not only with the spiritual side of life, but also with its social and economic components. During the Middle Ages, the Church was deeply concerned about economic matters, not only on the theological level, but also on the operational one. Hospices, orphanages and philanthropic work were supported by income generated through economic activities. However, most of these were done through the monasteries. Julio De Santa Ana¹³ points out that it was the monasteries that chose to radically eradicate poverty. The monks saw as their gospel responsibility the need to be involved in the transformation of society.

However, the concept of social or community transformation adopted by the medieval church can be classified as that of the conservative paradigm, poverty is just there: “The poor you will always have with you” (Mk. 14:7). The relationship of rich and poor is a personal one of mutual rights and obligations, which are ordained by tradition. The responsibility of the rich towards the poor is to behave with fairness, forbearance and compassion. The responsibility of the poor, as taught in the medieval church, was to accept their place in life humbly, being hardworking, law-abiding, loyal and grateful for the charity of the rich. This is, usually, reflected in relief programmes to ease immediate hardship and in welfare approaches concerned with meeting “basic needs”. More broadly, it is seen in institutions such as the “poor relief” at the parish level. The provision of such support is often seen as an important part of the role of the Church. Whilst the church in the medieval period took its responsibility to the poor seriously, it did not really seek to restructure society. Instead, it took the poor and struggling people into the monasteries and cared for them there. This was to change with the coming of the Reformation.

The Reformation

The early sixteenth century is a watershed in European history. It marks the vague dividing line between the old, decaying feudal order and the rising capitalist system. By then, the church had become completely secularised. Under Henry VIII, the state in the form of God’s monarchy assumed the role and function of the old universal church. As a result, the people could no longer look to the Catholic Church for relief from widespread unemployment and poverty. Destruction of the power of the church had eliminated the organised

¹⁰ N. Tanner, *The Church in the Later Middle Ages* (New York, I.B. Tauris, 2008), p. 46.

¹¹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 231.

¹² P. Henry, “Monastic Mission: The Monastic Tradition as Source for Unity and Renewal Today”, in *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. 39 (1983), pp. 271-281.

¹³ Ana J. De Santa, *Good News to the Poor: The Challenge of the Poor in the History of the Church* (Geneva: WCC, 1979), p. 62.

system of charity. The state attempted to assume responsibility for the general welfare of society. All through this time, the Christian paternalist view that promoted the general welfare of society still prevailed.

The 16th century Protestant Reformation was an attempt to reform and transform both church and society. The Reformation embraced a number of quite distinct, yet overlapping, areas of human activity: the reform of both the morals and structures of church and society, new approaches to political issues, shifts in thinking about economics, the renewal of Christian spirituality, and the reform of Christian doctrine.¹⁴

The Reformers, according to Stivers,¹⁵ not only influenced their society but they were also influenced by the ideology (economic) of their time. Consequently, the absolute biblical concern for the poor as expressed by the early church was slowly diminishing, even though groups of Christians continued to campaign for the rights of the poor, it was small in comparison to the whole church. The church was ultimately taking sides with the rich as it provided theological justification for economic and political advancement and the creation of a “better society”. It was not a “better society” for the poor and marginalised.

The new theological emphasis on individual faith contributed to the growing influence of the new individualistic philosophy. It stressed the necessity of doing well at one’s earthly calling as the best way to please God, and emphasised diligence and hard work. These doctrines subsequently led to the spiritualising of economic processes and the belief that “God instituted the market and exchange.”¹⁶ This emphasis, however, sadly took the Christian focus away from the general concern for the community and the obligation to the poor. It gave acceptance to the liberal paradigm: poverty as backwardness. It said that those who are poor or “backward” should not be controlled, but enabled to reach their full potential. Poverty is the result not of the natural order, but of incomplete development. As this suggests, the liberal world-view is historically intertwined with modernity.

The Reformers generally advocated an involvement with the world (although not all of them, for example, the Anabaptist). However, unlike the Middle Ages, they went a step further in the attempt to transform society. Their theology in many ways encouraged the transformation and development of community. This they engaged as they influenced social and economic policies of the government of the day.¹⁷

There are clear indications that Christian mission and diaconia started to broaden its terrain and impact in transforming people, communities and society. It is thus not surprising that some “secular interpretations” tend to discount the importance of the religious element in the Reformation. They simply state that Luther, Calvin, Knox, Zwingli and others are products of their socio-economic and political backgrounds and circumstances.¹⁸ There can be no doubt that other factors played a role but the religious one cannot be ignored. The Reformation movement did not only renew and change the church leaving the world uninvolved but this movement intervened dramatically in the lives of all and brought about radical changes to the social, political and economic aspects of a new developing world. It gave rise to a new epoch in the history of humankind. All through this period, there were small groups of Christians who kept to the task of transforming the lives of the poor. It is thus not surprising that one of the theological miracles of the late 20th century is the rediscovery of the biblical witness to God’s particular concern for the poor and oppressed. This became the major focus of the ecumenical church, in particular.

For example, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) Executive in August 1981 worked on a draft study on issues such as the catholicity of the church, confession and the act of confessing, worship, power and wealth, racism, and the theological basis of human rights. At the Ottawa General Council in 1982,¹⁹

¹⁴ A.E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

¹⁵ R.L. Stivers, *Reformed Faith and Economics* (USA: University Press of America, 1993), pp. 33-48.

¹⁶ Hunt and Sherman, *Economics*, p. 13.

¹⁷ Stivers, *Reformed Faith and Economics*.

¹⁸ B.J. Van Der Walt *Anatomy of Reformation* (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom University for CHE, 1991), p. 211.

¹⁹ WARC, ‘Study guide for delegates Ottawa 1982’ (1982a) [Available at: warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/news_file/BIBECUM.pdf.] [Accessed 7th August 2018].

WARC called on its member churches to bear witness in a world where powers and principalities are constantly defying the purpose of God and the lordship of Christ. The following ways in which churches could do so were suggested:

- Responsible participation in the power structures of the world with the aim of making them more human and more just;
- An alternative witness in the life of the church but on behalf of society as a whole, which refers to a simpler Christian lifestyle that goes against consumerism and greed;
- Expressing obedience to God by taking political responsibility through active resistance to unjust power structures.

It is clear from the above that, for Reformed churches, diaconia meant much more than charity and relief; it meant the transformation of society, communities and the world at large. It called for involvement and partnerships with organisations and movements seeking to create a better world for all creation.

The Idea of Development

Over the years, the concept of development has been defined as “*progress, process, (economic) growth and transformation*”.²⁰ Development was driven by certain approaches which include modernisation, dependency and underdevelopment, global reformism (The New International Economic Order, 1974), and another development.²¹

The church’s view on development, largely through the ecumenical movement, was at first deeply influenced by prevalent (secular) thinking. Economic growth was seen as the engine of development and, indeed, sometimes equated with development and progress. However, by the mid-1970s, the very idea of development was questioned by large sections of the ecumenical movement. Perhaps the most significant contribution that the ecumenical movement made to the debate on development was its emphasis on *people* rather than on *production*. It pointed out that any development must involve the participation of the people concerned and a strong view of justice. It maintained that people are not passive spectators and recipients of the transformation of society. People are active participants, who have roles to play and tasks to perform in bringing about the vision and hope of the reign of God. Thus, the focus on a human-centred and social transformation idea of development became the dominant discourse.

Further to this, the ecumenical movement argued for God’s “preferential option for the poor” and it placed emphasis on the *poor* as the agents of development. It is no longer the case of the rich developing the poor but of the poor developing themselves. Hence, economic growth as the paradigm for development is clearly insufficient. The needs of human beings and their communities, present and future generations, and creation as a whole, must be the starting point for development.

In its contribution to the debate on development, the ecumenical movement also gained a better understanding of the multifaceted meaning of development and the need for a *comprehensive* approach. Since people are the centre of development, development should be social development. As a result, all community development projects and programmes, education and training should place an emphasis on social justice, people’s participation, and the role of people’s movements and the need for networking between them. This also provided a growing awareness that development goes beyond charity and the transfer of money from the rich to the poor. It shows the changing and developing idea of diaconia, it is more than service, charity and relief, and it is radical transformation.

²⁰ J. Pillay *The Church and Development: Towards a Theology of Development*, PhD Thesis (University of Cape Town, Cape Town, 2002).

²¹ Pillay *The Church and Development*.

The ecumenical movement also stressed the need for ecological concerns in the development process. It placed a new emphasis on the care of the environment using the biblical focus on creation. Finally, it maintained that like theology, development has to be contextualised; there is no single development model that is applicable and valid in all parts of the world. The above indicates the churches' contribution to the global development debate.

Globalisation

The broader definition of diaconia does not only embrace the notion of development but it also expands into global solidarity, engagement and transformation. The ecumenical church has impressed upon us the need to shift from an *ecclesiocentric* to an *oikocentric* perspective of diaconia that leads to a more modest claim about our task in the world.²² The mission and diaconal praxis of the church is to be a sign and action addressing the groaning universe. The biblical understanding of the kingdom or reign of God gives credibility to the interconnectedness and interdependence of a single world society.

According to Albrow,²³ globalisation refers to “all those processes by which the people of the world are incorporated into a single world society”. Similarly, McGrew stated: “globalisation constitutes a multiplicity of linkages and interconnections that transcend the nation states (and societies) which make up the modern world system. It defines a process through which events, decisions and activities in one part of the world can come to have a significant consequence for individuals and communities in quite distant parts of the globe.”²⁴

Globalisation is a multifaceted phenomenon which includes economic, political, cultural and social dimensions. However, scholars tend to emphasise economic globalisation. Although the latter is an important factor, one must not ignore other important factors like political, cultural and social factors.²⁵

Returning to the Christian understanding of diaconia and globalisation, we can draw from John Calvin's view where he wrote, no member has “power for itself nor applies it to its own private use, but each pours it out to the fellow members”; what chiefly matters is “the common advantage of the whole body” (Inst., III, vii, 5.). Occasionally, Calvin identified this community with the whole human race: “All people are bound together as a sacred chain [which] should be embraced in one feeling of love” (*Commentary Acts 13: 36; Inst., II, viii, 55*). Mission organisations, like the Council for World Mission, have stressed the focus on taking the whole Gospel to the whole person to the whole world which indicates the global nature of Christian mission and witness. The World Council of Churches in its programme: *A Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace*, further links the ideas of Christian diaconia, development and globalisation.

This, too, can be seen in the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) adoption of the Accra Confession in 2004. Although not a doctrinal confession like the Heidelberg Catechism or Westminster Confession, the Accra Confession challenges current economic doctrines with the traditional Reformed criticism of idols (i.e., Mammon, consumerism, the financial and speculative markets) that deny God's life-giving sovereignty and defy God's covenant by excluding the poor, the vulnerable, and the whole of Creation from the fullness of life. In essence, the Accra Confession is a response and resistance to the Empire.²⁶ The Confession defines empire as:

²² B. Haddad, “Service or Subsistence? Diakonia in Our Globalized, Gendered World”, *The Ecumenical Review*, 66(3) (2014), p. 2.

²³ M. Albrow and E. King (Eds), *Globalization, knowledge and society: Readings from international sociology* (Sage: London, 1990).

²⁴ A. McGrew, *Aglobal society? Modernity and its Future* (Aldershot and Brookfield: Ashgate and Dartmouth, 1992).

²⁵ L. Hebron and J.F. Stack Jr, *Globalization: Debunking the myths* (Delhi: Dorling Kindersley India Pvt., 2013).

²⁶ Jerry Pillay, “The Accra Confession as a response to empire”. *HTS Theological Studies*, 74(4) (2018), pp. 1-6. [Available at: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i4.5284>].

the convergence of economic, political, cultural, geographic, and military imperial interests, systems, and networks for the purpose of amassing political power and economic wealth. Empire typically forces and facilitates the flow of wealth and power from vulnerable persons, communities, and countries to the more powerful. The Bible is full of stories of empire rising, over-extending, and falling. Empire today crosses all boundaries, strips and reconstructs identities, subverts culture, subordinates nation states, and marginalises or co-opts religious communities.²⁷

In the body of the text, the Confession does a reading of the signs of the times. It points out that “we live in a scandalous world that denies God’s call to life for all” (Accra Confession (AC) point 7). It refers to the debt of poor countries, the drive for profit of transnational corporations, climate change, crises caused by the development of neoliberal economic globalisation and an ideology that claims to be without alternative (AC point 9). The Confession attributes these challenges to empire: “We recognise the enormity and complexity of the situation. We do not seek simple answers. As seekers of truth and justice and looking through the eyes of powerless and suffering people, we see that the current world (dis)order is rooted in an extremely complex and immoral economic system defended by empire.” (AC point 10). This is a clear demonstration of the churches’ movement from local to global and from diaconia to concepts of development and globalisation.

Conclusion

In summary, the Christian church has played, and continues to play, a vital role in the transformation of people and society. Its mission has been to bring in the reign of God and, to achieve this, it has to work towards the establishment of a society in accordance to God’s will seeking justice and peace. In this article, we have seen how the church’s initial diaconal work has moved from charity and relief to development and the transformation of society, life and the world. The broader understanding of diaconia is necessary given the realities in the world, the reign of God, the Christian mission and the need for the church to work towards the fullness of life for all creation.

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80. ECUMENICAL DIAKONIA IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19 – A CHANCE FOR GROWING COLLABORATION BETWEEN ACT FORUMS AND CHURCHES

Corrie van der Ven and Jørgen Thomsen¹

Introduction

With a shared understanding of “who we are” and “what we do”, formulated in the joint Ecumenical Diakonia document, the World Council of Churches and ACT Alliance have a golden opportunity to contribute to the localisation agenda of the humanitarian sector. It is a matter of combining the best of two worlds, i.e. a global network of broadly ramified, locally rooted churches and a global alliance of specialised ministries and agencies.

The question we want to raise in this short article is: how can these two worlds be best combined in response to the COVID-19 pandemic? And more generally: how can collaboration between ACT Forums and Churches be strengthened in order to serve the people in need in the most dignified, effective and efficient way?

The Changing Landscape of Humanitarian Aid

The increasing number of complex and protracted disasters require changes in the humanitarian system, leading to the so-called localisation agenda. Localisation is about putting local actors at the centre of humanitarian aid, i.e. shifting power to crisis-affected people so that they will be at the centre of decisions. This means that localisation is, above all, a dignified agenda. At the same time, localisation strengthens effectiveness, as local people understand the context and the needs of the affected people best. It also strengthens efficiency if humanitarian aid builds on what is already being done by local actors, becomes complementary to it, and strengthens it.²

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² There is not one single definition of localisation, but the following three outline what is at stake:

The Grand Bargain signatories (see also note 2) committed to “making principled humanitarian action as local as possible and as international as necessary” while continuing to recognise the vital role of international actors, particularly in armed conflict.

https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Grand_Bargain_final_22_May_FINAL-2.pdf

The International Federation of Red Cross/Crescent Societies quote in their Policy Brief on Localisation a Pacific definition: “a process of recognising, respecting and strengthening the independence of leadership and decision making by national actors in humanitarian action, in order to better address the needs of affected populations”:

<https://media.ifrc.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2018/05/Localization-external-policy-brief-4-April-2.pdf>

The ACT Alliance policy for all Forums has as guiding policy that “Forums support local initiative – ACT forums take a participatory approach engaging local people and communities to enable the most appropriate and effective humanitarian, development and advocacy work. Particular priority is placed on local knowledge, local engagement, active seeking of local rootedness and local partners. The forums promote principles of localization and subsidiarity”. 4, 2, vi. See: <https://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/ACT-National-Sub-Regional-and-Regional-Forums-Policy-2018.pdf>.

The Grand Bargain, an agreement that was launched at the World Humanitarian Summit of 2016 and signed by more than 60 signatories,³ committed “to get more means into the hands of people in need and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action”.⁴ Getting more means into the hands of the people in need implies that national and international organisations will need to re-assess their roles in emergencies: as local as possible, as (inter)national as needed.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the need to localise humanitarian aid wherever possible. Not only because of international travel restrictions and the huge scale of the disaster, but also because behavioural changes and health messaging need to be spearheaded by trusted, persuasive local leaders. This includes, according to the IASC Interim Guidance on Localisation and the COVID-19 Response, local faith leaders because “local faith institutions also play a role in less tangible but very essential matters like countering stigmatisation, providing psychological and spiritual support, transforming dangerous beliefs and behaviours due to the authority and trust given to them by local communities”.⁵

Momentum is there to partner with unconventional local parties, empower them, take risks, learn and improve. Local faith communities are amongst these “unconventional parties”. Whether local faith communities can become unconventional parties to ACT Forums and their members depends on how the Forum thinks of them. For some Forums, they have been natural partners, for others they are not so yet. The direction however is clear in ACT’s Global Strategy: ACT Forums work with local actors “[...] in particular churches and church-based organisations”.⁶

Two supplementary remarks: firstly, ACT and WCC both subscribe to inter-religious co-operation in principle and in practice. Focus in this article, however, is on the intra-religious co-operation. Secondly, the quest for visibility and inclusion of local faith actors may well be seen by some as emancipation and self-assertion by faith-based organisations and actors. However, it is important for us to note that this discussion is first and foremost about better development and humanitarian aid in an international aid framework without sufficient faith sensitivity and competence and with many top-heavy features. Faith competence and sensitivity is in our view fundamentally about professionalism.

In the following paragraphs, we would like to briefly elaborate on the relationship between WCC and ACT Alliance since the Malawi conference in 2014 and the progress made in this relationship. We will then show a few opportunities which could further strengthen their relationship in the response to COVID-19. We will end with the hope that lessons learnt in the ecumenical laboratorium will provide the necessary input to further reflections on future co-operation in humanitarian and development aid in general.

The Relationship between WCC and ACT Alliance

In September 2014, the WCC and ACT Alliance jointly organised a consultation in Malawi on the relationship between churches and specialised ministries, assessing the quality of the co-operation between international ACT members and national and local church organisations. Participants observed that sometimes ACT, i.e. Action by Churches Together, was not working alongside national and local churches and was not using the

³ <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2020-03/The%20Grand%20Bargain%20Signatories%20March%202020.pdf>.

⁴ <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/about-the-grand-bargain>

⁵ IASC Interim Guidance on Localisation and the COVID-19 Response, pp. 4-5,

<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2020-05/IASC%20Interim%20Guidance%20on%20Localisation%20and%20the%20COVID-19%20Response.pdf>.

⁶ ACT Global Strategy 2019-2026, p. 7: “ACT will seek to advance the role of national actors and leadership across all of its humanitarian, development and advocacy work as the basis on which to build resilience, human rights and dignity, with ACT forums playing a central role in facilitating the implementation of the localisation agenda at national and regional levels. This will necessitate a stronger focus on building relationships with local humanitarian, development and advocacy actors, and in particular churches and church-based organisations”.

diakonia terminology, but instead opted for secularised language and approaches.⁷ Many other topics were discussed, such as the misconceptions and misunderstandings on the side of churches about resource sharing⁸ and about the rights-based approach.⁹ The consultation acknowledged the need to strengthen relationships and ended with recommendations, among others to develop an Ecumenical Diakonia document as a basis for ongoing formation and training in ecumenical diakonia.¹⁰

By now a draft of Ecumenical Diakonia has been written, which points to the need for strengthening the structures of shared diaconal action. This draft, amongst others, recommends:

- 1) strengthening structures of shared action in strategic and planning documents;
- 2) strengthening collaboration within and between regional and national ecumenical councils and ACT Forums.¹¹

Over the past decade, there is stronger awareness and an increased acknowledgement within the entire humanitarian sector, including ACT Alliance, of the distinct value of faith and faith actors in humanitarian and development work. In ACT Alliance's COVID-19 response, "shared action" is indeed integrated in strategic and planning documents, e.g. in ACT's Appeal for the Global Response to COVID-19. One of the core elements of ACT Appeals is "Engagement with Faith and Religious Leaders and Institutions" in the humanitarian response of ACT Forums. In the general ACT approach, collaboration with the National Council of Churches and local churches is institutionalised.¹²

Ecumenical Contributions to Humanitarian Response

As mentioned above, COVID-19 increases the urgency to accelerate the localisation agenda as well as the collaboration with local faith actors, in particular. Their role is, as we saw during the Ebola crisis, widely acknowledged in the present moment.¹³ Faith-sensitivity in the COVID-19 response is needed for dignified and effective support, and collaboration with local faith actors is needed so as to leave no one behind and increase efficiency. We are not only talking here about international Faith-Based Organisations or National Council of Churches, but also, or especially, local faith actors, who, according to a recent UN's OHCHR statement, "influence the hearts and minds of millions of people".¹⁴

⁷ Draft Ecumenical Diakonia document, p. 27.

⁸ There were, for instance, misconceptions about the discontinuation of the WCC Round Table resource sharing, which was felt to be more easily accessible by local churches and NCCs, but had never been intended to be part of the new ACT. See Malawi Consultation Final Paper, p. 2.

⁹ Here, the participants recognised that they needed to "Affirm our common commitment to justice of which a rights-based approach is an integral part" p. 4.

¹⁰ Report of the International Consultation on the Relationship between Churches and Specialized Ministries, 2014, p. 4.

¹¹ Draft Ecumenical Diakonia document, p. 93.

¹² ACT Global Strategy 2019-2026, p. 19: "National, sub-regional and regional forums of ACT Alliance are – for ecumenical, theological and historical reasons – not complete without the participation of National Councils of Churches (NCCs) and Regional Ecumenical Organisations (REOs). This does not only mean that NCCs and REOs have a permanent invitation to participate in their respective national, sub-regional and regional forums, but can also imply that NCCs and REOs could regularly host ACT forums. Where ACT Forums and NCCs/REOs are less or insufficiently related to each other or work in different areas, they are encouraged to explore reasons for this together and enter into a deeper relationship of continuous collaboration. In addition, all forums may extend an invitation to Christian and interfaith organisations to participate in these meetings, in order to maximise the impact of FBOs in humanitarian, development and advocacy work". See: <https://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Global-Strategy-2019-2026.pdf>

¹³ See <https://www.partner-religion-development.org/service/news-archive/article/pard-webinar-on-covid-19-a-test-for-our-humanity/>

¹⁴ 28th May 2020 <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25909&LangID=E>

Examples of local faith actors' COVID-19 responses are many. Here, we shall illustrate one experience where a northern ACT member reached out to established and new faith-based partners in seven African countries and asked what they could do to prevent the harmful effects of COVID-19.¹⁵ The interventions that they suggested for funding included, as could be expected, different more traditional, service delivery interventions around evidence-based health messages, washing, hygiene and cash support for the vulnerable. It also included a list of other interventions that together made up a very comprehensive response. They wanted to regulate faith life, services and counselling by going virtual; in this and other ways, they wanted to continue stimulating hope, courage and meaning in local communities and help them pull through the pandemic – helping people to be resilient. They also took responsibility for nurturing community inclusivity so that no-one is left behind from 'fake news' stigma or marginalisation. In practice that means speaking out against violence against perceived or diagnosed carriers of the virus. Or as one interreligious body did: to speak out publicly against a government food programme for marginalised people that deliberately left out urban refugees – to the effect that the refugees became included as well. In this and many other ways, faith actors wanted to include the protection of rights in the comprehensive humanitarian response: whether the rights of women and girls against Gender Based Violence peaking in quarantined families, the rights of refugee camp dwellers against excessive curfew management or rights of prisoners to virus protection. Furthermore, this included the more general role of societal watchdog against the harmful effects of drastic legislation – justified by pandemic management, but often with the risk of infringing civic space and human rights, if not robustly monitored and countered by voices of weight and authority as religious leaders often have. All these interventions were described and argued as part of a comprehensive local faith actors' faith, gender and rights response to COVID-19 and funded by government humanitarian aid.

However, coordination and collaboration between the conventional humanitarian sector, including international Faith-Based Organisations, and the local faith actors are still not practiced structurally. There are challenges in the process of putting local actors at the centre of humanitarian aid. Transforming mindsets and vested power and interests is not simple. In the next paragraph, we list only two of the challenges, and try to identify the opportunities to overcome them by offering stronger collaboration between ACT Forums and Churches in COVID-19 and other disaster responses.

Challenges and Ecumenical Opportunities to Overcome Them

Challenge 1 – An international, faith-insensitive humanitarian system: far away from local actors

Secularism within the humanitarian system is often seen as a neutral frame. However, the “neutrality” of the current humanitarian system often leads to marginalisation, privatisation or instrumentalisation of religion and does not lead to neutral engagement with religious diversity and into faith- and culture-sensitive partnerships with local actors. This might disempower the voices of many affected people, who have an understanding of humanitarian aid and development in which worldly actions are not separated from spiritual beliefs.¹⁶

Three ecumenical opportunities to overcome the challenge of faith-insensitivities in the humanitarian sector

Collaboration between ACT Forums and Churches, based on the shared Ecumenical Diakonia document, offers the possibility to provide an alternative to the not-so-neutral secularised humanitarian sector, and do right by what people believe and want.

¹⁵ DanChurchAid's "Local faith actors' faith, gender and rights response to Covid-19"

¹⁶ Alastair Ager and Joey Ager, "Sustainable Development and Religion: Accommodating Diversity in a Post-Secular Age", *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 14(3) (2016), p.103.

1. ACT Forums and Churches can build on millenniums of not necessarily western diakonal experience and are familiar with a variety of understandings of humanitarian and development work. Diakonal values like presence, patience, perseverance and hope are very helpful in humanitarian work.
2. ACT Forums and Churches can use their bilingualism, i.e. they speak the faith language of God's love, hope and solidarity, and they speak the secular language of humanitarian principles, humanitarian standards, human rights, etc. Bilingualism does not mean to be double-tongued. It is a cross-disciplinary approach.
3. ACT Forums and Churches can, therefore, become translators between these two languages and bring them together so that the two languages and approaches can benefit from each other. As the moderator of the WCC Central Committee, Dr Agnes Abuom stated: "Faith-based and right-based approaches complement each other. The rights open up access to services that people need to live a decent life. Faith provides the concept of dignity, i.e. all people, regardless of colour, gender, convictions, etc. are equal and made in the likeness of God."¹⁷ The Archbishop Antje Jackelén of the Church of Sweden adds: "Human rights sharpen the eyes of faith in seeing structural needs and faith gives depth and passion to human rights."¹⁸

The Ecumenical Diakonia document also concludes that "Diakonia is rights-based action"¹⁹ and that "faith-based and right-based action affirm each other".²⁰

The localisation agenda of the humanitarian sector could be enhanced by humanitarian actors like ACT and WCC members who are bilingual, i.e. who fully understand the humanitarian language, and fully understand the faith-based diaconal language, and can facilitate the dialogue between these two.

ACT Forums and Churches can build capacity of local churches and other local faith actors in humanitarian principles and transparency standards. They can build the capacity of humanitarian workers in faith literacy and partnering with local faith actors.

Challenge 2 – Funding systems: far away from local actors

Competition among aid organisations, complex funding proposal formats, preference for INGOs in funding mechanisms, strict reporting and auditing requirements, all often contribute to local actors and churches not having access to funds. What also does not help is that they are rarely invited to humanitarian cluster meetings²¹ or shy away from them because of the jargon or unhealthy competition.

The siloed and short-term nature of most funding mechanisms does not fit the long-term and integrated work of local actors. Churches in South Sudan, for instance, do not only provide emergency aid but at the same time continue to work on long-term peace-building and development.²² They use a multi-sector, de-siloed, nexus approach *avant la lettre*. Therefore, local actors struggle with narrow, short-term and unpredictable funding and are familiar with facing "remnants of projects, many of whose objectives have not been fulfilled".²³

At present almost no funding goes directly to local actors, let alone local faith actors. The 'Global Humanitarian Assistance Report' from 2019 concludes, that it is as little as only 3.1% of the total global

¹⁷ Interview with Dr Agnes Abuom, 7th September 2018.

¹⁸ https://fabo.org/act/religion_development?section=2#2

¹⁹ Ecumenical Diakonia, p. 92.

²⁰ Ecumenical Diakonia, p. 56.

²¹ F. de Wolf and O. Wilkinson. (2019) *The Triple Nexus, Localization, and Local Faith Actors: The intersections between faith, humanitarian response, development, and peace*. (Washington DC; Copenhagen: Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities; DanChurchAid, 2019) [Available at: <https://jliflc.com/resources/triple-nexus-literature-dca>] p. 16.

²² See Stein Erik Horjen, *Reconciliation in the Sudans: Religion and Society in Africa* (Bern: Peter Lang Publishing, 2016). *The Triple Nexus* also reports on local faith actors in South-Sudan.

²³ Wolf and Wilkinson *The Triple Nexus*, p. 26.

humanitarian funding. Local state governments receive 2.7%, so only 0.4% goes directly to local civic society, including local faith actors.²⁴ More funding comes to the local actors indirectly – through INGOs and the UN. But this amount is still surprisingly little. The few who dare to systematically report on it, for instance the 25 signatories to the ‘Charter 4 Change’,²⁵ after the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 barely make it to 20%. One can only speculate how little trickles down to local actors from all those who do not report. In total, it falls very much short of the Grand Bargain²⁶ plea to make it 25% by 2020.

Three Ecumenical Opportunities to Overcome the Challenge of Existing Funding Systems

Change in the funding mechanisms is urgent, but it needs political will and it takes time. Collaboration between ACT Forums and Churches offers the possibility to explore ways of transforming the system.

1. ACT Forums and Churches can make use of the political will to transform the humanitarian funding system. The Ecumenical Diakonia document provides the moral compass for political will: it is the foundation for putting people in the centre, and for shifting and sharing power.

2. ACT Forums and Churches can benefit from the variety of time spans. Next to the existing short-term project cycles, there is also the continuous work of churches. This offers the possibility of experimenting with long-term programs of preparedness and management of disasters. Attention can be given to more sustainable or deeper ways of transformation, i.e. at the level of beliefs and behaviours.

3. ACT Forums and Churches can take risks, which is needed for learning new things and renewing systems. In the ecumenical laboratory alternative, flexible, simplified, perhaps even more transparent approaches can be designed and tested. Building a body of evidence that this approach works will serve to support advocacy for reform of funding mechanisms.

For example, the Indonesian Council of Churches (PGI) developed a smartphone application for pastoral counselling in times of COVID-19 and is now dealing with building capacity of local congregations in the field of online business. The Council also thinks of engaging church youth to measure the impact of programmes by using smartphones. This may contribute to better accountability since smartphones are even used in poor and rural villages. They can be used to find out about needs, implementation and results of programs.²⁷

Final Notes

The centre of ecumenical learning-by-doing is the ACT Forum, with its network of international, national and local churches. It was decided upon by WCC and ACT Alliance to start two pilots in Africa in 2020 on learning and documenting ways of collaboration between ACT Forums and Churches. When this decision was made, COVID-19 was not yet among us. At time of writing, now it is, and therefore it is even more timely to start the pilots, explore and take advantage of the afore-mentioned ecumenical opportunities to deal with the growing challenges in the aid sector.

Joint advocacy for better localisation of humanitarian work is being done at the international ecumenical level, in New York by the Ecumenical United Nations Office (co-owned by WCC and ACT), with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, OCHA, and in Brussels by ACT EU with the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Office, ECHO.

²⁴ <http://devinit.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/GHA-report-2019.pdf> – p. 64.

²⁵ <https://charter4change.org/>

²⁶ <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/more-support-and-funding-tools-for-local-and-national-responders> – commits to “Achieve by 2020 a global, aggregated target of at least 25 per cent of humanitarian funding to local and national responders as directly as possible to improve outcomes for affected people and reduce transactional costs.”

²⁷ Oral information of General Secretary Rev. Jacky Manuputty of the Indonesian Council of Churches, see also <https://pgi.or.id/>, with additional information of Evert van Bodegom from Kerk in Actie.

If the Inter-Agency Research and Analysis Network, IARAN's prediction in *The Future of Aid: INGOs in 2030* is correct, then "INGOs and transnational alliances will increasingly focus on advocacy and activism, while faith-based NGOs and local NGOs leverage their proximity to communities and established networks to lead on direct implementation of humanitarian programs."²⁸ WCC and ACT Alliance are in the middle of this and are in the position to experiment, to risk, to learn, to transform, and to contribute to localisation, reflected in the Grand Bargain and other initiatives.

Suggestions for Further Reading

ACT Global Strategy 2019-2026 [Available at: <https://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Global-Strategy-2019-2026.pdf>]

Ager, Allistair and Joey Ager. "Sustainable Development and Religion: Accommodating Diversity in a Post-Secular Age", *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 14(3) (2016), pp.101-105.

Horjen, Stein Erik. *Reconciliation in the Sudans: Religion and Society in Africa*, Bern: Peter Lang Publishing, 2016.

PaRD webinar on "COVID-19 Pandemic: Challenges for religious/faith actors and communities? Responses from the field and global partners" [Available at: <https://www.partner-religion-development.org/service/news-archive/article/pard-webinar-on-covid-19-a-test-for-our-humanity/>]

Religion and Development. A 10 short module interactive e-learning course (for free) on the interaction between religion and development – to form effective multilateral partnerships among secular and faith actors (SDG 17). [Available at: https://fabo.org/course/religion_development]

Wilkinson, O. and F. de Wolf. *The Triple Nexus, Localization, and Local Faith Actors: The intersections between faith, humanitarian response, development, and peace*. Washington DC; Copenhagen: Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities; DanChurchAid, 2019. [Available at: <https://jliflc.com/resources/triple-nexus-literature-dca/>]

²⁸ *The Future of Aid: INGOs in 2030*, IARAN, 2016, <https://www.iran.org/future-of-aid>

81. CHRISTIAN SOCIAL WITNESS TOWARDS POLARISATION, MARKETS AND MONEY – PIVOTAL MOMENTS FROM THE U.S. CONTEXT

Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty¹

Like other Western nations, U.S. society is deeply divided today on how to debate and navigate different proposals and opinions regarding public policies, how to confront discrimination on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation, physical and mental ability, and nation of origin, how to reduce inequality and address poverty, the growing wealth gap, and patterns of overconsumption. We get our news from different sources that are often catered to our own interests, and hold onto deeply entrenched ideas about U.S. economic policies, climate change, involvement in war, access to health care, reproductive rights, immigration, taxation, public education, racism and reparations, among other issues. A neoliberal political and economic agenda has been the dominant force since the 1980s shaping public policies that are increasing wealth inequalities in the U.S. and worldwide, concentrating wealth in smaller and more elite groups, encouraging state and corporate disinvestment from social welfare, and placing more and more of the burden of education and caregiving on individuals and families. Within this context of political and economic polarisation, an ethic of scarcity all too often dominates debates and there is a widespread trust placed in markets to determine most efficiently the value of goods, labour, and the fair allocation of resources.

Moreover, polarisation impacts not only politics and economics, but also churches and their understanding and framing of social witness in the U.S. Some preachers argue that politics and the pulpit do not mix, even though it is clear in the pews that they do. A distinctive feature of U.S. Christianity in comparison to other Western nations is that churches are voluntary associations dependent upon donations for their survival and mission. In addition, political affiliation can influence church affiliation. Questions of morality often break along racial ethnic and denominational lines.² Many churches identify as Republican red or Democratic blue, only a few encourage conversations beyond partisan politics.

Take, for example, the attitudes of various Christian groups toward immigration. A Pew Forum Poll conducted in 2006 showed that “large segments of the public – including many Catholics, mainline Protestants, and Evangelicals – harbour serious concerns about immigrants and immigration.”³ White Evangelicals are “particularly wary” of immigrants as a threat to U.S. culture and customs with over 80 percent of white Evangelicals supporting Donald Trump. Comments made by Robert Jeffress, the pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, a staunch Calvinist, and ardent Trump support, in defence of our 45th president’s call to extend the wall along the U.S. southern border are representative of this side of the immigration debate. Jeffress suggests, “Government is an organisation God uses to bring vengeance against those who practice evil.”⁴ In the book, *God and Donald Trump*, Stephen Strange, “The unspoken assumption for [...] religious figures [...] from Franklin Graham to Robert Jeffress to Kenneth Copeland – is that God

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² See Pew Research Center available online at: <https://www.vox.com/identities/2017/10/11/16447008/christianity-america-politically-polarized>

³ Tom Rosentiel and Gregory A. Smith, “Attitudes Toward Immigration: In the Pulpit and the Pew.” Pew Research Center (25th April 2006). [Available online at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/2006/04/25/attitudes-toward-immigration-in-the-pulpit-and-the-pew/>]

⁴ Peter Henne, “Why Robert Jeffress is Wrong About Romans 13 (And North Korea).” *Huffington Post* (10th August 2017). [Available online at: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/why-robert-jeffress-is-wrong-about-romans-13-and-north_b_598c69ee4b08a4c247f28ad]

would only want a Republican president and so if Trump captured the GOP nomination, then ipso facto he must be God's choice. And the more unlikely the selection, the better proof it is of divine intent."⁵ At the same time, Trump's hardline immigration policies also propelled progressive Christians and the ecumenical movement in the U.S. into action to work in partnership with other organisations to stimulate a new Sanctuary Movement. Forty state networks and coalitions and 1100 houses of worship support the Sanctuary Movement today to build capacity for advocacy and organise vigils, marches, and meetings with lawmakers as well as to provide support for families.⁶

This brief description of the U.S. context suggests that churches are living in and considering the importance of social witness at a pivotal moment in our nation's history and around the world. Religious leaders have the opportunity to reorient debates, policies, and frame the right questions that will enable us to live into an alternative social logic beyond the contrasts and conflicts between red vs. blue, haves vs. have-nots, housed vs. homeless, free vs. incarcerated, legal resident vs. illegal alien and migrant, able-bodied vs. mentally and physically impaired, etc.

Gospel stories calls us into the world through the experiences and perspectives of those most vulnerable and pushed farthest to the margins of church and society. Jesus announces the beginning of his public ministry in the synoptic gospels by gathering disciples and proclaiming that he comes to release the captives, bring good news to people living in poverty, and heal every disease (Mt. 4:23-25; Mk. 1:14-28; Lk. 4:14-30). This article explores a crucial concern for ecumenical social witness – the polarising effect of the widening wealth divide, the persistence of grinding poverty, and the misuse of our natural environment – from a theological perspective. These three intertwined crises have captured the attention of the ecumenical movement for more than a century. Statements such as the Social Creed (Federal Council of Churches 1908), the Accra Confession (World Communion of Reformed Churches 2004), the Agape Document (World Council of Churches 2006), and *Economy for Life, Peace, and Justice for All* (WCC 2012) and *International Financial Transformation for the Economy of Life* (WCC 2012) provide examples of the ecumenical movement's investment in these issues. The ecumenical movement has been such a leader in this dialogue precisely because religious traditions invite us into an alternative social logic and offer a different way of questioning and envisioning our relationship to money, markets, wealth, debt, and the broader community.

Money, Markets, Wealth Inequalities and Debt in the Christian Theological Perspective

In the biblical texts, markets, money, and the creation of wealth are all within the sphere of God's reign. God's reign is most often described in the terms of the struggle for access to basic resources, particularly food, land, and housing, between the rich and the poor. In other words, questions regarding economic justice and the fair distribution of wealth and other resources in the gospel stories are raised from the perspective of the 90-95 per cent of people who lived in poverty in the Greco Roman world. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that Jesus and his early followers looked socially upward as they began to define conversations about poverty, wealth inequalities, and indebtedness. Their stories situate the conversation in the perspective of people living in poverty and offers a distinctive theological approach that frames the problem as wealth and how we create it.

Scholars and religious social activists underscore the fact there are more than 2000 references to wealth, poverty, and social justice in the biblical texts. Nineteen of the thirty-one parables Jesus tells in the synoptic Gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke include direct references to social class, indebtedness, the misuse of

⁵ Amy Sullivan, "Millions of Americans Believe God Made Trump President." *Politico Magazine* (27th January 2018). Accessed online at <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/01/27/millions-of-americans-believe-god-made-trump-president-216537>

⁶ For a "New Report: Sanctuary in the Ages of Trump" go to <https://www.sanctuarynotdeportation.org/sanctuary-report-2018.html>

wealth, worker pay, and the distribution of wealth. Throughout the Gospel stories, Jesus contextualises his teaching about money, markets and the economy and rejects, abandons, and reforms the organisation of the economy within the household as culturally defined by the Roman Empire.

The Greek root of the word economics is *oikos*, meaning household. In the ancient Greco-Roman world, the male head of the family or *paterfamilias* was given tremendous power to organise resources to ensure wealth for a particular family line. Consistently, however, Jesus reorients and reorganises the household toward a larger community. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus throws out blessings to those who would have been considered social losers – among them people who are poor, hungry and thirsty, and persecuted. The petition to “Give us this day our daily bread” in the Lord’s Prayer is one of the foundation stones of Jesus’ economics and has to be heard within the context of food fights that extend throughout the stories of the bible.

Biblical scholar, Walter Bruggemann says that food fights in a subsistence economy are about food, access to land, and being able to provide shelter for oneself and one’s family; the struggle between those who have much and those who do not have enough. The food fights in the biblical narrative show evidence of contrasting ideas and ways of thinking about the world and God’s relation to it. The contrast comes between the conviction that the world is a closed system of limited resources (only landowners and successful farmers have food and no debts), against the idea that creation is a process open to the continued gifts of God and human collaboration (everyone is worthy of food and freedom from perpetual bondage to debt).

Jesus questions and neutralises the coalition between wealth and kinship throughout his parables and the appropriation of wealth to benefit only or primarily the wealthiest. He refuses to normalise scarcity and affirms the inherent worthiness of all to have food and to be free from debt as he prays for daily food, daily bread. An example is found in Luke 14:12: “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbours; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed.” That was breaking some of the social rules of eating, purity, piety, access, relationships, which of course, all were connected to power.

Anthropologist David Graeber observes, “for thousands of years the struggle between the rich and the poor has largely taken the form of conflicts between creditors and debtors – rights and wrongs of interest payments, debt peonage, amnesty, repossession, restitution, the sequestering of sheep, the seizing of vineyards and the selling of debtors children into slavery.”⁷ Graeber further suggests that concepts of reckoning and redemption emerge most directly in the ancient world from the language of finance. Historically, debt was always tied to a broader context and community and, particularly within the traditions of Abraham and Sarah and Hagar, relationships between creditors and debtors were also subject to God’s reign.

Directives to cancel debt balance references the persistence of poverty throughout the Torah. Debt in the ancient world economy was directly tied to the ability to provide food for one’s family. Most loans were for seed, tools, animals, or access to water for small farmers who did not always own their own land. If weather, war, or blight impacted harvests, farmers and their families could be placed at great risk. A series of bad years meant not only less food but also more debt. Destitute farmers could be forced to work for their creditors, thrown into wage labour, or into begging. Passages in the Torah in Exodus, Deuteronomy, and Leviticus about Sabbath keeping, Jubilee, and debt release reframed the relationship between creditor and debtor. The debt codes in Leviticus call for the release of people in poverty from debts every seven years so that they will not be forced to perpetually lives as a permanent underclass. The nature of relationships within the community reflected the nature of God’s relationship with the world and the conviction that the world is God’s sphere of continual creativity and human collaboration.⁸

⁷ Ilsup Ahn, *Just Debt*. (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2017), p. 17.

⁸ See Norman Gottwald, “Abusing the Bible: The Case of Deuteronomy 15.” *Review and Expositor* 2 (2014): p. 197.

Musa Dube, a Ghanaian scholar and leader in the ecumenical movement, reminds us that the Lord's Prayer in Matthew is set within the context of the Sermon on the Mount and bears all the reminders of God's liberation of the Israelites from slavery. The petition to "forgive us from our debts as we forgive our debtors," directly confronted "the economic structures of Palestine in the time of the Roman Empire. The Lord's Prayer was suggesting that unmet taxes and unpaid loans must be let go. The suggestion is not synonymous with the deliberate evasion of taxes or paying of loans. Rather, it is a challenge to systemic structures that lock many responsible hard-working individuals and nations into a vicious cycle of poverty and debts."⁹ In these words, Jesus emphasises holiness in the act of being freed from bondage to others as opposed to sanctifying the repayment of debts.

What Does This Imply in Terms of Christian Mission and Social Witness Today?

Debates about money, markets, wealth, and debt are framed primarily in terms of market-oriented logic in our current context. All of these are seen primarily as transactional, which avoids evaluating our relationships with them from a theological and moral perspective. Beginning our conversations regarding wealth inequalities, poverty, and environmental destruction from a theological perspective enables us to frame a new set of questions to consider for Christian mission and social witness. Consider the theological discussion outlined above in reference to the U.S. context.

In the U.S. alone, 38.1 million people lived below the federal poverty line in 2017. 18.5 million are living in extreme poverty in the U.S., according to U.N. figures.¹⁰ Adults with a disability represent the largest percentage of people living in poverty (26%). Other groups with disproportionately high rates of poverty include single moms (25%), black Americans (21%), Hispanic Americans (18%), and foreign-born citizens (18%).¹¹

In the U.S., many families in a low-income group (the bottom 20%) spend more than 40% of their income simply paying off debts. Poor credit is often an issue for people with low incomes and means that, when borrowing money, they will be charged higher rates of interest. The median household savings in the U.S. is \$11 700. Nearly one third of U.S. households have less than \$1000 in savings.

People living in poverty are much more likely than middle class and wealthy families to live near hazardous waste facilities. According to a 2007 study conducted by the United Church of Christ, poverty rates in neighbourhoods hosting hazardous waste facilities "are 1.5 times greater than those in non-host areas (18% vs. 12%), and mean annual household incomes in host neighbourhoods are 15% lower".¹² This disproportionately impacts people of colour, "More than 5.1 million people of colour, including 2.5 million Hispanics or Latinos, 1.8 million African Americans, 616 000 Asians/Pacific Islanders and 62 000 Native Americans, live in neighbourhoods with one or more commercial hazardous waste facility."¹³

At the same time, according to the Economic Policy Institute, between 1978 and 2011, CEO compensation increased by 725 per cent.¹⁴ The average family in the top 1 per cent had an income in 2013 of more than \$1.1 million compared to the average income of the 99 per cent of around \$46 000.

⁹ Musa Dube Shomanah, "Praying the Lord's Prayer in a Global Economic Era." *The Ecumenical Review* (1st January 1997): p. 447.

¹⁰ Jeff Stein, "The U.N. says 18.5 million Americans are in 'extreme poverty.' Trump's team says just 250,000 are." *The Washington Post* (25th June 2018). [Accessed online at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2018/06/25/trump-team-rebukes-u-n-saying-it-overestimates-extreme-poverty-in-america-by-18-million-people/>].

¹¹ U.S. Poverty Statistics [Accessed online at <http://federalstafety.net.com/us-poverty-statistics.html>].

¹² See "Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty." Accessible online at https://www.ucc.org/environmental-ministries_toxic-waste-20

¹³ "Toxic Wastes and Race".

¹⁴ Lawrence Mishel, "CEO Pay 231 Times Greater Than the Average Worker," *Economic Snapshot: Poverty and Inequality*, Economic Policy Institute, 3rd May 2012.

These statistics fail to capture the global reach of poverty and impact of growing wealth inequalities in a world where 1.2 billion people continue to live in extreme poverty on less than \$1.25 a day. Half of the world's people live on less than \$2.50 a day. According to the *New York Times*, at the same time “Just eight of the richest people on earth own as much combined wealth as half the human race.”¹⁵

The alternative social logic of Christian faith challenges us to examine our personal and communal approach to and relationship with money, markets, debt, poverty, and wealth inequalities through a theocentric and ecocentric lens. An alternative social logic can be found by critically challenging the philosophy and anthropology of neo-liberal economic doctrines, by building economic competencies to redefine the economic paradigms behind them and by developing economic political models of ecological, social, political and cultural embeddedness. In the U.S., there are many examples of individuals and groups working to reorient their resources toward a larger community by advocating for alternative approaches to money, markets, and wealth creation, such as the Christian food movement, solar power cooperatives, worker-owned businesses, social collaboratories, and re-envisioning stewardship with economic justice in mind. Framing the right questions as they emerge from a wide variety of different contexts in which we live will be essential in these polarised times to carefully define the church's mission in response to God's call “to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly” (Micah 6:8) together.

Study Questions

- In your context, how does market-oriented logic define individual and communal orientations toward money, markets, debt, poverty and wealth? In what ways, have you experienced and/or witnessed individuals and communities reorient resources of their “households” toward a larger community?
- Where do we continue to see the struggle between people who are extremely wealthy and those living in poverty continue to take the form of conflicts between creditors and debtors? How can and do you see individuals and communities reframing the relationship between creditor and debtor in the U.S. and around the world?
- How does social class function within your individual congregations and denominations? What different roles can and should people play in addressing wealth inequalities? Consider a variety of perspectives including those who are wealthy, the middle classes, and those living on lower incomes, and/or in poverty.
- Where do you see strong alliances in your church with movements for economic justice in your local community and/or around the world? What change have these movements been able to make and what is limiting their ministry?

Suggestions for Further Reading

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¹⁵ https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/16/world/eight-richest-wealth-oxfam.html?mcubz=0&_r=0

82. DIGITALISATION IN DIACONIA – DESCRIPTION AND ETHICAL REFLECTION

Melissa Henne¹

Drivers of Digitalisation Processes

Digitalisation has led to deep changes in our societies, in social structures and conditions, in the way we communicate and behave.² These changes also influence our social and caring systems. Today, technologies are often used in supporting processes, like administration or documentation. Step-by-step digitalisation has also become part of the caring process, e.g. many people with cognitive disabilities need support to use computers or smartphones.

These changes progress very quickly. In developed countries, there are several social processes, which use new technologies in the social sector. First of all, the technologies provide many new opportunities to support people with different forms of disabilities in their daily life. These opportunities should be seized. Therefore, technologies have to be designed in a way that people with disabilities are able to use them, so that they can benefit from the advantages.

Furthermore, there is the hope that these technologies can help to work on the challenges of demographic change. Elderly people can possibly live longer in their usual living environment if they receive technical support or if professional caregivers can be supported by new systems in their work. There is also the expectation that the use of technologies could cut costs in social services. However, it is not possible to predict whether these expectations will become true or whether the costs will increase even more.

Many social organisations are trying to develop new innovative offers and services which meet the needs of their clients. Digitalisation offers new opportunities for such innovations. This list shows that there are many different reasons for using technologies in the social sector. It is important to clarify what the purpose of digitalisation processes are. Otherwise, we cannot prove whether such systems offer meaningful support.³

Features of New Technologies in Social Services

Already today, technologies have many different functionalities. Most users cannot grasp all these functionalities and understand how they work. This complexity is going to increase and the connectivity of many devices, which regularly exchange information and data among themselves, is going to especially reinforce this process.

In the future, technologies are going to be proactive, they will be able to speak to their users and to give them advice on what to do or not to do. They will be adaptive, which means that they will adapt their behaviour to the habits and preferences of their users. Systems will be able to make decisions independently, even in situations they are not programmed for. These kinds of technologies are often called “autonomous systems”. They act more and more like humans, sometimes they even look like human beings – e.g. humanoid robots.

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² Christian Dopheide, *Zur Digitalisierung des Sozialen – Ethische und ökonomische Reflexionen*. (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2017), p. 61.

³ Melissa Henne, “Ethische Reflexion technischer Unterstützung in der Pflege”. *Die Schwester/Der Pfleger*, 1 (2019), p. 60.

By using implants, it is even possible to integrate such systems into the human body, so the difference between technology and human beings is no longer perceptible.⁴

To give an example, a “care robot” in the future could provide many functions – monitoring patients, supporting their personal hygiene, structuring their daily life or talking to them. It could be able to make decisions for its users, if they are not able to decide on their own because of cognitive disabilities. The robot could choose clothes, determine what to eat for breakfast or which movement exercises should be done.

With these autonomous systems, it becomes possible to use technologies in areas which were previously reserved for human help. In former times, whenever people were not able to take decisions on their own, they needed the support of other people. In these situations, the supporting people had to take responsibility for those who received the help. In future, we may be able to delegate these kinds of decisions and the responsibility for doing so to technologies like care robots.⁵

These changes can provide a revolutionary change to social care. Social professions will have to realign their actions and methods. They need new professional concepts which will not only focus on the relationship between caregivers and clients but are also able to integrate technological systems. Social professions should not just adjust their methods to these new circumstances, they should create them in an active way.

These developments contain many professional questions, e.g. how can caregivers support people with disabilities in using social media and new technologies or how can assistive technologies be used to support their participation in society?

There are also economical questions. Who has to pay for these systems – the users themselves, social services, or society? Can social services negotiate financing for technologies as a part of their services?

There are legal obligations, e.g. it should be checked who has to assume liability in case of technological mistakes. Who is responsible for systems which adapt continuously to their users and develop themselves – the manufacturers, users, social services or even the technological systems themselves?⁶

Ethical Reflection

Beyond professional, economical and legal questions, ethical dimensions should also be considered. These dimensions can roughly be sorted into three categories:

- 1) Ethical dimensions that concern the self-understanding of human beings: What makes man human? What does it mean to live humanly? How does the self-understanding of human beings change by using technologies? Is there a dissolution between human beings and technologies? How do we evaluate enhancement in which technologies are not used to compensate for impairments, but to optimise human skills?
- 2) Ethical dimensions in interpersonal relationships: How do we want to live together? Do technologies like smartphones change our way of communication and our relationships? How can we protect users' privacy? How do we answer questions of justice? Who gets access to new technologies? Do users need special skills? Are technical support systems for care funded by the state? Under what conditions are the technologies produced? How is the necessary energy obtained? What is our understanding of care? What constitutes good care in times of digitalisation? Do we want to substitute personal care by using technologies? Are there limits?
- 3) Ethical dimensions between users and technologies in respect to the manufacturers: Do technologies keep their promises? Do users e.g. really become more independent? Do the systems really offer more security to their users or do they just create a feeling of security? Are users able to understand the

⁴ Melissa Henne, *Technik, die begeistert: Ethische Reflexion technischer Unterstützung in der Diakonie ausgehend vom Capabilities Approach nach Martha Nussbaum* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2019), pp. 86-87.

⁵ Henne, “Digitale Teilhabe und ethische Reflexion”.

⁶ Henne, *Technik, die begeistert*, p. 70.

functions of these complex technologies and the effects of the usage, even though they have cognitive disabilities? Do technologies even fool their users, e.g. by inducing certain behaviour?⁷

Such ethical implications of developing and using new technologies are increasingly addressed in science. Many technological development projects not only work on technological questions but also reflect on the “ethical, legal and social implications” (ELSI).⁸

So far, there are only a few approaches and methods to evaluate these questions in a systematic way. One example of these methods is “MEESTAR”, a “model for the ethical evaluation of social-technical arrangements”. MEESTAR is “an analytical instrument which guides the process of reflection on the use of a technology”.⁹ It provides seven ethical dimensions: care, autonomy, safety, privacy, justice, participation and self-conception. The evaluators reflect on these dimensions from three different points of views (individual, organisational and social), rate them and assign them on one of four levels. The first level means the “use of the technology is completely harmless from an ethical viewpoint”.¹⁰ The second and third levels mean that the use is sensitive or even extremely sensitive, but it can be compensated or has to be permanently monitored. On the fourth level, the use of a technology “should be opposed from an ethical viewpoint”.¹¹

Several organisations and committees also developed statements or guidelines for using technological support in social care. *Alzheimer’s Europe*, e.g. have published guidelines on using assistive technology in dementia care.¹²

So far, hardly any ethical approaches are developed from the specific point of view of social organisations. Using models like MEESTAR can help them to approach these questions. Developing an organisation’s own ethical guidelines can also be helpful – to define objectives, give orientation to employees and even to set limits around the use of technology. Social organisations should also clarify responsibilities and define structured processes for ethical reflections. It is important to consider different perspectives and to involve different groups of people into these processes – executives and employees, and clients and their members, for example. If people with disabilities are involved, special methods may need to be developed, e.g. discussion formats in a simple language or a translation into sign language.¹³

Guidelines for Ethical Decisions

Such models or guidelines are helpful to reflect on the ethical questions of using technical support in social organisations. Nevertheless, these approaches do not address one central question: what are the overriding criteria for these evaluations? Based on which standards can we decide if a technology is ethically justifiable or not?

These questions refer to the goals of social work and to what people need, to live a life in dignity – as human beings in general, as well as individually, in each specific situation.¹⁴

⁷ Henne, *Technik, die begeistert*, p. 118.

⁸ Kehl (2018): *Wege zu verantwortungsvoller Forschung*, p. 150.

⁹ Arne Manzeschke, Karsten Weber, Elisabeth Rother, Heiner Fangerau, “Ethical questions in the area of age appropriate assisting systems” 2 (Berlin: VDE/VDI, 2015), p. 13.

¹⁰ Manzeschke et al. “Ethical questions”, p. 13.

¹¹ Manzeschke et al. “Ethical questions”, p. 13.

¹² Alzheimer’s Europe, “The ethical issues linked to the use of assistive technology in dementia care”. (2010) [Available at: <https://www.alzheimer-europe.org/Ethics/Ethical-issues-in-practice/2010-The-ethical-issues-linked-to-the-use-of-assistive-technology-in-dementia-care>], [Accessed 29th January 2020].

¹³ Henne. *Digitale Teilhabe und ethische Reflexion*, p. 53.

¹⁴ Mark Coeckelbergh, “Health care, capabilities an AI assistive technologies”. *Ethics of Information Technology*, Volume 13(2) (2010), p.190.

Social services should work towards enabling their clients to achieve such a good life, regardless of whether the individual measures are performed personally or technically. Therefore, this goal should be the main criteria for using technology in social services.

To explain what living a life in dignity means, diaconal organisations often refer to “the Christian image of man” but without specifying what constitutes this image. In secularised societies or in those where Christians are in the minority, it is not self-evident what “the Christian image of man” means. It has to be explained.

In fact, the term “the Christian image of man” is problematic because it is not able to show the multidimensionality of views concerning human beings.¹⁵ There is not only one Christian image of man. The Bible shows different images and views on human beings.¹⁶ Even if we could define one Christian image of man, could it be the answer to actual questions on the relationship between human beings and technological developments if it is based on ideas which are 2000 years old?

A Life in Dignity – Capabilities According to Martha Nussbaum

If we do not have one image of man which social or diaconal work can align to, we need an alternative description of what constitutes such a life in dignity. To discuss and evaluate this, the “capabilities approach”, developed by the American philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum, can be used. Nussbaum describes the basic requirements of a decent life. From her point of view, people need ten different “central capabilities” to live a good life. Capabilities “are the answer to the question, ‘what is this person able to do or to be?’”¹⁷ For example, people have to be able to live, to have good bodily health, to use their senses, imaginations and thoughts, to live towards and with others or to have control over one’s environment.

To develop these capabilities, people not only need personal abilities but also social circumstances which enable them to develop and use them. For example, people who are able to read cannot use this ability if they do not have access to literature.

According to Nussbaum, every state has to build social circumstances in which all citizens are able to develop and use the central capabilities. Then, people are able to decide on their own whether they want to use these capabilities or not. They have the freedom to choose and are able to live according to their own ideas of a good life.¹⁸

Many states delegate parts of this task to social services. Therefore, these services work on the implementation of the right to live such a life in dignity.¹⁹

Nussbaum created the capabilities approach as a universal approach, independent from different cultures or religions. In her opinion, everybody has the right to develop the central capabilities, all over the world.

Because of this universal perspective, the approach can be also used in Christian contexts, such as diaconia, as a basis for further discussions on what constitutes a life in dignity. Nussbaum expressly invites you to discuss and substantiate the approach in the respective context. Based on these considerations, social organisations can define what constitutes good care which supports such a dignified life. This, in turn, can form the basis for further evaluations as to whether individual care measurements should be done in a personal or technical form.²⁰

¹⁵ Marcus Düwell, “Menschenbilder und Anthropologie in der Bioethik” *Ethik in der Medizin*, Jahrgang 23, Ausgabe 1 (2011), pp. 25-32.

¹⁶ Beate Hofmann, “Grundlagen diakonischer Unternehmenskultur”. In: Beate Hofmann, and Stephan Haas (eds.), *Diakonische Unternehmenskultur – Handbuch für Führungskräfte*. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2010), pp. 24-26.

¹⁷ Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, p. 20.

¹⁸ Nussbaum, *Creating capabilities*, pp. 17-45.

¹⁹ Henne, *Technik, die begeistert!?* p. 265.

²⁰ Henne, *Technik, die begeistert!?* pp. 236-239.

Digitalisation: Inspirations, Risks and Social Discourse

It has become clear that actual technological developments lead to new opportunities to use digital systems in care, not only in supporting processes, like administration, but also in core processes and in the direct support from person to person. If social professions and organisations do not just want to wait for these changes but help shape them in an active way, they have to deal with these developments, their opportunities and risks. Social professions need new concepts and methods which are able to integrate personal and technical support, based on the wishes and needs of the people who need care.

Furthermore, ethical reflections are needed and should be based on the clearest possible objectives for care. As many perspectives as possible should be included in the reflection processes and the results should not only be used within the organisation but also in social discourse. In order to do that, diaconal organisations should actively participate in central social change processes. They can work to ensure that the social system not only adapts to technological developments but uses them to support people in leading a life in dignity.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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83. CARE AND CARE DEFICIT

Christine Globig¹

The term “care” has established itself since the 1980s as a technical term in European and American philosophy and ethics, in different social sciences, as well as in pedagogical and medical disciplines.² It denotes diverse caring activities, which all people depend on existentially in their lives, “beginning from the vulnerable time being an infant, to circumstances of serious diseases, up to the period at the end of life when strength is failing.”³ Care responds affirmatively to human vulnerability and interpersonal dependency.

The Ethics of Care considers those activities which take place in the household, in the care of children, patients, elderly people and in social services. Care describes a multi-layered and laborious work, which scarcely has a societal and theoretical perception. Because of care activities being hidden, mainly done by women in domestic spaces, it already receives little appreciation. “According to the gender order contract underlying modern societies [...], it was understood as a derivate of female nature, provided in the private sphere of the single family.”⁴ Yet Care work is not implicit, but a work in and for itself and of a kind that requires high emotional and mental commitment and temporal expenditure. Care work is demanding; it calls for prudence in different contexts, high organisational skills and motivation. Additionally, Care requires a precise perception of people in need, aptitude in empathy, competence to act and willingness to take responsibility in given situations.

At the beginning of these discussions, starting with Carol Gilligan’s well-known book, *In a Different Voice*,⁵ the question of different, gender specific concepts of self and morality was asked. Nowadays, the discourse rather focuses on the highly present Care Deficit, which ties into the earlier discussion about the esteem of household and reproduction work. The distinction between public and private live in the Care discourse however is no longer present, as care of children and elderly people also takes place in the public space, in Care institutions and as market economy-orientated services. Also, Care work as an employment is mainly done by women often in precarious working conditions and barely appropriately paid.⁶ Furthermore, the allocation of Care services has become an issue of global resource distribution.

The Ethics of Care reacts critically to the idea of an autonomous subject, dominating in the western tradition of thought. According to this idea, the subject is (or should be) self-determined and requires help from others only in exceptional cases. The Ethics of Care relativises this claim; and peoples’ existential dependency is brought up realistically. On the one hand, it remains indisputable that the autonomy of the

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² Thank you to Rahel Gerrens for her friendly support in translating this contribution into English. Also, all German quotations are translated by us.

³ Christel Kumbruck, Mechthild Rumpf, and Eva Senghaas-Knobloch, *Unsichtbare Pflegearbeit. Fürsorgliche Praxis auf der Suche nach Anerkennung*, Studien zur Pflege Bd. 3, Protestantische Impulse für Gesellschaft und Kirche Bd. 10 (Münster: Lit.-Verlag, 2010), p. 3.

⁴ Ursula Apitzsch, “Care, Migration, and the Gender Order”, in *Care and Migration. Die Ent-Sorgung menschlicher Reproduktionsarbeit entlang von Geschlechter- und Armutsgrenzen* (eds) Ursula Apitzsch and Marianne Schmidtbauer (Opladen & Farmington Hills, MI: Barbara Budrich Verlag, 2010), pp. 113-125, p. 113.

⁵ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1982).

⁶ Gabriele Winker, *Care Revolution: Schritte in eine solidarische Gesellschaft* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2015).

person in need should remain best possible outcome, but, on the other hand, the unbalanced relationship and the conditions of dependency have to be accepted by both sides.⁷ Balancing this task can be a difficult process that cannot be avoided by theoretically downplaying the conditions of human dependency! According to the German ethicist Dietmar Mieth, the claim for autonomy is often theoretically “stated in such a way, as if advocacy for ‘more’ autonomy is reclaimed as ‘liberal’ in the sense of thinking freedom, on the other hand, each advocacy for protection of life and Care, which orientates itself at real freedom and real capabilities, is discriminated as ‘fundamentalist’ or ‘paternalistic’ [...] The logical problem consists in thinking of freedom and autonomy context-free and abstractly, while medical and nursing [and other caring C.G.] measures come into view as concrete and vulnerable actions [...] Autonomy on the other hand is freed from other contexts and criteria, meaning it is introduced as an ideal image.”⁸ Such an ideal of human freedom, which dominates current western philosophy, ethics and theology, results in Care work – which thwarts the ideal of human freedom as it operates in dependency relationships constantly –not coming up in many theoretical discussion contexts.

In the industrial nations the capacities for caring activities are declining, which has caused an alarming development. The American sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild has already introduced the term “Care Deficit” for this issue before the turn of the millennium.⁹ In western states, currently, a severe scarcity of labour force is recorded, which prospectively will intensify in the near future. Time and expression of Care, support and assistance are lacking increasingly in both families and Care institutions. In Germany and in other European countries, the nursing crisis in hospitals and retirement homes is prevailing. Also, many families are under the stress of not being able to cover the requirements of childcare and Care for the elderly. Only the states of Scandinavia have developed progressive state systems of Care.¹⁰ For many other industrial nations, however, it has to be said: “Care is in all facets a comprehensive crisis [...] The Care for others often becomes a crucial test for the affected and the hence emerging consequences and dilemmas are, as an individual, almost irresolvable.” “Specialists for education, nursing and Care are overstrained [everywhere], as their working conditions are worsening (work intensification, time pressure, staff shortage, precarious employment conditions).” “Care-tasks are still ‘somehow’ taken over, but usually for a high cost, which is mainly paid by overworked mothers, stressed nursing relatives, burned-out nursing staff and educators.” “It is challenging, that [...]the] Care crisis appears only in some instances, when women and men are trying, individually and usually with a lot of effort, to overcome structural societal difficulties”.¹¹

The central cause for the Care Deficit is the fact that women remain responsible for Care Work, even under the conditions of their professional occupation. The resources for Care Work become scarce, because women are working out-of-house and are increasingly demanded to provide mobility and willingness for longer working hours. At the same time, there are less grandmothers or other relatives for support. Children, sick or elderly people cannot be sufficiently looked after, especially, if there is a lack of Care institutions. These arising deficits are not compensated by the state. On the contrary, currently, public authorities again rely more heavily on the family’s responsibility. Furthermore, the shifting of nursing and Care towards the market economy-orientated service sector itself leads to the Care Deficit. Of course, the demographic change in the

⁷ Theda Rehbock, “Autonomie – Fürsorge – Paternalismus. Zur Kritik (medizin-)ethischer Grundbegriffe”, *Ethik in der Medizin* 14 (2002), pp. 131-150.

⁸ Dietmar Mieth, *Grenzenlose Selbstbestimmung? Der Wille und die Würde Sterbender* (Düsseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 2008), p. 103.

⁹ Arlie Russell Hochschild, “The Culture of Politics. Traditional, Postmodern, Cold-modern, and Warm-modern Ideals of Care”, *Social Politics* 2(3) (1995), pp. 333-346.

¹⁰ Cornelia Heintze, “Care-Dienste von der Wiege bis zur Bahre. Das skandinavische System im Vergleich”, in *Um-Care zum Leben. Ökonomische, theologische, ethische und ökologische Aspekte von Sorgearbeit* (eds) Waltraud Waidelich and Margit Baumgarten (Hamburg: VSA Verlag, 2018), pp. 35-65.

¹¹ Manifest “CareMachtMehr”, <http://www.care-macht-mehr.com/>

western countries intensifies the issue considerably. “Demographic factors such as the rise in elderly population, changes in family structures, and social policies including the retrenchment of the welfare state, ‘care in community’, and intersections of demography, economics and socio-cultural forces (the changing role of women, feminisation of labour force etc), mean that, to put it crudely, female EU citizens [and US-Americans C.G.] are no longer spending so much time doing caring work within the family. Yet that caring work continues to be necessary – and it is difficult to imagine a society where it will not continue to be so.”¹² With the fact that caring attention is not any longer sufficiently given, it becomes clear that Care cannot count as a natural resource that can be assumed as available without giving it any consideration, cultivation and appreciation. If experiences of Care for the most people were natural, it is in fact presupposed that other people found time and energy for empathy and so many of these subtle actions, which convey the feeling of comfort to others.

Globally speaking, the most relevant consequence of the Care Deficit is the labour migration of domestic workers, nannies and nursing staff from emerging countries into industrial nations.¹³ The proportion of migrating women exceeds the proportion of men, because domestic services of women are in demand internationally. They migrate from Southeast and South Asia, from Central and South America and from Eastern Europe into the wealthier neighbouring countries. According to the International Labour Organization in 2013, “100 million women and girls [were] working as domestic and care-workers worldwide; in nearly half the countries in the world they are unprotected by national labour laws. Although on the whole data in this sector are inaccurate, it is clear that at the beginning of the 21st century, most of these women are either internal migrants – from the countryside to the urban centres, as in China – or external (transnational) migrants moving within regions (e.g. from the Philippines and Indonesia to Taiwan or from Eastern to Western Europe, or even moving on an transatlantic scale). The phenomenon of the ‘global woman’ [...] has become one of the main features of the *feminisation of migration*.”¹⁴

This results in a series of chain reactions: Often, in the home countries of the migrants, similar supports relationships are established; the migrating women leave their relatives who are in need to be looked after by cheaper labour forces.¹⁵ The loss of Care resources leads to a “Care Drain” each time in the poorer countries and to a “Care Chain” that is then built by the women of different countries (the terms Care Drain and Care Chain have also been shaped by Arlie Russell Hochschild and are the discourse’s points of reference).¹⁶ The migration of women always takes place to the detriment of the poorer: “At the other end of this global care chain [...] are families in the sending countries, in particular children and elderly people in need of care, who

¹² Bridget Anderson, *Reproductive Labour and Migration*. Paper given at the Sixth Metropolis Conference, Rotterdam, 26-30th November 2001, <http://www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk/working%20papers/WPTC-02-01%20Anderson.doc.pdf>, pp. 3-4.

¹³ Mary K. Zimmerman, Jacquelyn S. Litt and Christine E. Bose (eds.), *Global Dimensions of Gender and Carework* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); Helma Lutz, *The New Maids: Transnational Women and The Care Economy* (London: Zed Books, 2011); Helma Lutz, “Domestic workers and migration”, in *The Encyclopedia of Global Human Migration* (ed.) Immanuel Ness (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2013), https://www.fb03.uni-frankfurt.de/47719186/domestic_workers_and_migration.pdf

¹⁴ Helma Lutz, “Domestic Workers”, p. 2; Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild (eds.), *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002).

¹⁵ Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Children of Global Migration: Transnational Families and Gendered Woes* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2005).

¹⁶ Arlie Russell Hochschild, “Global Care Chains and Emotional Surplus Value” In: *On the Edge: Living with Global Capitalism* (eds) Anthony Giddens and Will Hutton (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000), pp. 130-146; Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Commercialization of Intimate Life: Notes from Home and Work*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Helma Lutz and Ewa Palenga-Möllenbeck, “Care Workers, Care Drain, and Care Chains: Reflections on Care, Migration and Citizenship”, *Social Politics* 19(1) (2012), pp. 15-37: p. 16.

pay the social and emotional cost of the deficit of care and emotional work.”¹⁷ Even if most migrants consider such work as temporary, circumstances that bear comparison with a relationship to servants and very often leads to exploitation of the workers, are established in the dependency relationships. The compensation of Care Deficits by migrants has been concluded as the “quantitatively most important shifting of family work”.¹⁸ The shift does not take place in between women and men, but in between women of different cultural groups; “it is an expression and reproduction of social relation, of relation between genders, and increasingly it is not only gendered, but ‘racial’/ethnic identities that are reproduced”.¹⁹ At the same time, the price of Care work is kept low by those who do not have the chance to make reasonable requests. Thereby, Care work remains female and precarious.

Coming from the German-speaking Protestant discourse, which is my context, the appreciation of both the importance of Care work and the urgency of the Care Deficit and its global consequences is still insufficient. Furthermore, in the interdisciplinary Care discourse, the protestant ethics and diaconic sciences have not distinguished themselves particularly.²⁰ In the light of the Christian tradition, in which the idea of Care had been firmly established, this is very surprising. Once again, it turns out that the firm concept of the autonomous subject, developed also in the Protestant (Western) theology, neglects the realities of interpersonal dependency and, at the same time, makes the multi-layered Care work invisible. At this point, the Christian social service should contribute arguments and could develop specific initiatives. The biblical testimony is very clear: the excellent sample text for acting socially, the parable of the good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37), emphasises “seeing” the person in need, compassion and the willingness to act. That contrasts with the abstract ideal of freedom. However, it is not enough to only cite biblical texts. Church diaconic institutions are responsible that, in their establishments, Care work (mainly done by women often low-paid) receives more appreciation and gets paid according to their high performance.

The Jewish pedagogue and philosopher, Micha Brumlik, looking at human dependency, talked of the necessity for “advocatory ethics”, given that “the crucial ethical question arises not in between mature people, but between mature and immature people”.²¹ Similarly, the philosopher Jürgen Habermas stresses, that “man, biologically speaking, is born ‘unfinished’” and that he is “subject to lifelong dependency on the help, care, and respect of his social environment”.²² Therefore, the need for help and dependency are significant conditions of human existence.

Hereby, I have denoted some first approaches of alternative thinking, which mention the dependency of people on each other and the necessity for caring actions. By this, the long overdue “Care Revolution” has already been initiated,²³ that brings up the quality of dependency relationships and the diverse activities of human Care. In theological ethics and diaconic science, these topics have thus far been neglected. In my opinion, this is due to the fact that in these disciplines, at least in the western context, human autonomy is

¹⁷ Lutz and Palenga-Möllenbeck, “Care Workers”, p. 16.

¹⁸ Mechthild Rumpf, *Geschlechterverhältnisse und Ethos fürsorglicher (Pflege-) Praxis im Wandel: Literaturstudie und Problemskizzen zu häuslicher Pflege (Langfassung)*, artec-paper Nr. 144 (2007), http://www.artec.uni-bremen.de/files/papers/paper_144.pdf, 120.

¹⁹ Anderson, *Reproductive Labour*, p. 6.

²⁰ Christine Globig, “Care und Gender. Ein Beitrag zum heutigen Diakonieverständnis”, in *Helfendes Handeln im Spannungsfeld theologischer Begründungsansätze* (eds) Heinz Rügger and Christoph Sigrist (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2014), pp. 155-164; Christine Globig, “Zur Reetablierung des Fürsorgebegriffs in der evangelischen Ethik” In: *Sorget nicht – Kritik der Sorge: Dimensionen der Sorge* (ed) Anna Henkel, Isolde Karle, Gesa Lindemann and Micha Werner (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, 2019), pp. 181-195.

²¹ Micha Brumlik, *Advokatorische Ethik. Zur Legitimation pädagogischer Eingriffe*, 2nd edition (Berlin/Wien: Philo Verlag, 2004), II.

²² Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature* (originally: *Die Zukunft der menschlichen Natur*) (Cambridge: Polity Press/Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), p. 34.

²³ Winker, *Care Revolution*.

favoured. Weakness and dependency are only located in those persons, who are aided, but not in the subject giving help. The people in need are always “the others”; this is particularly a typical pattern of the diaconic way of thinking. Also, the gender issue is always affected, insofar as (female) Care in private relationships are often taken for granted and care in professional occupation, sadly also in the church context, is underpaid. The global labour migration caused by the dramatic Care Deficit of the industrial nations is female as well, and also in this aspect the diaconia, when it employs foreign workers, is often a key actor. The gender question remains highly present, as Gilligan already clarified provocatively, at the beginning of the Care debate: does Care remain “female” in the sense of a stronger female disposition or willingness for such tasks, or did the societies of almost all countries bring (only) women in the position of doing the “invisible” Care work without complaint? Research on these issues remains unfinished.

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PART IV

MODELS AND METHODS FOR COMPETENCY BUILDING IN DIACONIA

84. CURRENT STATE OF DIACONIA TRAINING WITH SPECIAL FOCUS ON URBAN DIACONIA IN SOUTH AFRICA, USA AND CHINA

Christoph Sigrist¹

One Word Before: Contextuality of Diaconia

In the last decade, in view of the variety of meanings of the term “diaconia”, the solidary action has become commonly accepted in the Western European discourse of diaconal studies as encompassing general helping. Such helping action is universal, is religiously motivated and ethically justified in the context of church or society within the Judeo-Christian tradition.² The need of aid is normative for life. To love one’s neighbour as oneself is not exclusively Christian in a world that has become plural, but it is constitutive for Christian life and the mission of the church. The social space in which help is given shapes the way it is given. Diaconia as a general helping, solidary action does not just happen, but needs to be grounded in the cultural and social field of those who provide and those who seek help. The diaconal text is written on the page of social contexts.

This fundamental insight into the contextually formative as well as limited forms of aid leads to not “globalising” the Western European context, i.e. not postulating it for other countries and continents as constitutive for theological justifications and diaconal practice. The author’s position is shaped by the Swiss context, more precisely by the Protestant-Reformed tradition of church and Christian life, as begun in Zurich, 500 years ago by the Reformer Ulrich Zwingli and his successor, Heinrich Bullinger, at the Grossmünster. The experience of working for almost 20 years as a pastor in this small, cosmopolitan city in Switzerland, as well as the equally long research work in diaconal studies at the theological faculty of the University of Bern, were motivation enough to get to know diaconal and Christian-based social work in churches and diaconal works in other contexts outside Europe. On my research trips to South Africa and the USA in 2016, and to China in 2018, I investigated helping action, church-involved or Christian-based, in cities, megacities and urban neighbourhoods with a view of “urban diaconia”.³ I was less interested in curricula and training courses at universities and technical colleges than in topics and focal points of diaconal work and education. Focal points of local diaconal reflection emerged from discussions with lecturers, students at universities and universities of applied sciences, with people living in poverty, with volunteers, as well as with leaders and employees in diaconal projects. These sharpen the view here in Switzerland and in Europe.

Current Status of Diaconal Education Work in the Individual Countries

South Africa/Pretoria

In Pretoria, as in many other cities in South Africa, the fundamental insight in lecture halls and on the streets is that the current post-apartheid structure is reviving the apartheid conditions before the turnaround in 1990. The great frustration that the dream of overcoming apartheid thinking, as envisaged by civil rights activists Steve Biko, President Nelson Mandela, Bishop Desmond Tutu, has not become a reality, is currently redirecting the social discourse back to the question of race. Steve Biko’s intention from the 1970s to raise black consciousness by developing its image, because black people’s greatest enemy is the white people’s

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² Christoph Sigrist, *Kompendium Diakoniewissenschaft* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2020), p. 12.

³ Sigrist, *Diakoniewissenschaft*, pp. 122-127.

image of black people, is still in its infancy. The following topics are covered in diaconal education and diaconal work.

Language and culture: The starting point is exclusion mechanisms in language education. What is meant by this? Those responsible in the Lutheran Church were politically passive towards apartheid before 1994. After the first free elections in 1994, proclamations were made in the parishes: Lutheran is German. The same phenomenon can be seen at the universities: shortly before 2016, the government announced that the Afrikaans language may no longer be officially spoken in lecture halls. The constitution says that Afrikaans should be taught as far as this is practically possible and feasible. The Reformed Churches, as the founders of the Faculty of Theology in Pretoria, vehemently oppose this provision because the Afrikaans language is part of the Reformed identity. Moreover, the people of colour also speak Afrikaans. From this follows that language can be understood in its nationalistic use as an instrument of exclusion. Diaconia as a generally helpful action has a hermeneutic, language-psychological function in this: it forms language within language diversity, teaches and learns to make inclusion linguistically capable as an identity-forming experience of difference. With language, the world is formed. For this reason, diaconia is based on the basic idea of creation theology, that the world is created in the creative, inclusive word. The Christological culmination in John's Gospel that this creative word became man (John 1:14) has in this context a religion-critical and church-critical function: faith in Christ opens the ear to the words of all people, of one's own and other religions. The categorical attachment of church and community to their own identity receives a theological correction. Diaconal training leads to inclusive language cultures and structures.

Restitution and Reconciliation: The nationally active Truth and Reconciliation Commission, initiated and led by Bishop Desmond Tutu in the 1990s, recommended that meetings be made possible so that restitution work would no longer be necessary. This intention has hardly been implemented. The principle of healing of memory, according to the assessment of responsible and leading persons and teachers, has been neglected by the churches themselves in the last 20 years. Diaconal education focuses on places and spaces of encounter where people can remember in a healing way. Church spaces can be such memory healing spaces.

Transformation: South Africa is in the midst of a political and social transformation process that challenges the churches and diaconal agencies in many ways. How can diaconal initiatives, new beginnings and established churches be made to work together? Apartheid and racism are not, as in the Western European context, inflamed by region, social status or religion, but simply by skin colour. Spirituality and diaconia flow into each other and amalgamate with everyday life to form a holistically perceived way of life. Prayer and work shake hands. Church rooms, no longer used for worship celebrations, are used as diaconal places for emergency situations in nearby social areas. Fundamental to diaconal work is the insight: I am because you are. This insight calls to social work, in that dignity and humility guide the action. Helping action shows itself in accompanying and assisting. Give and take are in balance.

Diaconal education in South Africa focuses on the question of the identity of person, community and society. In view of the transformation processes, social life with its post-apartheid structures are central challenges: How can life together, between white and black, be successful? How can experiences of difference and diversity processes be appropriated not as sources of danger but as building blocks of a future identity?

USA/Chicago

Chicago is a "city of parallel worlds".⁴ Segregation, exclusion and racism characterise this city on Lake Michigan. Social challenges include poverty and violence, police violence, the prison system, gentrification processes, mass deportations of undocumented persons, food deserts and homelessness.⁵ Racism against

⁴ Ilka Sobottke, "Chicago – eine Stadt von Parallelwelten", in: Christoph Sigrüst (ed), *Chicago-Resonanzen, Dokumente der CityKirchenKonferenz, Kirchen in der Stadt* (Berlin: E.B. Verlag, 2019).

⁵ Sobottke, *Chicago*, pp. 27-87.

blacks plays a fundamental role in all social hotspots. The City Church Conference, a network of pastors working in city and town churches in Germany, Holland, Austria and Switzerland, visited church and social welfare initiatives in Chicago in the fall of 2018, including the largest evangelical church of black people, the Trinity United Church of Christ. Otis Moss, senior pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ, answers the question of what he believes is the most pressing social problem and the most obvious consequence of racism against blacks in the USA: “The imprisonment of so many black Americans! A third of all black Americans between the ages of 16 and 24 are in prison or on remand or at least on probation. This means that they are all never allowed to vote again, hardly ever find a normal job again and are exploited in private prisons like in the days of slavery. If they take drugs, they are locked up instead of being helped. This never happens to the rich kids of white Americans. This is a discrimination system like before the civil rights movement in the 1960s. [...] That’s why we fight for black people’s rights here. The Church has a mandate to look closely, to bring problems to the public and to stand up for the rights of the marginalised.”⁶

The prophetic-theological role of the church, based on the experience of the Trinity United Church of Christ, is characterised by the following aspects:

- The church, the great mass of people who gather in their thousands on Sundays for worship, and who meet in countless groups and house groups during the week, is of great importance. It becomes a sonorous choir, whose voice finds resonance in the social space.
- The pastor plays a key role in this: Otis Moss’ predecessor Jeremiah Wright, who had integrated the later President Barack Obama as a young adult into his youth work, publicly proclaimed in 2011 after 9/11 that America is probably not innocent in this, since it had contributed to this potential for violence with its aggressiveness.
- Otis Moss, together with many other churches, has brought about a reduction in discrimination among prisoners in Chicago. For example, when applying for a job, all prisoners had to confirm that they had been in prison by ticking a box on the application. So, there were people with a tick and people without a tick. As a result, young black men in particular, no longer had a chance to actively participate in shaping social life. Otis Moss played a decisive role in ensuring that these boxes were no longer in application documents. The Chicago example has set a precedent in other states.
- Liturgy and diaconia are two sides of the same coin of a prophetic-theological interpretation of the church’s mission. The Trinity United Church of Christ trains and educates young people to better deal with gang violence. They learn to live out aggression in a targeted manner and thus to control it. They are trained to deal adequately with police officers without arousing suspicion that they possess weapons or would run away. In the church services on Sundays and in prayers during the week, the names of the murdered are recorded, events are integrated into the sermons, and again and again with gospel singing and the typical “call and response” principle the congregation is trained to stop violence, to live non-violently and to bear witness for a non-violent life in society.
- Worship and social space flow together, congregation and community overlap. The theological interpretation of Scripture in the church is constitutively oriented towards the narrative in the social space. The history of the persecutors is a different narrative than that of the persecuted. The change of perspective in the fight against poverty from the objectification of the poor to the maintenance of one’s own power and use of violence to the subject-making of the oppressed as an object is normative for the educational work in church communities with regard to racism and exclusion.

Diaconal education in the USA takes on its political, prophetic role with regard to racism and violence. The fight for black people’s rights, looking closely at them, proclaiming them publicly and advocating for the excluded are causally part of diaconal work.

⁶ Sobottke, Chicago, p. 48, translation by the author.

China/Wuhan

“China accounts for over 20 percent of the world’s population. China is the world’s second largest economic power, has had the greatest success in reducing poverty in recent decades and is the world leader in solar energy. At the same time, the social challenges ranging from environmental pollution to internal migration are enormous; accordingly, the need for social and diaconal institutions is very great”.⁷ The Geneva Agape Foundation,⁸ founded by Christoph Stückelberger and a prolific Christian Chinese entrepreneur and professor of economics in 2014, combines, in view of the estimated tens of thousands of Christian entrepreneurs, internal Christian values with social-diaconal-philanthropic responsibility in society, in order to demonstrate re-orientation of investments in the service of values and diaconia. Stückelberger distinguishes three phases in the development of Christian Entrepreneurs Fellowships in China: the incubation period (1980-2000), the embryonic period (2000-2010) and the developmental phase (since 2010). Protestant Christians belong to the officially registered church, China Christian Council (CCC), which comprises about 36 million people. Others live in family churches or house churches. They are not registered, nor counted, but are also under pressure from the government. Some churches are closed, others are rebuilt and opened. An estimated 80 million Protestant-oriented Christians currently live in China. American missionaries have been trying for 20 years to spread a radical, fundamentalist form of Christian faith in China.

In principle, the state and the communist party are favourably disposed towards diaconal initiatives. Charity and welfare work are promoted, but public meetings and church services are still repressed. The rural exodus of the working population to the megacities represents a major diaconal challenge. Up to 90% of young adults seek and find work in the city. Grandparents raise their grandchildren in the country. Children and old people left behind in the cities are dependent on diaconal initiatives by companies and municipalities: Christians and non-Christians alike are supported in this urban diaconia, which is interpreted as welfare work. Questions concerning human rights and freedom of expression are also taboo among pastors.

In a nutshell: Do good and never talk about it – this is the “brand” of diaconal training and diaconal practice. The churches of the CCC, as well as the house churches and family churches, lack pastors and trained personnel in the social-diaconal environment. There is a lack of historical knowledge about the diaconal work in Christianity. In the knowledge transfer of such a socially oriented society, which is shaped by its reformatory heritage and the current development in the European welfare state, lies the potential for responsible persons to build up and develop Christianity in its social form in China and to implement it within the repressive structures of the state in social hotspots. Not only in Wuhan is it evident that Christian enterprises are taking on this task alongside churches and congregations. “In comparison to business associations in other roles, the advocacy role for social and political issues in China does not play a role. Altogether these associations contribute substantially to the ‘ethical reorientation of Christianity in China’ (Manhong Melissa Lin) and see the Christian faith not only as an individual inner path, but as a common effort of the Christian community to serve society”.⁹

Diaconal education in China focuses on the social and socially oriented role of helping people. This collectively lived, Christian-uniting, Christian- and non-Christian-oriented social effectiveness, motivated and founded in the Protestant work ethic, is lived in silence under the political radar. In this way, Christians gain social acceptance and state support.

⁷ Christoph Stückelberger, “Diakonie und christliche Unternehmer – Europa früher und China heute”, in: *Jahrbuch Diakonie Schweiz* 2 (2018), [Available at: <https://doi.org/10.22018/JDS.2018.10>], [Accessed 21st February 2020], p. 204, translation by the author.

⁸ Available at: www.gaafoundation.world.

⁹ Stückelberger, *Diakonie und christliche Unternehmer*, p. 206, translation by the author.

A Word After: Ambivalences of Diaconia

Diaconal education is contextually and socio-spatially integrated. As such, it gains different orientations and different colours: Diaconal education and practice can mean identity work on Christian existence of community, diaconal work or existence. It can be political, advocacy prophecy against racism. It has a social-diaconal, ethically oriented effect in acute focal points of social tension. Diaconal educational work forms Christian identity, encourages political struggle, sharpens social commitment. Despite different cultural and social contexts, fundamental current areas of tension between diaconal work and education are becoming apparent.

- How can general, helping action as an expression of specifically Christian founded and motivated work described as “diaconia” be described in such a way that Christian identity is built up as a specifically Christian proprium, but religious help be interpreted differently in terms of ideology and not be devalued?
- How are cultural-historically grown, psychologically experienced and socially developed asymmetries and dependencies on helping action to be formulated, transformed and implemented in the context of help for self-help and help at eye level?
- How are church communities, diaconal enterprises and state initiatives to be related to each other in such a way that concrete help is provided locally in the social space?
- How are the different systems of helping action, which have grown historically and are politically predetermined or are imposed by social policy, to be related to each other in such a way that injustice is prevented and the right to life is promoted?
- In the interreligious, intercultural and secular context of social coexistence, how can the anti-racist potential of Christian views be effectively introduced in helping action?
- How is diaconal work, which only costs money, to be put in tension with the invaluable achievement of helping action, thanks to the cultural, social and symbolic capital of Christian charity?¹⁰

Whoever eats together with those affected is in the midst of the fields of tension of helping action. A personal experience from Pretoria puts the finishing touches on this chapter.

Once a year, the Tshwane Leadership Foundation¹¹ (TLF), a diaconal ministry founded by the practical scientist Stephan de Beer, organises a meal for homeless people in the city together with the Department of Christian spirituality, church history and mission theology. At that time, in 2016, there were about 100 people present, 60% of them homeless. Derrick Mashau, head of the department, emphasised in his opening speech, taking up a quotation from Martin Luther King: “Do not stop dreaming! Education is the key to everything. No one is homeless or all are homeless [...]” Education, diaconal education is – as we learn from the context of South Africa for our Western European contexts – the heavenly key to earthly poverty reduction.

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¹⁰ Cf. the six basic areas of tension: Sigrist, 2020, pp 53-101.

¹¹ Cf. www.tlf.org.za.

85. MULTI-RATIONAL MANAGEMENT FOR DIACONIC LEADERSHIP

Martin Büscher and Udo Krolzik¹

Diaconia is part and parcel of the identity and mandate of any Christian church as much as evangelism. In contrast to the spiritual concerns of the church, the diaconic concerns of charity, care and advocacy are much more closely related to social context and to different competencies of how to address these concerns. Likewise, professions, competencies and expertise are added to the mix. It is the competencies of social work, medical care and health services, social counselling and law, as well as socio-economic and management that are used to fight hunger, poverty, violence, social injustice and to organise care. All of these have their own expressions in different regions, nations and cultures around the globe.

Another important aspect of diaconic services is interdisciplinarity in professions. This obviously forms a part of diaconic practice. It is also mirrored in any form of diaconially relevant competence building, education and studies.

This article will look at relevant rationalities for diaconic professions and demonstrate the skills required for diaconic engagement. The notion of multi-rational management according to Kuno Schedler and Johannes Rüegg-Stürm will be discussed and some relevant categories, such as theological and management-based rationalities will be introduced. Conclusions for competence building and management skills in diaconic leadership will be presented at the end.

What Does Multi-Rationality Mean?

Multirationality does not question the existence of a more generic notion of rationality, rational action or human reason as such. It does, however, emphasise that in pluralistic organisations there are different types and plausible ways of thinking that can determine what is considered to be rational and what is considered to make sense. The notion of multirationality was developed by Kuno Schedler and Johannes Rüegg-Stürm in their book on “Multirational Management”.² Rationality is defined there as:

A reference or horizon of sense of unquestionably valid assumptions, principles, rules and maxims of behaviour on whose basis it is possible to judge from a universal, generalisable perspective what kinds of conduct, argumentation or assumptions are rationally appropriate, admissible, correct, expedient, sensible, imperative and morally desirable and worth striving for, in contrast to what runs counter to human rationality.³

Such references and horizons of meaning form “communities of meaning”. Communities of meaning are created through the tasks and functions carried out by professions and through expertise. They are social groups that find their cohesion through common interaction with a shared meaning. In pluralistic organisations, the like of which exist in diaconic areas of engagement, these rationalities can be the theological, ethical, social, medical, gerontological, pedagogic, ecological, political, economic, management,

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² Kuno Schedler and Johannes Rüegg-Stürm, *Multirational Management – Mastering Conflicting Demands in a Pluralistic Environment* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

³ Schedler and Rüegg-Stürm *Multirational Management* p.18.

financial, technical, legal or any other rationality involved in social issues. The field of diaconia is pluralistic in itself. It is the nature of diaconia to be involved institutionally in worldly matters that go beyond theology. Looking at the “unquestionably valid assumptions, principles, rules and maxims of behaviour” of a rationality, we will identify two main rationalities, the theological and the economic.

Theological thinking is causal, not final. As we are loved by God, we do good things as a consequence of faith. As we are created in the image of God, we are given personal dignity, which forms the basis for respect and sensitivity. As God loves all human beings, this mandate is given to all human beings. As we are all sinners, we are all depending on God’s grace. God’s grace is indispensable. Human beings cannot direct God’s grace. In an anthropological context where human beings are designed as God’s creation that act according to God’s will, “Love your neighbour” is not a means, but necessary to reduce suffering and lead a full life. The aim of diaconic engagement is to offer meaningful support to fulfil God’s will. Faith is a gift that cannot be created by human beings alone but is enhanced by the Holy Spirit. In that sense, human beings do not dispose of faith, of God’s Kingdom or of justification.

Economic thinking is based on a set of assumptions. It is related to a framework within which the boundaries of the economic world are defined. The “*ceteris paribus-clause*” indicates that “all other things are equal” and thus need not be considered in the economic analysis. In other words, anything outside of this framework does not belong into the world of economics. The focus of economics is on cost, price, numbers, return, gain or efficiency in a functional way. Politics, society, religion, mentalities, culture, norms and values are considered constant, fixed elements of the framework. These are external factors. From the internal perspective, human economic action is orientated towards self-interest, advantage or individual progress. Economic rationality is about understanding economic laws, in a similar way to understanding natural laws. The anthropological picture is of the “*homo oeconomicus*” pursuing his – mostly material – self-interest. The economic principle is to achieve the maximum output with a given input or to reach a given output with minimal input.

Looking at these rationalities as a scientific discipline, we can identify specific ways on how to approach and interpret reality.

Discipline-Based Approaches to Reality	
<i>Theology, Ethics</i>	<i>Economics, Business Administration</i>
Arts	Part of Social Sciences, quasi-natural Science
Hermeneutics, “Hidden” Realities	Empirical, quantifiable Relations, Structures
Meaning, Values, Norms	Facts, Numbers, Data
Qualitative Approach	Quantitative Approach
Methods mostly inductive, bottom up	Methods mostly deductive, top down

In analysing two rationally bounded disciplines like theology and economics, different forms of thinking are discovered. Each are based on elaborate traditions and identities. Those identities are not only shaped by their specific kinds of academic work. They are also influenced by and based on a set of habits in that discipline, as well as important authorities who set standards, and personalities of influence and sets of wording that people in each discipline are accustomed to. Ways to work well and lead a good life are part of this world. Rationality of a discipline is more than the academic habits. Rationality is interwoven with and surrounded by people, languages, habits of work, and thinking that is considered to be normal and up to self-evident standards. Those normalities and standards, though, are just different and influential at the same time. They lead to non-communication, communication obstacles and chronic misunderstanding. The idea of freedom, for example, would in theological contexts dominantly be identified as the freedom of human beings in the face of God, e.g. the freedom to serve everybody, thought subordinate to none, to pray and talk to God directly, to have free will and the freedom of individual responsibility. In economic contexts, freedom would

predominantly be identified as the freedom of the market, the freedom of competition, the freedom of investment, freedom from the state, the freedom of self-interest. In both contexts, a basic notion like freedom gains its own interpretation, meaning or tradition.

Multirational Professions in a Hospital

Let's look at a context to give an insight into multirational perspectives in an institution. A Christian hospital may serve as an example. A hospital as an organisation needs competencies of care, medical expertise, organisation and financial management, and theological leadership. Each of these competencies is represented by professionals and by professional groups. They are organised into departments as well as into forms of direct communication. They all bring in their competencies, their needs, their standards. A medical doctor guided by the Hippocratic oath is bound to supply health and fight diseases. The doctor will maximise medical help. The financial controller is interested in the efficiency of services and cost reduction. The caring personnel are interested in individual recovery services under time constraints and according to medical standards of quality management, the theologian will consider spiritual care and well-being of a person including needs of the soul and spirituality. The executive board may be composed of a director of care, a medical director, a chief of the administration and a theological head. They all bring in their standards. They represent communities of understanding. They represent contradicting demands. How then can the competencies be related?

Working and living together in multi-rational contexts is demanding to organise. Multi-rational management is at stake, when reference systems of the actors involved are incommensurable, when contradicting requirements or presuppositions are present in the organisation.

Looking at international encounters of rationalities, there are tensions of multirationality in different world views with their own rationalities. In contrast to a universal understanding of rationality, multirationality considers that human thinking and reason face different notions on how to experience faith, beliefs, "normal" habits of behaviour, values and ways to look at the world. These are different in Christian, Islamic, Buddhist, Confucian, Hinduist, Indigenous or Atheist traditions. Communities of sense differ in experiencing communities, individualism, politeness, gender roles, concepts of time and ways on how to lead a decent life. The "Western *Weltanschauung*" often is embedded into a scientific-technical, contemporarily secular world view, whereas in other world cultures, a spiritual, religiously grounded world view currently dominates. The thought leading European philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650) identified human thinking by "Cogito, ergo sum" (I think/reflect, therefore I am) whereas the Senegalese president and poet Léopold Senghor (1906-2001) identified being human by "In dancing with the other, I feel the other, hence I am." Human thinking is embedded into cultural preconditions and thus at the same time universal in the use of language, but contextual in the regionally underlying values, religions and traditions.

Multirational Management: Dealing with Conflicting Demands

Having explained these basic notions, the following section looks at the skills required to enable constructive communication in multi-rational contexts. How to deal with multiple rationalities? The table on the next page show four levels: Polarisation, Support, Avoidance and Tolerance.

There are analytical skills that enable and support dealing with conflicting demands of multi-rational constellations. How can this competency to use multi-rationality for constructive communication be acquired? How can managers become at ease with the language of another rationality? How can managers estimate and appreciate the competency of another rationality?

Practises for Dealing with Conflicting Demands⁴		
Dealing explicitly	Polarisation Conflict, Competition, Refusal between Rationalities	Support Making Multirationality fruitful
Dealing implicitly	Avoidance Implicit Domination of one Rationality	Tolerance Implicit Accordance between Rationalities

First of all, they must recognise that there is a problem of co-operation and communication. To solve the problems in their business needs more than one rationality and competency. No problem in diaconia can be solved only by economical reflections. It also cannot be solved only by theological reflections or the reflections of any one of the other disciplines involved. To neglect one aspect of problem solving will lead to suboptimal results and produce conflicts. Theological insights may open up for this understanding. The Christian belief is based on the conviction that human beings are creatures which are given their life and possibilities by God. Therefore, they know that they are limited in understanding and designing the world. If managers know about their limits, they can evaluate their strengths and limits and they can estimate the strength of other people and will involve them in the search for understanding and the solution of a problem. There is no delusion of omnipotence.

Let's continue the example of the hospital. A doctor with these insights does not believe that he or she alone can cure the patient, but that they need the observations and services of the nurses and other professions. Leadership in such a setting means to allow potentials to be found and developed and to be included in decision making. Respect for another and their competencies and abilities, which complement each other and cross fertilise in a community, will not be seen as a problem but as a benefit and enrichment in coping with a task or a problem. How can this be transferred into practise? There are currently good results being achieved by forming working groups with members from different communities of understanding and from different hierarchical levels. They meet to prepare a decision by contributing their particular observations and reflections. After this process, they disband as they are not a regular working group but an ad hoc group called together to deal with a particular issue. The next problem will be considered in another group with different members in accordance with the requirements of the new issue. The unifying element is the aim. The openness to other rationalities is the experience of one's own limits and the trust that members of the different communities of understanding do not suppress each other. No rationality wants to dominate the others but wants to contribute to solving the common problem.

If this practise is exercised in an organisation, the respect for and necessity of different rationalities and the importance of each community of understanding will become obvious and carry on bearing fruit. Communication will be experienced as supporting.

Skills to Support Multi-rational Co-operation

What are competencies and attitudes that can help to benefit from multirational perceptions of an organisation? What skills are relevant to support communication and establish fruitful co-operation? It is not merely competencies of empathy, sensitivity, tolerance or intellectual openness that enable multirational co-operation. There are three factors that especially support communication between conflicting demands, conflicting perceptions of reality and multirationally composed decision making.

⁴ Büscher and Hofmann, *Diakonische Unternehmen multirational führen*, p. 37.

Three central elements of skills to support understanding, enable and develop multi-rational competencies are:

Skills	
<i>Curiosity</i>	Curiosity enables a participant to be willing to understand a different perspective. Curiosity can help to add knowledge and another professional competence. An unfamiliar competency is looked at as an enrichment.
<i>Knowledge</i>	Understanding a different or conflicting community of sense is impossible without knowing basic elements of an unfamiliar rationality. Ways of thinking as arguments are understood, if more than attitudes are considered.
<i>Professional Self-confidence</i>	Facing conflicting demands or different communities of sense does not mean comprehensively questioning the proper, familiar perspective as towards confrontative communication. Each rationality involved shall diligently involve the proper views and observations.

These might be surprising to mention. Curiosity, knowledge and professional self-confidence are more than competencies and abilities. These elements refer to attitudes. They refer to abilities that do not seem to be achievable by knowledge of facts rather than by knowledge of orientation. They refer to developing a leadership style. Conditions for successful multirational leadership obviously are knowledge of different areas of work, supporting trust into valid contributions of other rationalities and one's own and establish regular spaces of communication. Multirational management starts with adequate process organisation and methods to enable communication.

Suggestions for Further Reading

- Hofmann, Beate and Martin Büscher. *Diakonische Unternehmen multirational führen. Grundlagen – Kontroversen – Potentiale*. Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2017.
- Schedler, Kuno and Johannes Rüegg-Stürm. *Multirational Management – Mastering Conflicting Demands in a Pluralistic Environment*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

86. LIBERATION THEOLOGY AND DIACONIA: METHODS OF LEARNING

Craig L. Nesson¹

One of the most innovative developments in contemporary theology has been the emergence of liberation theologies, which began in the 1960s and continues to the present. Liberation theologies have developed in many global contexts, starting in Latin America to provide solidarity with the poor and in the U.S. to address oppression against African Americans. Subsequently, liberation theologies have emerged in many other contexts: anti-apartheid theology in South Africa and Namibia, Minjung theology in Korea, Dalit theology in India, and Palestinian liberation theology. This chapter explores methods in liberation theologies as a resource for articulating and practicing method in diaconal ministry.²

Method of Correlation: Existential Questions Arise from the Human Situation

Paul Tillich first introduced the “method of correlation” to theology.³ Tillich states:

In using the method of correlation, systematic theology proceeds in the following way: it makes an analysis of the human situation out of which the existential questions arise, and it demonstrates that the symbols used in the Christian message are the answers to these questions.⁴

According to Tillich’s apologetic purpose, theology must pay attention to the existential questions coming into expression through the arts, philosophy, social sciences, literature, and other cultural forms, in order to “correlate” these questions with resources from the Christian faith. This makes the primary interlocuter for theology questions arising from the religious sceptic or “non-believer” in search of an answer to questions about meaning.⁵

Whereas much modern theology has been devoted to the problem of God, seeking “a reformulation of that concept so that it can be meaningful and relevant to the modern world,” liberation theologies, by contrast, have taken their point of departure from the suffering of those described by Gustavo Gutiérrez as the “non-person.”⁶ In Latin America, this means those suffering from the devastating effects of structural poverty and injustice. Intellectual questions about the meaning of God lose priority for those struggling for survival.

While liberation theologies also operate according to a method of correlation, the central questions posed are about particular forms of suffering, not religious doubt. For example, black liberation theologies engage the legacy of slavery and violence of racism; feminist theologies the history, dynamics, and consequences of sexism; womanist theologies the intersecting oppressions of race, gender, and class; Latinx and *mujerista* theologies the domination of Latinx people; Native American liberation theologies the history and consequences of indigenous genocide; LGBTQ+ liberation theologies the oppression of lesbian, gay,

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² For international perspectives on the diaconate, see Reinhard Boettcher (ed), *The Diaconal Ministry in the Mission of the Church* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 2006).

³ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1: Reason and Revelation/Being and God* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1951), pp. 59-66.

⁴ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 1: p. 62.

⁵ Cf. Langdon Gilkey, “Chapter Three: God,” in Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King (eds), *Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1994), p. 88-113.

⁶ Gustavo Gutiérrez, “Faith as Freedom: Solidarity with the Alienated and Confidence in the Future,” *Horizons* 2 (Spring 1975), p. 43.

bisexual, transgender, queer, and others not conforming to the established conventions of society regarding sexual orientation or gender designation; and ecojustice theologies, the multiple threats to the ecological sustainability of the planet caused by human interventions that are eroding and destroying the very conditions that make life possible.

Analogous to the method of correlation in liberation theologies, method in diaconal theology takes its point of departure from the experiences of suffering arising from humanity and the travail of creation.⁷ The vocation of diaconal ministry is to engage the world's suffering, bringing this suffering to the attention of the church, and to respond to the world's needs, employing the resources of faith mediated by the church. To make a correlation between concrete experiences of suffering and compassionate care by the church belongs both to the ministry of the deacon as person and the diaconal calling of the entire church.

Three Types of Suffering: Existential, Diaconal, Structural

The range of suffering known to human beings is not all the same kind. Here we distinguish between three kinds: 1) existential suffering: the suffering that belongs universally to the finite human condition, 2) structural suffering: the suffering that is inflicted on others and the creation due to damaging social structures, and 3) diaconal suffering: the suffering Christians choose to take upon themselves to share and alleviate the suffering of others.

Existential suffering encompasses the suffering that is common to all humanity, belonging to the finite human condition. Existential suffering encompasses a range of human experiences including physical pain, emotional distress, mental illness, and spiritual despair. Physical pain relates to experiences that include, for example, childbirth, growth, illness, bodily disfunction, injuries, accidents, aging, and dying. Emotional distress also ranges widely to include feelings of fear, anxiety, loneliness, boredom, annoyance, jealousy, betrayal, confusion, disgust, regret, shame, guilt, worry, stress, and many others. The ability of human beings to identify and name precisely their own experiences of emotional suffering discloses the extent to which the interior life of human beings knows the many facets of anguish.

Structural suffering, by contrast, refers to preventable suffering that human beings impose upon one another and upon the world. A distinction can be made between two forms: those indignities experienced on an interpersonal level and those embedded in the social, economic, and political structures. When physical pain, emotional distress, mental illness, or spiritual despair are the consequence of identifiable human agency that could have been otherwise, it is important to distinguish this reality. Here, we focus on how injustice has become embedded in social structures, sometimes referred to as "structural sin."⁸ Social disorder results from structural violence, economic injustice, ecological irresponsibility, and disrespect for human dignity. Structural violence is manifest, for example, in economic disparity, violations of human rights, discriminatory immigration policies, gun violence, police brutality, inequities in the criminal justice system, warfare in disregard for political solutions, surrogate warfare by states, "collateral damage" against civilians and creation through acts of war, and genocide. Fundamental disparity of wealth causes economic injustice in the forms of hunger, lack of access to clean water, homelessness, inadequate medical care, preventable diseases, infant mortality, childhood stunting, inadequate sanitation, and lack of other basic social services.

Ecological irresponsibility is a form of structural suffering resulting from careless disposal of waste, inadequate recycling, water pollution, depletion of topsoil, overharvesting natural resources, extinction of species, the crisis of climate change, and degradation of the very conditions that support life. Disrespect for human dignity occurs in the harm done whenever the fundamental human rights of children, women, and men

⁷ For a related appropriation of liberation theologies for "diaconal methodology," see Kjell Nordstokke (ed), *Diakonia in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 2009), pp. 58-66.

⁸ Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000).

are not regarded and protected.⁹ Particular attention needs to be given to safeguarding the rights of tribal, ethnic, racial, sexual, and other minority populations. Special protections must encompass the increasing numbers of stateless migrant people, whose dislocation has been caused by structural injustice through economic disparity, political oppression, violence, and ecological devastation.

Diaconal suffering refers to the suffering that is voluntarily chosen to enter and share the suffering experienced by others. This addresses the call of Jesus: “[...] let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” While existential suffering is endemic to the human condition and structural suffering is caused by human beings either intentionally or by disregard, diaconal suffering involves empathy, courage, and risk. An ethics of the cross leads Christians to choose the way of the suffering in bearing the crosses of others.¹⁰ The body of Christ is called to analyse the complexity of the social issues related to specific forms of suffering and commit resources to address root causes that can alleviate present suffering and reduce future suffering.

Five Methodological Elements: Identification, Prophetic Critique, Social Analysis, Biblical Engagement, Advocacy and Structural Change

Liberation theologies employ action-reflection (praxis-oriented) methodologies in response to particular forms of oppression, consisting of five elements: 1) identification with particular forms of oppression and suffering, 2) prophetic critique of the causes of that suffering, 3) social analysis to expose the causes of oppression and suffering, 4) biblical and theological engagement to address suffering and oppression, and 5) advocacy for structural change toward a greater approximation of justice. Liberation theologies intentionally reflect upon concrete experiences in which these five elements interact dynamically according to the forms of suffering specific to the experiences and contexts of each endangered group.

Liberation theologies are contextual theologies, formulated to address specific forms of oppression by employing methods of social analysis and biblical-theological reflection. Drawing upon the social sciences, for example, liberation theologians investigate the factors leading to endemic poverty through socio-political and economic analyses. At the same time, liberation theologians appeal to the justice trajectory in the Bible and usable fragments from the theological tradition to construct movements for social transformation and justice. God hears the cries of the poor, raises up prophets to proclaim righteousness, and authorises people to act justly.

Because these theologies deal with the suffering of oppressed people and an endangered creation, they focus on an analysis of the structural sin that diminishes the worth and status of suffering people and they draw upon theological resources to advocate justice for oppressed communities, including creation itself. The theological claims of liberation theologies engender practical engagement to transform structures that hold the oppressed in bondage.

Diaconal Implications of the Five Methodological Elements

Jesus Christ is a deacon. One of the most fitting descriptions of the ministry of Jesus Christ is the ministry of Word and Service, diaconal ministry.¹¹ The New Testament testifies to the servanthood of Jesus: “The greatest

⁹ United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights [Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html>].

¹⁰ Jon Sobrino, *Where Is God? Earthquake, Terrorism, Barbarity, and Hope*, trans. Margaret Wilde (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), references the experiences of “crucified people” today.

¹¹ William T. Ditewig refers to “word, sacrament, and charity” belonging to the ministry of the deacon as “an icon of Christ the servant,” in Owen F. Cummings, William T. Ditewig, and Richard R. Gaillardetz, *Theology of the Diaconate: The State of the Question* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2005), pp. 55-57.

among you will be your servant” (Mt. 23:11). Jesus came proclaiming the kingdom of God (Mk. 1:14-15) – ministry of the word – and Jesus came to make others whole – ministry of service: “It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt. 20:26-28). The ministry of deacons within the church exists as both sign and catalyst for the ministry of the entire church.¹² There is no ministry in the name of Jesus Christ that is not an expression of diaconal service. The five elements of method in liberation theologies provide direction for formulating method in diaconal ministry. Diaconal ministry originates in experiences of suffering and correlates that suffering both to the ministry of the person called to serve as deacon and to the resources of the church for providing diaconal accompaniment.

The *first element in this method* involves the *identification of specific experiences of suffering and oppression*. Depending on one’s area of expertise, deacons bring not only their own charisms (gifts) but the resources of the church as institution to address this suffering. The ministerial response of the deacon to experiences of suffering entails the practice of empathy. One of the insidious features of all forms of existential suffering is the isolation of the person facing it. One “dimension of physical pain is its ability to destroy language, the power of verbal objectification, a major source of our self-extension, a vehicle through which the pain could be lifted out into the world and eliminated.”¹³ No one else can fully identify with the suffering – physical, emotional, or spiritual – known by the person experiencing it. The deacon participates empathically through the arts of active listening and pastoral care to identify with diverse experiences of suffering by others and by creation. To enter the suffering of others requires profound humility.¹⁴

The *second element of method* involves *prophetic critique of the root causes of structural suffering*: “[...] what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Mic. 6:8). Here we focus specifically on how injustice has become embedded in social structures, also called “structural sin.” The social conditions under which marginalised people suffer are not merely a matter of fate. Deacons are called to reject every moral calculus that functions to blame the victims of structural injustice as something they deserve due to their own moral failure. While full equality in social, political, and economic conditions may not be realisable, the prophetic impulse functions to create holy dissatisfaction with the status quo and provide energy to advocate for social systems that generate greater approximation of justice.

The *third element of method* involves *social analysis to expose the root causes of suffering and oppression*. Here, the education and expertise of deacons in disciplines that complement theological education are paramount. The variety of specialisations needed by the diaconal community for effective social analysis are wide-ranging, for example, social work, economics, political science, sociology, psychology, medicine, nursing, business, administration, communication, law, ethics, climate science, biology, and history. Each of these disciplines, among others, bring perspective and depth to the analysis of both existential and structural suffering. By including social analysis as an element in diaconal method, we can attain a more complete and accurate understanding of how effectively to address and alleviate that suffering.

The *fourth element of method* entails *biblical and theological engagement to address instances of suffering and overcome oppression*. This is the element that summons forth the explicit contributions of theological education for diaconal ministry. Theological education not only provides foundational understanding in the Bible, church history, theology, ethics, and the pastoral arts but also more specialised skills in areas such as leadership. A theological hermeneutic for diaconal ministry operates within a hermeneutical circle that takes

¹² On the ecclesial character of the deacon office, see John N. Collins, *Deacons and the Church: Making Connections between Old and New* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2002), pp. 128-144.

¹³ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of a World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 54.

¹⁴ Everett L. Worthington, Jr. and Scott T. Allison, *Heroic Humility: What the Science of Humility Can Say to People Raised on Self-Focus* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2018).

seriously both the context of historic Christian sources and the contemporary reality of suffering to formulate biblical and theological claims.¹⁵

The professionalisation of diaconal ministry in some contexts has allowed for an increase in expertise in cognate academic disciplines at the expense of theological integration, while in other contexts deacons have strong preparation in theological disciplines at the expense of other fields of knowledge.¹⁶ Drawing upon the method of liberation theologies for diaconal ministry demonstrates the value of bi-vocational education for those serving as deacons, in order to attend both to the requisites of social analysis and theological engagement. The method of correlation in diaconal ministry is enhanced both by expertise in analysing the causes of suffering and competence in theological articulation.

The *fifth element of method* involves *advocacy for structural change* toward a greater approximation of justice.¹⁷ Diaconal organisations play a vital role in educating and organising advocacy efforts to improve policies and laws that safeguard the endangered and alleviate suffering.¹⁸ The work of advocacy takes different forms according to the distinct political system of a given country and culture. In some contexts, advocacy may take the form of persuading influential leaders, while in others, there may be a distinctive legislative process to which the church may contribute as a public body.¹⁹ The practices of congregation-based community organising may also provide guidance and direction for grassroots advocacy efforts.²⁰

Another vital form of engagement by diaconal institutions encompasses direct service to those in need of support and healing. For this reason, the church has organised social services to address many forms of suffering, for example, hospitals for the sick, mental health programmes, care for those with intellectual or physical disabilities, sheltered workshops, foster care and adoption services, refugee resettlement programmes, counselling, educational programmes, support for children and families, and many others. Direct service and advocacy efforts complement one another in providing relief to those who are suffering.

Summary: Liberation Theology and Diaconia

The intercessions of the church provide passage into the call to action for the church's diaconal ministry. When we pray the intercessions in our Christian assemblies, we are invited to enter diaconal suffering for the world. This includes all those known to us by name who belong to or are connected to a given congregation – the sick, dying, grieving, injured, unemployed, or fearful ones – as well as the needs of the larger world and all creation. The intercessions not only beseech God to attend to our prayers; they are a call to diaconal ministry. The integrity of the church depends on authenticity between that for which we pray and how we respond in diaconal service.

¹⁵ Laurie Jungling (ed), *Lutheran Perspectives on Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis, MN: Lutheran University Press, 2010), pp. 11-35.

¹⁶ Cf. Beate Hofmann, "Diakonische Unternehmenskultur zur Entwicklung neuer Strategien," in: Peter Helbich, Peter Oberender, Jürgen Zenker (eds), *Diakonische Perspektiven für innovative Strategien: Impulse für eine nachhaltige Unternehmensführung in der Sozial- und der Gesundheitswirtschaft* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2015), pp. 82-94.

¹⁷ Cf. Marie A. Failinger and Ronald W. Duty (eds), *Lutheran Theology and Secular Law: The Work of the Modern State* (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 63-74.

¹⁸ For discussion of diaconal action as "solidarity with marginalised and suffering people, moving away from traditions of conceptualising *diakonia* as humble service," see Stephanie Dietrich, Knud Jørgensen, Kari Karsrud Korslien, and Kjell Nordstokke (eds), *Diakonia as Christian Social Practice: An Introduction* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014). The reference is on page 2.

¹⁹ Cf. Trish Towle Greeves, *Prophetic Faith: Exploring Social Justice Advocacy as a Congregation* (CreateSpace, 2017).

²⁰ Dennis A. Jacobsen, *Doing Justice: Congregations and Community Organizing* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2001).

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87. ABUSE AND MISCONDUCT IN CHURCH SETTINGS: LEARNING FROM THE DARK SIDE OF DIAKONIA HISTORY

Tormod Kleiven and Matthew Ross¹

Introduction

The dark side of the history of Diakonia is when a diaconal understanding and approach is distorted and misappropriated to abuse people. Church should be a safe haven and a secure base for all people, especially the vulnerable and those in need of support and help. We know that this is not always the case. When trusted people in a church or a Christian organisation abuse vulnerable people this is a sinful misuse of the Church as the body of Christ and it is misuse of Diakonia.

In general, Diakonia can be described as the Ministry of Care, Community Building and Justice Making,² as a practice of discipleship by following Jesus Christ³ and “the life-form of the community of Christ”.⁴

When power is misused in a Church setting, a true diaconal approach should be to emphasise solidarity with the vulnerable party, criticise injustice and repression, increase competence to empower but also discover and fight against using power to offend others.⁵ This has to be done by strengthening the awareness of the responsibility of leadership and authority in the church. Diakonia should care for the suffering part of the body of Christ through justice, transforming and permeating within the Church.

This chapter describes and discusses abuses and misconduct from an Irish and a Norwegian Church context. Matthew Ross has described the Irish example and Tormod Kleiven the Norwegian one.

Cruelty, Neglect and Underinvestment – Examples and Reflection from an Irish Context

In 1767, the “Magdalen Asylum for Penitent Females”, a Church of Ireland (Anglican) institution, was opened in Dublin. This was the first of several “Magdalene asylums” for what was euphemistically described as “fallen women” – ostensibly prostitutes, but also women who had given birth outside marriage and, in some cases, girls placed there by impoverished families. Although some institutions were run by Church of Ireland or Presbyterian agencies, the majority were run by several Roman Catholic orders, such as the Sisters of Charity of Our Lady of Refuge. The Magdalene (or Magdalen) asylum system usually included “industrial schools” and were finally financially self-supporting through providing laundry services, thus acquiring the sobriquet “Magdalene Laundries”.

Historically, the Magdalene Laundries operated in the context of severe poverty in Ireland, including the legacy of the Famine of the 1840s, lack of a welfare state, the upheavals of the war of independence and the “Economic War” (trade dispute with high customs tariffs) between the newly-independent Irish Free State and the United Kingdom in the 1930s.

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² Church of Norway, *Plan for Diakonia*. (2010). [Available at: https://kirken.no/globalassets/kirken.no/church-of-norway/plan_diakonia2_english.pdf].

³ Hans Raun Iversen, *Praktisk teolog*. [Practical Theology] (Frederiksberg: Forlaget ANIS, 2004).

⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, et al. *Hope for the church: Moltmann in dialogue with practical theology*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979).

⁵ Tormod Kleiven, *Intimitetsgrenser og Tillitsmakt. Kirkesamfunns forståelse av og handlingsstrategier i møte med anklager om seksuelle krenkelser sett i lys av et diakonifaglig perspektiv* (2010).

Ten Magdalene Laundries were still in operation following the independence of the Irish Free State in 1922 (which became the Republic of Ireland in 1949); the last of the Magdalene Laundries in Ireland closed in 1996. Widespread sales of washing machines from the 1950s onwards, economic growth, reduction in poverty and availability of legal contraception (from 1980) all contributed to the demise of the Magdalene Laundries. In 2013, the Irish Government commissioned the “Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee to establish the facts of State involvement with the Magdalen Laundries”, chaired by Senator Martin McAleese. In the introduction to his report, McAleese writes:

Many of these women drew a clear distinction between their treatment in Industrial Schools and their experience in the Magdalen Laundries. [...] However, the majority of women described the atmosphere in the Laundries as cold, with a rigid and uncompromising regime of physically demanding work and prayer, with many instances of verbal censure, scoldings or even humiliating put-downs.

Some of the women the Committee met stated clearly that the Laundries were their only refuge in times of great personal difficulty. Others spoke of their real sense of being exploited. But the large majority of women who engaged with the Committee and especially those who had previously been in Industrial Schools spoke of the deep hurt they felt due to their loss of freedom, the fact that they were not informed why they were there, lack of information on when they would be allowed to leave, and denial of contact with the outside world, particularly family and friends.⁶

Whilst providing shelter and food, the Magdalene Laundries also became notorious for exploitation and cruelty. The unpaid residents often worked in arduous conditions, providing laundry services for numerous companies, public bodies and individuals. The McAleese report noted many reports of sexual abuse of girls occurring in the industrial schools, but much less so in the Magdalene Laundries. Given the parlous state of the Irish economy in the 19th and early 20th centuries, income from the laundry business was often barely sufficient to cover operating costs, with little left for investment or the improvement of quality of life for the residents. This history shows the risks posed by and consequences from underinvestment, financial difficulties, poor management, cruelty by staff and lack of professional safeguards. The McAleese report did, however, also report kindness and camaraderie, with a notable improvement in living conditions from the 1960s onwards (coinciding with the Second Vatican Council).

The scandal of the “Bon Secours Mother and Baby Home” in the Irish town of Tuam must also be considered. This was a maternity home for unmarried mothers, operated by the Bon Secours Sisters, between 1925 and 1961. In 2012, a local historian made the discovery of abuse and neglect at the home, with allegations of forcible migration of children to the USA and of bodies of children being dumped in a mass grave. In early March 2017, it was confirmed that the remains of 796 bodies of babies had been discovered, some in a septic tank (reported by RTÉ news). Speaking in the Irish Parliament on 7th March 2014, the then Taoiseach [Prime Minister] of Ireland, Enda Kenny said:

No nuns broke into our homes to kidnap our children. We gave them up to what we convinced ourselves was the nuns’ care. We gave them up maybe to spare them the savagery of gossip, the wink-and-elbow language of delight in which the “holier than thou” were particularly fluent. We gave them up because of our perverse, in fact, morbid relationship with what is called respectability. Indeed, for a while it seemed as if in Ireland our women had the amazing capacity to self-impregnate. For their trouble, we took their babies and gifted them, sold them, trafficked

⁶ Report (2013) of the Inter-Departmental Committee to establish the facts of State involvement with the Magdalen Laundries, published in: <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/MagdalenRpt2013>; the introduction of Senator Mr. Martin McAleese can be found here: [http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/2013Magdalen-Introduction%20by%20the%20Independent%20Chair%20\(PDF%20-%2082KB\).pdf/Files/2013Magdalen-Introduction%20by%20the%20Independent%20Chair%20\(PDF%20-%2082KB\).pdf](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/2013Magdalen-Introduction%20by%20the%20Independent%20Chair%20(PDF%20-%2082KB).pdf/Files/2013Magdalen-Introduction%20by%20the%20Independent%20Chair%20(PDF%20-%2082KB).pdf).

them, starved them, neglected them or denied them to the point of their disappearance from our hearts, our sight, our country and, in the case of Tuam and possibly other places, from life itself.

The era of the Magdalene Laundries and the Tuam scandal reflects a very different era from contemporary Ireland. In Ireland, the levels of absolute poverty have decreased markedly over recent decades and there is no longer the same level of social stigma towards children born outside marriage. Nevertheless, the issue remains of whether such practices exist – or may be in danger of occurring – particularly where lack of resources may be an acute problem. In all cases, the following questions need to be asked by and of providers of diaconal care: is there undue deference to authority, underinvestment, poor regulation, poor management, poor training, lack of safeguarding measures and an inability to detect bad staff that can facilitate such problems?

As providers of care, the harsh legacy of the Magdalene Laundries, the Tuam home and other such abuses is one of which the Church and providers of diaconal care globally must learn lessons from. Christ, who came that we “may have life in all its fullness” (John 10:10), demands nothing less.

About Sexual Misconduct in Church – Examples and Reflection from a Norwegian Context

- The leader in a Church institution for orphans sexually abuses a child.
- A teenager shares her story about her parents not taking care of her with the youth leader in the congregation. He uses her trust to manipulate her into a sexual relationship arguing that she is in need of his love.
- A young woman is going to her pastor for counselling and speaks about the problems in her marriage. The pastor gives her a lot of support, but proceeds step-by-step (in grooming behaviour) in creating an intimate relationship ending with sexual intercourse. She feels guilt and shame. He blamed her for tempting him.

These are some examples of what has happened and is still happening in the Norwegian Lutheran church context and also in other denominations. We also know this is reality in churches all over the world.

At an official level, the churches in Norway were in denial of this reality until the 1980s. During the late 1980s, there was a huge media focus in Norway resulting from published literature based on research (Eva Lundgren, 1985 and 1990) claiming that Christian men and leaders sexually mistreated their wives and used the Christian faith to justify this behaviour. This debate encouraged some brave women to tell their stories about how trusted persons in church had sexualised their relations when they were in a vulnerable position and in need of help. They all felt considerable guilt and shame for what had happened, even though some of them had been children or teenagers whilst being abused. Some of them had told their stories to church leaders. These leaders mainly exhorted the offended persons to forgive and be silent because of the sake of the Kingdom of God and the reputation of the church.

Sexual misconduct and sexual abuse is all about the hidden stories. In a number of cases, the offender and the leadership blamed the offended, which served to further silence the victims. The offender emphasised his goodwill and vulnerability. Church leaders accused the offended for destroying the reputation of the church by talking about their experiences. They also blamed them for tempting the perpetrators and for their sexual sins and used sexuality as a framework for understanding.

These stories are not about sexual relations. They are about misuse of power. The interpretation and choice of perspective is crucial, and using a power analytical perspective helps to clarify the dynamics in the relation, from a perspective of power asymmetry. These stories are also about a misuse of trust. The vulnerable lean on the understanding and authority of the trusted person to interpret what is good and right. The asymmetric power position makes it possible to inflict the vulnerable person with a self-understanding of responsibility, guilt and shame as a footprint in his or her life. Discovering this mechanism presupposes choosing the

perspective of the vulnerable part in the relationship. Listening to the offender very often presents a quite different story about the offender's intention of doing good, falling into sin, becoming a victim of temptation and his or her vulnerable life. These are not necessarily lies, but they present the offender as a victim and distorts his or her responsibility towards the offended.

The churches and mission organisations in Norway denied this reality for many years. However, the veracity of the revelations compelled some leaders to admit the reality. This was the starting point in the development of policies and guidelines to explore how to understand and how to handle accusations about sexual misconduct against trusted people in Church. These guidelines were based on a theoretical approach where power misuse rather than sexual affairs was the key to understanding. A core point was to listen to the account from the person who experienced the assault before listening to the version of the story from the accused. If we want to know the truth, we have to listen to more than the persons being in a position of "power over" others. Building competence in this field is achieved by learning by doing and afterwards evaluating and reflecting on the outcome of the actions. Scientific research to understand more about the mechanism, based on a power analytical framework as an interpretive tool, has also been a crucial approach. Today we know about such abuses, but still there are forces within the Church who want to deny or trivialise the reality when accusations come.

Discussion

The examples from Norway and Ireland have some areas of commonality, as well as distinctive and contextual issues in both. Context is important in identifying potential areas of problems. Issues include:

- Negative, dismissive and dehumanising terminology towards victims through naming (with expressions such as "fallen women" and "deceivers")
- Conditions based on exploitative practices, cruelty and social stigma
- Blaming only the workers/offenders and not the system, leadership or management
- Exclusion, no privileges, lack of contact with family, not knowing why they were at the institution and when they could leave (particularly in the Irish example)
- Lack of dignity for the weakest, such as placing dead babies in mass graves, children/youths/women being neglected or blamed – an effective transference of guilt from the offender to the victim.
- A desire to protect the reputation of the Church and its leadership from association with malpractice
- An undue emphasis on "respectability" and "reputation", with social and cultural values being reinforced by the Church (and *vice versa*)
- Suspicion of and lack of credibility given to victims, often the weakest and most voiceless individuals
- Victims finding difficulty in addressing Church leadership
- The blind spots in leadership positions relating to a "power over" position, with lack of awareness of the demands for support and dignity from the voiceless.

The diaconal approach must always take a position close to the weak part in the context and listening carefully to their experience of reality. When a diaconal approach is used to hide evilness and cruelty happening in the Church, this is both a misuse of Diakonia and Church as the body of Christ. Working for justice is at least as relevant and a part of the diaconal ministry when leadership and trusted persons inside church are unjust. Diaconia is about taking care of the vulnerable and those suffering instead of taking care of the reputation of the church organisation.

A diaconal approach does not necessarily create peace. Justice making is not a silent matter. A true reconciliation presupposes those involved tell the truth and openly settle the unjust behaviour and evilness. Diakonia is about solidarity with and care for the vulnerable, and it is to criticise the unjust on behalf of the offended. This is true even when a diaconal approach focuses on misuse of power and assaulting behaviour from trusted persons and leadership in church. It has to break through the blind zone to find the responsible

individuals in the church organisation. You cannot see what happens before you believe that it may happen – and it does happen.

At institutional levels, Christian stewardship and Christian care are essential elements, but must be evidenced in practice rather just aspiration. This requires effective resourcing of such institutions – in terms of management, oversight, infrastructure and staffing. Lack of finance can be an acute problem for many diaconal providers. This may explain suboptimal conditions of buildings, but this cannot be an excuse for poor management and oversight. Poor pay may be a factor in staff retention and motivation, but salary levels can never excuse cruelty or abuse.

The examples from Norway and Ireland are not unique to these countries. There is a need to ensure that lessons are learned globally from such malpractice and not just to dismiss them as exclusive examples from past eras in Norway and Ireland because they happened under specific conditions. In both countries, the catastrophic impact of malpractice in ecclesial and diaconal institutions have contributed to a significant decline in church membership. Churches and providers of diaconal care must study both the positives and negatives, with particular awareness of the social and economic contexts of where they are called to serve. In all cases, Christian standards of integrity, with care and dignity for the users of diaconal services, are of paramount importance.

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88. DIACONAL CHURCH DEVELOPMENT IN HONG KONG: THEOLOGICAL GROUNDS, CONTEXTUAL CHALLENGES AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Kenneth Tsang¹

Introduction

As a church, working on “church development” is as a matter taken for granted, of course. Nevertheless, the crucial question is: How do you define “church development”? Is it defined as increasing in membership or even becoming a megachurch? To answer this question, I strongly agree with the definition posited by Harald Hegstad when he defined church development as “an intentional effort to make the church better equipped to be what it is called to be, and do what it is called to do.”² In the ecumenical circles, more and more churches and scholars agree that diakonia is both the necessary action and the very nature of a church.³ As Nordstokke contends, “[d]iakonia is not an optional activity of the church; the church is by its very nature diaconal.”⁴ Therefore, building up a church as a diaconal church and engaging Christians participating in diakonia are essential aspects of church development. Therefore, based on the Hong Kong context, this article tries to briefly discuss how to work on this diaconal church development in three dimensions: the normative understanding, the diaconal spirituality, and the diaconal capacities.

Developing the Normative Understanding on Diakonia

Browning reminds us that there are theories, rationales and assumptions underlying all practices of a church or any Christian.⁵ Hence, developing the church’s normative understanding of diakonia as the core mission, which should be participated by the whole church,⁶ can motivate her and her members to do diaconal activities. In Hong Kong, many churches have diaconal ministries but usually in the form of institutional diakonia.⁷ That is, those diaconal works are often practiced by employed and professional staff rather than

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² Harald Hegstad, *The Real Church: An Ecclesiology of the Visible* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), p. 230.

³ Stephanie Dietrich et al., “Introduction: Diakonia as Christian Social Practice,” in *Diakonia As Christian Social Practice – An Introduction* (eds) Stephanie Dietrich et al. (Oxford: Regnum, 2014), p. 2; Stephanie Dietrich et al., “Introduction: The Diaconal Church,” in *The Diaconal Church* (eds) Stephanie Dietrich et al. (Oxford: Regnum, 2019), p. 1.

⁴ Kjell Nordstokke, “Trinitarian Perspectives on Diakonia,” in *Evangelism and Diakonia in Context* (eds) Rose Dowsett et al. (Oxford: Regnum, 2016), p. 144.

⁵ Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 6.

⁶ Under the concept of “diaconate of all believers”, diakonia should be carried by all church members instead of just ordained ministers or specialists. Refer to: Stephanie Dietrich, “Ecclesiology on the Move: Rethinking the Church in a Diaconal Perspective,” in *The Diaconal Church* (eds) Stephanie Dietrich et al. (Oxford: Regnum, 2019), p. 21.

⁷ Institutional diakonia means the churches do diakonia by setting up diaconal institutions, such as schools, hospitals, social services organisations. For more information, please refer to: Lutheran World Federation, *Diakonia in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment – An LWF Contribution to the Understanding and Practice of Diakonia* (ed) Kjell Nordstokke (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 2009), pp. 49-52.

the church members.⁸ Moreover, some statistical figures of the 2019 Hong Kong Church Survey⁹ may reflect the situation of congregational diakonia¹⁰ launched by the churches here. Among the 1305 congregations, 45.4% and 35.2% had the ministry of “visiting/serving people in the community” and “offering monetary or material assistance to needy people”, respectively. (Compare: 40% and 29.7% among 1287 congregations in 2014.)

Moreover, the percentage of congregations which participate in the activities related to prophetic diakonia (e.g. protest or reflecting opinions to the Government) was around 10%.¹¹ Regarding the expenditure on serving the poor, 28.4% of congregations spent nil and another 57.4% spent 5% or lower in their total spending. (Compare: 49.7% and 40.1% in 2014.)¹² Although the survey results show that there is an increase in congregational diakonia, it is estimated that more than 50% of congregations still have no such ministry of this kind. Such a phenomenon may be due to the fact that many congregations still emphasise preaching the gospel by words rather than by deeds. That is, the normative understanding of doing diakonia by the whole church is not yet firmly held among churches.

The first strategy to develop the normative understanding in a church is through diaconal education. The LWF’s document *Diakonia in Context* exhorts that diaconal education should be included in every part of Christian education in the church.¹³ This means that we can enhance such normative understanding through sermons, Sunday school classes, publications, programmes of preparing baptism and confirmation, etc. Clearly, the above-mentioned diaconal education is built on the premise of diaconal education among pastors and other church leaders.¹⁴ Such leadership training is essential not only because they are usually responsible for the education in churches but also the ministries are often initiated and decided at the leadership level. Hence, it is good to see that more and more diaconal organisations and seminaries in Hong Kong have launched programmes or courses related to diakonia. For example, the Mission to New Arrivals Limited has set up the School of Poverty Caring in 2009; the Lutheran Theological Seminary has offered diaconal courses and launched the Master of Arts in Diakonia programme since 2012.

Besides formal education, we can also educate members via making the normative understanding ‘visible’ in the church. For instance, the church can appoint leaders or set up a department that is responsible for the diaconal ministry. Indeed, such specific leadership and structure of ministry does not only facilitate the diaconal work but also gives a clear signal to her members that diakonia is their vital ministry. Moreover, if most leaders are actively participating in diakonia, it will create a modelling effect which can also propagate

⁸ Similar to many developed cities, many diaconal institutions in Hong Kong employ professional staff, such as social workers, teaching professions and medical professions, to offer professional services. Those staff include Christians and non-Christians. Usually, the churches will assign some church leaders to participate in the governing boards of their institutions. Nevertheless, most Christians in the congregations of the churches have not participated in this kind of diakonia.

⁹ This is a census survey among Chinese Protestant congregations in Hong Kong which is conducted by the Hong Kong Church Renewal Movement in every five years.

¹⁰ Congregational diakonia means the diaconal works are organised at a congregation level and are mainly enacted by church members. For instance, visiting poor people in the community to offer social and tangible support is one common congregational diakonia in Hong Kong. For more information about congregational diakonia, please refer to: Lutheran World Federation, *Diakonia in Context*, pp. 48-49.

¹¹ Research Group on 2019 Hong Kong Church Survey, *Report on 2019 Hong Kong Church Survey*, p. 51. It is noted that the data of this survey reflected the situations before the mass social movement started in Hong Kong in June 2019.

¹² Research Group on 2019 Hong Kong Church Survey, *Report on 2019 Hong Kong Church Survey*, p. 55. Research Group on 2014 Hong Kong Church Survey, *2014 Hong Kong Church Survey – The Collection of Statistical Data*, p. 50.

¹³ It is noted that the diaconal education stated in this document is not only about the normative principles regarding diakonia, but also includes how to do diakonia in a practical sense. Refer to: Lutheran World Federation, *Diakonia in Context*, p. 76.

¹⁴ In *Diakonia in Context*, it indicates that diakonia is quite often lacking in pastoral training. It exhorts that diakonia should be an integral part of theological education. Refer to: Lutheran World Federation, *Diakonia in Context*, p. 76.

the normative understanding. In sum, diaconal education, no matter whether in formal or informal practices, is crucial in propagating a normative understanding of diakonia. Also, diaconal education can equip members on how to plan and to do diakonia, which in turn is enhancing the diaconal capacities of the church. However, before discussing the diaconal capacities, we first need to turn to diaconal spirituality.

Developing Members' Diaconal Spirituality

After engaging members to have a normative understanding of diakonia, the second issue is about how to nurture them to live out this rational knowledge. In doing so, the churches should work on members' diaconal spirituality. This spirituality can be defined as the transformation of one's life by God's grace that: 1) one can see "the presence of God in everyday life and especially in situations where people struggle for life and dignity;"¹⁵ 2) one is sensitive and eager to be in solidarity with the people and other creatures in suffering; 3) one is willing to work on their holistic needs even in a sacrificial manner.¹⁶ Here are two suggestions on building up such spirituality.

Words and Sacraments

In my ministerial experience, it is easy to find Christians and even church leaders who consider that words and sacraments have no relation to diakonia. In fact, they have an inseparable relationship. According to Martin Luther, human's sinful nature of unbelief to God makes a person to turn himself away from God as well as from other people, and to turn exclusively to himself (*incurvatio in se ipsum*).¹⁷ In turn, just opposite to the principle of diaconal spirituality, they become "ingratitude, greed, hoarding for oneself, not being willing to give anything to others."¹⁸ Therefore, working on the bondage of sin is fundamental. Based on Luther's teaching of two kinds of righteousness, once a person is given the alien righteousness through faith in Christ, their proper righteousness is bestowed as the fruit of alien righteousness.¹⁹ Against the life of *incurvatio in se ipsum*, the life of proper righteousness consists of crucifying the desires of seeking own good, loving one's neighbours, and seeking the good of others.²⁰ In other words, nurturing Christians' faith in Christ (God) is nurturing their diaconal spirituality at the same time. As Samuel Torvend contends:

For Luther, Christian faith – trust in God – enlightens every aspect of life, animates loving service to the neighbour, and prompts public resistance to injustice whether that injustice is discerned in banking, law, politics, or trade, in the local store or the multinational corporation.²¹

¹⁵ Lutheran World Federation, *Diakonia in Context*, p. 37.

¹⁶ For more discussions on the concept of diaconal spirituality, please refer to: Lutheran World Federation, *Diakonia in Context*, pp. 37-38; Johannes Nissen, "Partners in Life: Reflections on Diaconal Spirituality," in *Spirituality, Diaconia and Social Work* (ed) Ullrich Zeitler (Diakonhøjskolen Aarhus: Centre for Diaconia and Pedagogy, 2012), pp. 71-100.

¹⁷ Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008), pp. 181-182.

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¹⁹ Martin Luther, "Two Kinds of Righteousness," in *Luther's Works* (eds) Harold J. Grimm and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 31 (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1957), pp. 297-300.

²⁰ Martin Luther, "Two Kinds of Righteousness," pp. 299-300.

²¹ Samuel Torvend, "Greed is an Unbelieving Scoundrel", in *The Forgotten Luther: Reclaiming the Social-Economic Dimension of the Reformation* (eds). Carter Lindberg and Paul Wee (Minneapolis, MN: Lutheran University Press, 2016), p. 37.

Nurturing people's faith can be done by words and sacraments. Through preaching God's words, the Holy Spirit calls people to repent and live in faith. Yet, God's call to repentance and faith is not only concerning loving God but also about loving one's neighbours (see as key references 1 Cor. 13:1-8a and Mt. 25:31-46).

In the protestant tradition, the two sacraments, baptism and eucharist, are important for faith development. Both sacraments call for people's repentance and affirm the gift of God's salvation. The gift of baptism liberates and empowers people to live out God's call in sharing their faith in words and deeds (*diakonia*) in the world.²² In the Lutheran tradition, Christians are called to return to their baptism daily. This appeal is not only about remembering God's salvation, but also "a call to live out baptism in daily life, in witness and service, *diakonia*."

Regarding eucharist, as indicated by Rodolfo Gaede Neto, it signifies the notions of God's unconditional love, the coming of the Kingdom of God, sharing, inclusion, transformation, reconciliation, and empowerment, which all point to *diakonia*.²³ In sum, both words and sacraments are crucial in developing Christians' diaconal spirituality. As Nordstokke indicates, "[w]hat brings *diakonia* into being, motivates and sustains it, comes from the same sources that give life to the church, namely Word and sacraments."²⁴

Pray and Work (*Ora et labora*)

The notion of "Pray and Work" (*Ora et labora*) from the monastic tradition also give insights on how to nurture members' diaconal spirituality. As mentioned in *Diakonia in Context*, "Pray and Work" points at the mutual relationship between spiritual life and *diakonia* that "true prayer is incarnated in the experiences of real life and in the struggle against the forces of death. In the same way, diaconal work is imbedded in that for which faith sees and hope longs."²⁵ Therefore, in the diaconal spirituality building, the churches should emphasise both Prayer and Work. As the words and sacraments are related to the part of "Pray", the following will focus on "Work" (i.e. participation in *diakonia*).

In my research regarding the Chinese Lutheran congregations' diaconal practices for the poor in Hong Kong conducted from 2016 to 2017, one of the results reflected that members' motivation was enhanced after participating in some experiential learnings of diaconal work.²⁶ Through the work, members can experience the joyfulness of living out God's calling and of putting their learning from sermon and bible study into practice. Through the work, members put on a metaphorical new pair of glasses to see those people in suffering, which involves revising their negative misconceptions towards them.²⁷ Through the work, members notice that God is working among vulnerable people. Through the work, members' and the whole church are encouraged to go deep in their diaconal reflection and participation. As Howard says:

We are refined through spiritual formation in the midst of care, finding again and again the need to repent of our own agendas and judgments so that we might care as Christ cares. Through Christ we are enabled to persevere in the life of care, for care can become full of trials and heaviness over time. We are led from depth into depth as we

²² Stephanie Dietrich, "Risen to New Life in Christ," p. 85, p. 89.

²³ Rodolfo Gaede Neto, "Sharing the Body of Christ: Eucharist in a Diaconal Perspective," in *The Diaconal Church* (eds. Stephanie Dietrich et al. (Oxford: Regnum, 2019), pp. 105-110.

²⁴ Kjell Nordstokke, "Reflections on the Theology of *Diakonia*," *Diakonian tutkimus. Journal for the Study of Diaconia* 2 (2011), p. 224, [Available at: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/30921348.pdf>], [Accessed 14th March 2020].

²⁵ Lutheran World Federation, *Diakonia in Context*, p. 35.

²⁶ Ho Yin Kenneth Tsang, "Being a Diaconal Congregation with the Poor in Hong Kong: A Study on Local Chinese Lutheran Congregations' Diaconal Practices for the Poor," (Th.D. diss., Lutheran Theological Seminary, Hong Kong, 2018), pp. 361-363.

²⁷ In the results of my research on Lutheran congregations' diaconal practices for the poor, some congregations reported that members' participation in the diaconal works help them understand more about poverty and correct their misconceptions towards poor people. Refer to: Ho Yin Kenneth Tsang, "Being a Diaconal Congregation," pp. 362-363.

share increasingly the heart of God and the heart of others. To bring the body of Christ into an authentic expression of care is indeed a reorientation and rehabilitation of life.²⁸

In conclusion, developing members' diaconal spirituality through Prayer (words and sacraments) and Work (participation in diaconal works) helps them to be liberated from the *incurvatio in se ipsum* and to live out the normative understanding of diakonia. Furthermore, working both on the diaconal spirituality and the normative understanding are also contributing to the third dimension – diaconal capacities – of developing a diaconal church.

Developing the Diaconal Capacities of the Church

Based on the research on the congregations' diaconal practices for the poor in Hong Kong as mentioned above, the diaconal capacities related to manpower, economic, skills and knowledge are important issues for a congregation considering her participation in diaconal works.²⁹ In other words, enhancing the diaconal capacities of the churches can motivate their diaconal participation. Then, how to strengthen them?

Diaconal spirituality helps members become sensitive to the holistic needs and dignity of vulnerable people, which is a vital “skill and knowledge” in doing diakonia. Of course, besides these two methods, there are other ways to enhance diaconal capacities. This article suggests two more of these.

The first one is about discernment. If a church has too many activities and ministries, it is difficult for her members to squeeze in time for diakonia. It is also sensible to say that no one church can respond to all kinds of suffering in society. Hence, every church needs to discern what their ministries and diakonia should focus on prayerfully. As Lupton describes, “[f]ocus is also essential if we expect measurable results. Define the parish too large, spread our ministry too thin, and we dissipate our energies.”³⁰ In discernment, it is better to include an asset-mapping exercise. Nordstokke proposes that a church should map out their diaconal assets, both tangible assets (e.g., manpower and economic resources) and intangible assets (e.g., collective memory and relationships) since those assets can guide, correct and sustain the diaconal works of the church.³¹ Hence, strictly speaking, discernment is not mainly to increase the diaconal capacities of a church. It is about helping a church to make good use of her capacities.

The second one is about participation. Who are the participants of the diaconal works? In a normative sense, all people who are involved in the diaconal works, no matter whether they are going to serve or be served initially, are participants. All should be encouraged to contribute in the diaconal process. The “Use Your Talents project” is about an approach which “affirms that each person is given talents [by God] for their own and other people’s good; that well-being would only happen if each person uses their talents for themselves and others.”³² Therefore, this approach mobilises all participants to contribute their talents (assets) in the diaconal works. As such, the participants may also discover their unknown talents when doing diakonia.³³ Furthermore, as mentioned above, no one church can solve all challenges in society. A church requires networking and co-operation with other churches, organisations, and the wider community.

²⁸ Evan B. Howard, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008), p. 363.

²⁹ Ho Yin Kenneth Tsang, “Being a Diaconal Congregation,” pp. 365-366.

³⁰ Robert D. Lupton, *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help (And How to Reverse It)* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), p. 172.

³¹ Kjell Nordstokke, “Mapping Out and Mobilising Diaconal Assets,” in *Diakonia as Christian Social Practice: An Introduction*, ed. Stephanie Dietrich et al. (Oxford: Regnum, 2014), 217-219.

³² Zo Ramiandra Rakotoarison, “Diakonia as Asset-based Action and the Role of the Congregation,” in *The Diaconal Church* (eds) Stephanie Dietrich et al. (Oxford: Regnum, 2019), p. 203.

³³ As Rakotoarison indicates, “[The participants] are also surprised to discover that they have many more talents and possibilities at their disposal than they thought. Those who experienced Use Your Talents called it an eye/mind-opener.” Refer to: Zo Ramiandra Rakotoarison, “Diakonia as Asset-based Action,” p. 204.

Therefore, with this mode of participation, it is believed that the diaconal capacities of a church will be enhanced.

Conclusion

Working on the normative understanding of diakonia, the diaconal spirituality, and the diaconal capacities among church members can encourage a church to go further and deeper in her diaconal ministry. Other than “doing”, working on these three dimensions, particularly the diaconal spirituality, nurtures the diaconal “being” of a church. It should be highlighted that being is more important than doing (Refer to Mt. 25:31-46). A diaconal church (i.e., a church with diaconal “being”) will do diakonia spontaneously, even to a sacrificial level. As Garcia and Nunes contend, “It is not merely doing things for others. It is a life driven by the love of God to serve others, even to the point of great sacrifice. This is the mark of true discipleship that is accentuated by *diakonia* in the New Testament.”³⁴ Finally, since all churches and every Christians are still under the influence of evil power, the diaconal church development is often confronted with ups and downs. Nevertheless, in faith, the Holy Spirit will help us move step by step towards becoming a diaconal church.

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89. BUILDING DIACONAL LEADERSHIP IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS – AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES

Bosela E. Eale¹

Introduction

Good leadership, especially in Africa, is a scarce commodity and the churches are not an exception to this statement. Appropriate skill development in that direction is paramount if the church is to make progress in the 21st century and rub shoulders with partners' churches and development partners. Building diaconal leadership is an initiative that exposes church leaders to new ways and techniques of administering and developing partners. Skill development and diaconal leadership training should become an integral part of the church's education mechanism and protocols. The church in Africa should start taking steps to mobilise resources to demonstrate their resolve and experience emanating from the training seminars across the continent. Leadership ought to be understood as an art of leading people to higher or better ground. It is getting people out of situations of chaos, crises and darkness and into the light; from confusion to clarity. Leadership is about influencing change and, for the most part, is a problem-solving process.

It is to be recognised that if the church is to successfully fulfil its mission and vision for building diaconal leadership, it must have trained leaders who understand the responsibilities of human resource management and church leadership. This must include preparedness for leadership on matters, among others, to do with succession, strategy, policy and financial sustainability. Such training will equip church leadership with effective service and strengthen capacities within the church against potential risk. The need for building diaconal leadership comes out of the need felt on the ground. This is expressed by Banks and Ledbetter, when they write:²

The local or international, social or economic, racial or cultural scene may be uncertain, causing people to feel anxious, unsettled, and insecure about the future. Or perhaps the pace of change is so fast or the changes so unpredictable that people feel things are out of control. Sometimes these concerns give rise to the desire for insightful and dependable leaders who can help people understand what is happening and how it affects them, as well as give them confidence in their present circumstances.

Diaconal leadership development has to be an intentional process that enables the target leadership to confront real organisation management, organisational sustainability and ability of leadership to take advantage of modern methods of communication; these qualities are essential for effective diaconal development work.

Contextual Diaconal Leadership

Diaconal action has changed from one generation to the next according to contextual environments. All people live and act within particular historic contexts. The Bible announces God's actions in the world within a specific historic context and very often where there is human suffering. Diaconal action, understood as integral to the church's mission in today's world, is also conditioned and challenged by concrete contexts. In order to be relevant, diaconal work requires prayerful discernment of the sign of the times as well as faithful readings of the context. Such contextual reading is a complex endeavour due to the fact all contexts are

¹ Prof. Eale Bosela is Director of the Unit on Peace, Diakonia and Development at the All African Conference of Churches in Nairobi.

² Robert J. Banks, Bernice M. Ledbetter, et al. *Reviewing Leadership: A Christian Evaluation of Currents Approaches*, 2004, p. 21.

multifaceted and require an interdisciplinary approach.³ For diaconal leadership, reading the context is never a goal in itself. Its purpose is to mobilise diaconal action and make sure that such action is well considered for the sake of the people in need. It helps to set priorities and formulate objectives for shared action, and to identify work methods that are effective and based on diaconal values.⁴ On the importance of the contextual leadership for diaconia and the value that should be added to it, Swart asserts:⁵

In light of the attempts to contextual understanding of South Africa's services-delivery crisis [...] I will more pertinently consider that the church may offer in terms of its own service to society – or put differently in more peculiar theological language, in terms of its own diaconal response – to make a transformational difference to the crisis and by implication the living conditions of numerous communities of the poor that suffering from crisis.

Evolving persons without working with them to comprehend and change their working environment will not lead the organisation to any transformation. The main relation of the church is with people. It has been observed that, from a diaconal perspective, the church must serve people through worship, word and deed, especially focusing on the most vulnerable and marginalised people and communities. The perception of a diaconal church keeps the church close to individuals, their daily life and their context. A church committed to diaconal work treasures the relationships between people and is a convivial space and presence which helps to mature networks and also contributes to the encouragement of working with people in the local context.⁶

Understanding the Culture

Culture is a strong part of people's lives. It impacts their views, their beliefs, their expectations, their allegiances, and their uncertainties and worries. Thus, when working with people and building relationships with them, it helps to have some perspective and understanding of their cultures. When one explores the culture, it is important to remember how much we have in common as well as our differences. It has been argued by Damirchi *et al.* that:⁷

Culture is the most important need of human society and basic factor of activeness, joy and continuity of life and societies. Nowadays, cultural issues are regarded as the most important factors in economic, social, political and humanistic and ethic development are on the focus of all the scholars and scientists and effective role of culture in all domains, including theoretic and biologic ones, has created a new perspective in subjective and objective domains. Culture in the recent world, is the ground definition, recycle and development of all abilities, values, identities, believes, norms, traditions, myths and human symbols.

It is becoming clear that if we want to build a diaconal leadership which is successful at improving conditions and solving problems, we need to understand and appreciate many cultures, establish relationships with people from cultures other than our own, and build strong alliances with different cultural groups. Africa is a continent with a mosaic of cultures. As such, in terms of diaconal leadership, copy and paste methods will not work. As Ross rightly says in the opening remarks during the AACCC and WCC diaconal and development seminar with church leaders from Angola and Mozambique in Maputo: the African experience of diaconia differs enormously from parts of Europe and North America, where highly specialised and professionalised

³ Kjell Nordstokke, *Diakonia in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment*, Geneva: LWF, 2009, p. 12.

⁴ Kjell Nordstokke, *Diakonia in Context*, p. 13.

⁵ Ignatius Swart. *South Africa's Service-delivery Crisis*, 2013, p. 7.

⁶ Interdiac Team and Participants in the New Learning Programme. *New Directions for Diaconia*, 2019, p. 8.

⁷ Qader V. Damirchi et al. "Leadership in Context of Culture", *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies*, 3(1) (2016), p. 2102.

diaconal agencies have been developed and are often funded by the church and by governments.⁸ This is why the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) suggested that diaconal seminars should be held in the different geographical and linguistical contexts of Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone member churches. It is recognised that the church in its ecclesiastical expressions has a long and rich tradition of leadership that is expressed both inside its own community and in the world at large.⁹ We should note that there are several ways to identify how culture could influence leadership. This is done when culture shapes the image of the ideal of a particular group of people, nation or organisation. It also could be seen when culture influences the personality traits and the work values of leaders and followers in a particular setting.¹⁰

Diaconal Leadership Training

Strengthening churches in their diaconal work of capacity building, exchange of best practices, use of methodologies and mutual analysis of the challenges and issues faced by the church is the overall aim of diaconal leadership training. Skills development and training should become an integral part of building diaconal leadership. The capacity building for diaconal leadership helps our churches to improve their ability to respond to the needs of their communities. It provides member churches with the knowledge and skills to be able to do their diaconal work more effectively and sustainably. It also offers space for participants to share challenges and lessons learned from their diaconal work in their specific contexts so that they can inspire and learn from each other.

As Nordstokke writes:

It should be remembered that empowerment always implies shifting of power, which means that imbalances of power must be dealt with critically. Diakonia should constantly raise this issue, not only in society and in the relations between helpers and those helped, but also with reference to diaconal praxis and how power is established and lived out in the life of the Church. Too often the question of power is silenced in the Church; in some cases it is even disguised behind service language.¹¹

Equipping a congregation for service designates the biblical understanding of this building process. Therefore, it is the primary task of servant leaders and is at the very heart of diaconal leadership.¹² One of the reasons the church is called to equip its member for diaconal work is to serve the vulnerable. The teaching should address issues such as human suffering, injustice and emergency responses which will then enable churches to become better equipped to undertake these roles. To enable people in the church to be active in diaconal work, they need not only training but someone with a strong leadership capacity to help people through personal leadership development and creative leadership. As it has been argued:

The diaconal worker would take a role of enabler, helping people to recognise their strengths and capabilities and then work together with them towards developing strong community, supporting new actions toward leaving together. A diaconal church and its members would also take a critical position towards political and economic structures where they prevent human flourishing and do not recognise the dignity of all.¹³

⁸ Matthew Ross, *Report of the seminar on Human resource management and leadership for diaconia development and development held in Maputo, Mozambique from the 17th-21st June 2019*, p. 7.

⁹ Banks, Ledbetter, et al. *Reviewing Leadership* p. 42.

¹⁰ Qader V. Damirchi et al. *Leadership in Context of Culture* p. 2106.

¹¹ Kjell Nordstokke, *Diakonia in Context*, p. 46.

¹² Knud Jørgensen, *Equipping for service: Diakonia and Capacity-Building*, p. 2.

¹³ Knud Jørgensen, *Equipping for Service*, p. 9.

Training is an element that can help people learn to do things in a better way. Sometimes, we can have good motives in wanting to help others, but it may be that we do it in a way that hurts them in the long run because we undermine both their dignity and ours. It is sometimes appropriate to simply give food and other forms of direct relief to people who need them, but more often it is better to build a relationship and to get involved in the lives of people to comprehend what is going on at deeper levels, beyond their more obvious needs, in order to find practical, loving ways to address the root causes of those needs. True love and service can only come through relationships. Building diaconal leadership is an important exercise that is being done in different churches and in different contexts. It is not an academic education, but rather a training performed through seminars and workshops. An important part of the training is the sharing of experience in different contexts among others.

Challenges in Diaconal Leadership Building

Church diaconal work is being implemented in very difficult contexts, especially in Africa where dimensions of poverty and development have become a real challenge. This makes several diaconal projects rely on external donors without which nothing will be done. The lack of identifying spiritual, emotional and physical competencies necessary for someone within the circle of the church means that they are often capable of moving things from one level to another, and impact people in the community should be taken into account. It is observed that challenges for building diaconal leadership are complex:

While leadership presents to each of us the opportunity to demonstrate the best of what we are, it also exposes our limitations. In many cases, good leaders have to overcome those limitations in order to transmit and follow their vision. Fear, lack of confidence, insecurity, impatience, intolerance (all can act as barriers to leadership. At the same time, acknowledging and overcoming them can turn a mediocre leader into a great one. It's often very difficult for people, especially those who see themselves as leaders, to admit that they might have personality traits or personal characteristics that interfere with their ability to reach their goals. Part of good leadership is learning to accept the reality of those traits, and working to change them so they don't get in the way.¹⁴

In her paper entitled “An overview on the imperative of Diakonia for the Church” presented at the 11th All Africa Conference of Churches Assembly in Kigali, Phiri states, “several challenges exist requiring concerted efforts and renewed commitment of the churches. Dwindling overseas supports and growing poverty in rural African communities are new realities that threaten viability/sustainability of the churches’ health in serving rural poor population.”¹⁵ The spirit of dependency has been also pointed out as one of the challenges for building diaconal leadership. As Bowers du Toit rightly asserts, “In poorer communities, a culture of entitlement and dependency was noted. This was linked to mental poverty particularly in cases where people believe that they could not do much out of their own initiative. It was also linked to a culture of dependency created by wealthy people/donors.”¹⁶

Conclusion

Whereas most congregations in the world still show the lack of professionalised capacity and struggle with the delivery of professionalised services to the poor and marginalised, there are also many of them that appear to undergird the most vulnerable in communities with respect to relief work and are relatively engaged in

¹⁴ Center for Community Health and Development. *Recognizing the Challenge for Leadership* 1994, p. 1.

¹⁵ Isabel A. Phiri. *An Overview on the Imperative of Diakonia for the Church*, 2018, p. 5.

¹⁶ Nadine Bowers du Toit, *Meeting the Challenge of Poverty and Inequality? 'Hindrances and Helps' with Regard to Congregational Mobilisation in South Africa*, 2017. p.4.

educational and individual empowerment initiatives.¹⁷ Equipping church leaders on human resource management, leadership development and advocacy work is a very appropriate step for church leaders in Africa. Knowledge and skill training and development are essential for promoting good leadership for diaconal work. Regular interaction and education of church leaders is highly desirable in the respective accredited zones. This interaction will go a long way in the promotion of confidence, effectiveness and efficiency in the management of all human, financial and material resources that may be invested for the diaconal work in the church.

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90. BUILDING DIACONAL LEADERSHIP IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS – PERSPECTIVES FROM THE ARGENTINIAN CONTEXT AND THE ROLE OF CREAS

Humberto Shikiya¹

Diakonia and Contexts

Concepts and biblical-theological approaches to diaconia have gathered momentum within the Ecumenical Movement and in inter-ecclesiastical co-operation. One of the most widely used definitions of the term is found in the *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* which says that Diakonia is “responsible service of the Gospel in word and deed by Christians in response to people’s needs.”²

Ecumenical diakonia is a key expression to respond in a practical way to human needs based on the vocation which Churches have regarding their commitment to unity and their participation in God’s mission. Ecumenical Diakonia is an expression also to declare with hope the Kingdom of God, his justice, and his peace in the midst of changing contexts and critical situations.

Churches have undertaken the responsibility of the Gospel through their mission in different historical periods in a way so that Christians would give an organised response to human needs. Therefore, to be relevant, diaconal action needs the “prayerful discernment of the signs of the times and a faithful reading of the contexts.”³

The sign of our times is inequality on a global scale. Growing inequality in both developing and rich countries exacerbates social divisions and delays economic and social progress, as one can see in the data provided in the World Social Report 2020⁴ on inequality in a rapidly changing world. The richest 1% of the population accounts for 46% of the world’s wealth, while the poorest 40% obtain less than 25% of the income. An economy distanced from ethics and a financial system that tends to distance itself from the real economy generates a multiplicity of inequalities and environmental damage. Inequality needs to be seen in its intersectionality, where gender, race and ethnicity, among others, play an important role.

Latin America and the Caribbean are the most unequal regions in the world with signs of very high violence which, in several South American countries, led people to express their discontent in the streets during the second half of 2019, prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in January 2020. It is clear that the pandemic will have even greater impacts on the most vulnerable people in the region: people with underlying health problems, the elderly, unemployed youth, underemployed people, women, unprotected workers and

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² *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002), p. 305.

³ *Mission in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment*. An LWF contribution to the understanding and practice of mission (Geneva: FLM, 2006), p. 10.

⁴ UNDESA. World Social Report 2020. Inequality in a Rapidly Changing World.

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2020/02/World-Social-Report2020-FullReport.pdf>. (January, 2020).

migrant workers, indigenous people, people of African descent, and LGBT groups, and will result in considerable increases in inequalities.

Not only does it need to be significant, diaconal action as seen and practised by CREAS, the Ecumenical Regional Center for Advisory and Service,⁵ is also relevant because it makes solutions more sustainable. Therefore, diaconal action requires a systematic updating of the theological analysis and interpretation of the contexts in which diakonia takes place. Analysis and interpretation are the starting points of relevant and pertinent diaconal action. Diakonia is also influenced by changing contexts, which needs to be reflected in order to articulate a dynamic and versatile response from faith, hope and love⁶ with a form of action “that heals and cares for people and relationships, in struggles that seek justice and affirm truth.”⁷

Furthermore, “diakonia must build partnerships, not only at a global level or large church structures, but also between congregations, specialised ministries and networks of people committed to the values of justice, peace and human dignity at local, regional and national levels”.⁸ In the diaconal practices of the churches in Latin America and the Caribbean, alliances with other churches, faith communities, community groups, networks, civil society organisations and social movements are a key dimension for the viability of ecumenical, prophetic and political Diakonia. There are several examples of this over the last 20 years linking joint actions from the local, national, regional and international levels such as participation in the World Social Forums, the Conference of Parties (COP) on Climate Change, among others.

The ethnic-racial condition is a factor of structural inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean. Around 133 million people of African descent live in the region (World Bank, 2018) and 45 million indigenous people (UNFPA, 2010). Their worldviews contribute to new narratives and development paradigms. The most concrete contribution has been made by the indigenous peoples of the Andean region with the concept of *Buen Vivir* (“*Suma Qamaña*”, in the Aymara language) as a paradigm of an alternative society⁹ in opposition to the Western approach of development based on economic growth, social welfare and sustainable progress. The ecumenical diaconal action assumes from the churches, who have an indigenous majority, the cosmivision of the *Buen Vivir* concept within its contextual theology and interprets its relationship of care and protection of nature and its resources from the indigenous spiritualities.

Diakonia, Development and Co-operation

The 21st century brought a diaconal commitment to inclusiveness, to take into account that the objects of diaconal work participate as subject actors who build their own dignity. In Latin America and the Caribbean, political scenarios have emerged some years ago, making it possible to promote income redistribution policies and, in many countries, the expansion of rights, and this was due to the favourable situation of commodity prices at a global level. In terms of international co-operation in September 2000, 189 countries signed the United Nations Millennium Declaration, in which they committed themselves to eradicate extreme poverty in all its forms by 2015. Eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were established with their 18 targets.

After exhausting co-operation in the 1990s, the search for a new international co-operation architecture emerged, and a series of High-Level Forums promoted by the OECD/DAC and the Multilateral Development Banks were held with the aim of harmonising the efficiency and effectiveness of development co-operation between donors and recipients. In March 2005, the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness emerged, setting

⁵ See the website: <http://creas.org/>.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 13 King James Version (KJV).

⁷ *Perspectivas teológicas sobre la diakonia en el siglo XXI. Documento de la conferencia organizada conjuntamente por los programas Justicia y diakonia, Comunidades justas e incluyentes, y Misión y evangelización del Consejo Mundial de Iglesias en Colombo, Sri Lanka* (June 2nd-6th 2012).

⁸ *Perspectivas teológicas*.

⁹ *El Buen Vivir como Paradigma Societal Alternativo. Dossier de Economistas sin Fronteras*. (2016).

out commitments to move towards better aid management. To this end, a plan was established with concrete goals to be achieved by 2010 from the perspective of five axes: ownership, alignment, harmonisation, management for results and mutual responsibility.

After four High-Level Forums on Development Effectiveness¹⁰ organised between 2003 and 2011 by OECD/DAC and with a global financial crisis between them, a new institutional framework was established: The Global Partnership for Development Effectiveness Co-operation,¹¹ which for the first time has official representation from Civil Society.

From 2005 onwards, ecumenical development co-operation together with the World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation, also began to promote a process of creating a new global alliance committed to working together on development and advocacy to a high quality. As a culmination of that process, the global alliance ACT Development (Action by Churches Together for Development)¹² was founded in Kenya in February 2007. The creation of ACT Development was mandated to promote a merger process with ACT International.¹³

After a process of regional consultations with the members of both international bodies, in 2009, the decision was taken by a large majority to create ACT Alliance, which began operating under that name in January 2010. ACT Alliance¹⁴ aims to work for positive and sustainable change for the lives of people affected by poverty and injustice through co-ordinated and effective actions in the field of humanitarian assistance, development and long-term advocacy.

The current framework for the implementation of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represents a socio-political setting for diaconal action. While the signatory countries of the 17 SDGs, beginning with the United Nations Assembly in mid-September 2015, assumed their implementation through development plans, public policies and government programmes, it is up to civil society organisations, including churches and FBOs, to ensure that “no one is left behind” in accordance with the 2030 agenda and its achievements, in addition to contributing to its results with their diaconal and social action.

Diakonia, Leaderships and Capacities

The building of diaconal leadership requires increasing attention and training in the face of changing and complex contexts. In the leadership training and capacity building experience of CREAS¹⁵ in Argentina, there are four key areas which are part of the strategic management of Diakonia.

The Theological Framework of Diakonia

In discerning the signs of the times, diakonia seeks to apply its theological vision to the analysis of the context and to the interpretation of the different scenarios of intervention with diaconal action.

¹⁰ <https://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/theaccrahighlevelforumhlf3andtheaccraagendaforaction.htm#:~:text=The%20Accra%20High%20Level%20Forum,lift%20people%20out%20of%20poverty.>

¹¹ See: <http://effectivecooperation.org/>.

¹² ACT Development currently consists of 77 ecumenical development agencies, Church Development Departments and Ecumenical Development Organisations which together implement development programmes in 140 countries.

¹³ Founded in 1995 to globally co-ordinate humanitarian aid actions mainly in the face of emergencies and natural disasters.

¹⁴ ACT Alliance today is a coalition of 135 churches and faith-based organisations working together in more than 120 countries.

¹⁵ CREAS is a Christian-inspired multidisciplinary regional ecumenical organisation whose mission is to strengthen the capacity of the ecumenical movement to promote dignity, economic, ethnic-social and gender justice, care for the common house and respect for diversity. See also: http://www.creas.org/ingles/index_en.htm.

The theological frame of reference provides the values for diakonia that will be made explicit in all its actions and dimensions. We have seen that diakonia will try to be ecumenical, prophetic and political in the way that it is directed towards unity, sharing, justice and peace, giving reason for hope, promoting dignity, advocating for human rights and proposing alternatives.

The diaconal action in the different contexts of the region shows that the churches' practices are based on territorial and communitarian principles, on what happens to people in their living conditions, and on the possibilities of transforming the situations of injustice suffered by people. Actions are geared towards restoring relationships and promoting unity for the common good and care of creation. These transformations involve going to the root causes of injustices in such a way that they are eradicated and have a lasting resolution.

Resources and Capacities, Diversification and Limits

The approach of the resources and capacities theory tries to analyse the reasons why organisations, which develop their activity in the same context and which would be subject to the same social, economic and environmental impact factors, obtain differentiated levels of results.

Therefore, the purpose of this analysis of resources and capabilities is to identify the potential of the organisation to establish differentiated advantages by identifying and assessing the resources and skills it has or could get access to. It also focuses on maximising the resources and capabilities that organisations possess, as well as on their limits and differences to explain the evolution of their results.

In general, three basic ideas, supporting the resources and capabilities approach,¹⁶ can be considered:

- a) Organisations are different from one another because of the resources and capabilities they possess at any given time, as well as their different characteristics (heterogeneity).
- b) These resources and capacities are not available to all organisations under the same conditions (imperfect mobility).
- c) This double consideration (heterogeneity and imperfect mobility) explains the difference in performance between organisations, even within the same area.

An organisation's benefit is the result of both the characteristics of the context (external factors) and the combination of the resources available to it (internal factors). In fact, the organisation is considered as a set of values, technologies, skills, knowledge, etc., that are generated and expanded over time. It becomes a unique combination of heterogeneous resources and capabilities, which gives the organisation a distinct and unique position in the context to be able to have an impact.

An organisation is more than a unit of programmes and projects, it is also a collection of productive resources, where the challenge for those who run it will be to identify, develop, protect and deploy resources and capabilities in such a way that it gives the organisation a sustainable advantage, and indeed a superior benefit. Ultimately, the best way in which the organisation deploys its resources and capabilities¹⁷ will determine its position to compete for more results and achieve greater impact.

¹⁶ Carrión Maroto Juan y Ortiz de Urbina Marta. *La Teoría de Recursos y Capacidades y la Gestión del Conocimiento. Fundación Iberoamericana del Conocimiento. Comunicación y Pedagogía: nuevas tecnologías y recursos didácticos.* (Spain, 2002), pp. 65-67.

¹⁷ Resources are things or elements that are owned or controlled and exist relatively independently of their concrete use; capacities represent ways of doing activities and using resources. In contrast to the individual skills of each person, capabilities only exist to the extent that people collaborate with each other and co-ordinate to solve a problem or perform an activity.

Communication and Organisational Culture

There is a close link between diaconal action and communication. Communication spreads and reaches others without the direct experience of diaconal action, tells and builds stories, generates representations about a diaconal action that the public has not necessarily experienced.

The construction of the story of what happens constitutes one of the key paradigms to get to know the organisational identity and culture. Identity here is seen as a synthesis between “I am who I am because of what I do, but also because of what I say I do”. The projection of this identity in the elements that manifest it will produce the image that the people with whom the organisation relates have of it.

The transformations pursued by diaconal action must be led by people who have a high degree of commitment, who form a stable critical mass and who are legitimated by other groups that can contribute to and maximise these transformations so that they are sustainable over time.

In this type of transformation or change, communication ceases to be a tool and becomes a strategy. For this purpose, it is necessary to clearly define what changes are desired, and who are the actors of the changes that will take place, since they will be the protagonists of the communication.

The Mobilisation of Resources, Processes and Opportunities

The role as agents of civil society and their mandate to undertake advocacy and public testimony activities, urge the actors of the diakonia to build alliances and co-operation networks. This includes collaborating with social organisations, governments, private sector actors and other religious communities. The goal of this strategy is to contribute to the construction of fair, participatory and sustainable societies where everyone has equal access to common goods and the full exercise of their rights.

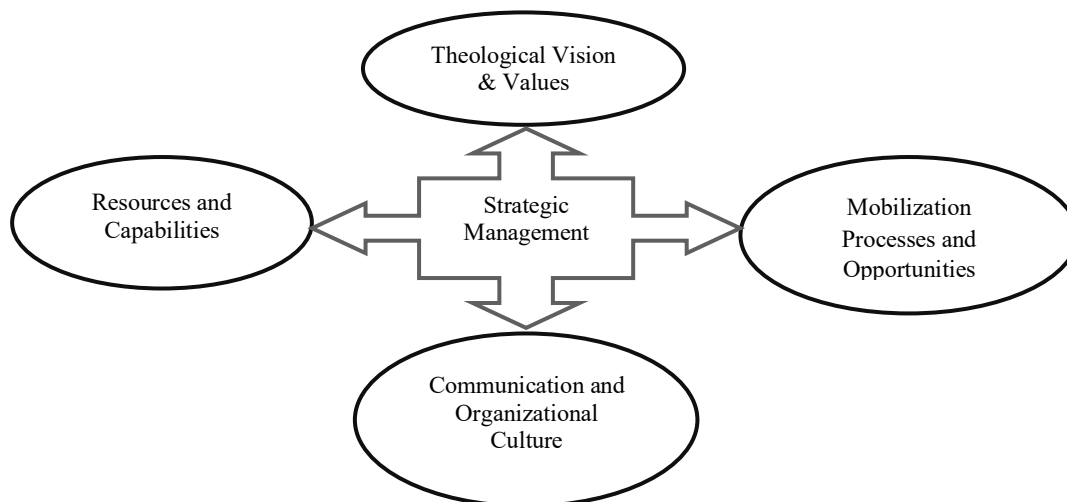


Diagram of the strategic management of diaconal leadership

The theory of resource mobilisation¹⁸ analyses how effectively the various organisations that make up a movement or alliance use the available resources to achieve common goals. This does not necessarily refer to a social movement or alliance established as a homogeneous entity but rather to the different ideological, organisational and/or strategic orientations that coexist within it.

Within this theory, the Political Opportunities or Political Process approach considers social incentives to be a priority over individual ones in order to analyse collective action where individual organisations join social movements or alliances as a response to political opportunities; and besides, in their subsequent dynamics they can create new opportunities through collective action.

The other approach within this theory is the collective process of Interpretation, where political opportunities and social mobilisation are the result of a process of cultural ruptures that bring out latent contradictions, and that reformulates or questions the standard definitions of the social situation that is criticised by movements.

In terms of the diaconal practices of the churches, resource mobilisation analysed from the two approaches mentioned above, are aligned in: national human rights movements, coalitions for justice and gender equity, climate justice movements, networks for the right to water, coalitions for land rights, inter-religious alliances in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, among many other examples at a local, national, regional or global level.

Lastly, diaconal action without the motivation of love is not diakonia. Diaconal action is witnessing God's love, mercy and truth by achieving justice for the suffering, poor, vulnerable and marginalised in the perspective of God's Kingdom.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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- CREAS (Ecumenical Regional Center for Advisory and Service), [Available at: http://www.creas.org/ingles/index_en.htm].
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- ACT Learning Lab with resources for learning and staff training, [Available at: <https://fabo.org/llab>].

¹⁸ Brunet Ignasi y Pizzi Alejandro. *La Acción Colectiva desde la Teoría de la Movilización de Recursos*. *Sociedad y Utopía. Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, n. ° 36. (November 2010), pp. 27-38.

91. TRAINING FOR SOCIAL SERVICES IN PENTECOSTAL CHRISTIANITY – DISCOVERIES IN GHANA

Emmanuel Kwesi Anim¹

Introduction

The provision of social services has become an essential part of many Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in Africa, particularly in education, health care, clean water, relief services, orphanages, among others.

Concurrent with this trend, scholars have been reflecting on questions of religiosity and its role in making “modern” society. Norman Long, in his foreword to the book, *Pentecostalism and Development*, noted that “early in the 2000s, a network of developing institutions, including the World bank, several national aid programmes, and key non-governmental organisations (NGOs), such as Oxfam, Care, Save the Children, Caritas and Tear Fund, initiated discussions with a view to exploring common ground between ‘secular’ and ‘faith-based’ modes of development thinking and practice.”² He observed that a key forum for these discussions has been “the World Faiths Development Dialogue, whose principal concerns are to link issues of material and spiritual well-being to questions of development and poverty, and to encourage the sharing of perspectives between persons of different religious convictions.”³

With the growing recognition of the importance of faith-based social initiatives, Pentecostals must also grow in their understanding of sustainable development and in their training for it. What this paper is calling for is an intentional effort by the Pentecostal churches *to study* the structural and political factors that inform the state of the poor and needy in society and *to train* our people to respond.

Pentecostals and the Pandemic

In Ghana, we see this link between religion and development in the response to the current COVID-19 pandemic. This crisis has made things extremely hard for some individuals and families. Because of the lockdown and economic slowdown, many have lost their jobs or had their incomes slashed because they cannot leave their homes to seek their daily bread in the informal economy.

The outbreak has revealed the depth of the deprivation of many African people and their lack of proper education. Many African village communities refuse to believe that the virus truly exists and will rarely observe the necessary health protocols such as washing their hands with soap and water, using facemasks, and observing social distancing.

Regardless, the idea of social distancing is almost impossible to observe because many people live in close quarters and in shanty towns. Many of these communities do not have access to potable drinking water, let alone clean, running water for washing their hands. As for soap, that is rarely close at hand.

In response to the pandemic, The Church of Pentecost, in April 2020, released its multipurpose, three-thousand-bed Pentecost Convention Centre to the Government of Ghana to serve as an isolation centre for

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² Norman Long. ‘Foreword,’ Dena Freeman (ed.), *Pentecostalism and Development: Churches, NGOs and Social Change in Africa* (London; New York; Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. vii.

³ Long, ‘Foreword,’ p. ix.

persons who were undergoing treatment for the coronavirus disease. This facility, in Ghana's Central Region, was offered free of charge to augment the government's efforts to address the problem.⁴ This action by the church has been applauded by many in the country as a testimony to the goodness of God and the necessity of the church in times of crisis.

Along with the Church of Pentecost, other Pentecostal and Charismatic churches have arisen to address the pandemic. The International Central Gospel Church, under the leadership of Mensa Otabil, responded by providing substantial amounts of money to needy members in the church and to health institutions in the form of personal protective equipment (PPE). Churches have also donated to a government fund that was established to help people cope with the crisis and have, in addition, collaborated with the government to help distribute food to deprived communities.

These efforts are notable and necessary. In like manner, we must always ensure that our good deeds have been properly informed so that we are not just rushing to put out fires but are creating sustainable improvements to our world. As the late Dr. Tokunboh Adeyemo observed, given the abundance of natural resources in the continent, Africa has no reason to be poor.⁵

It has been rightly noted that "a Christian approach to development entails a passionate involvement with the objects of development, turning them into subjects of their own lives."⁶ Pentecostal churches have embraced a pragmatic approach to addressing human needs through the provision of social services. This involvement has yielded commendable results, drawing attention to the fact that "the faith dimension should be added to development work."⁷ This underscores the significance of Pentecostal churches in the provision of social services as part of the development process and for human flourishing.

Who Are the Pentecostals?

Modern Pentecostalism began in the early part of the 20th century as a renewal movement in Christianity. It was founded on the principle of the empowerment and activities of the Holy Spirit in the divine orchestration of human welfare and destiny. Pentecostalism generally emerged as a grassroots movement where many of its early adherents were from the margins and low strata of society. In more recent years, we have seen a great number of Pentecostals in the middle and upper middle classes of society. "Thus, at one end of the scale we encounter local Pentecostal congregations that cater primarily to relatively poor farming households or the poorer sections of the urban working classes, while at the other end we encounter upwardly mobile middle-class elements with a relative degree of affluence."⁸

In his weighty book, *The Next Christendom*, Philip Jenkins underscored the significant development and impact of Pentecostalism in the global space. Jenkins observed that the stupendous growth of the Church in Africa was principally in the Pentecostal/Charismatic strand and that these churches were far more traditional,

⁴ For further details of the story see, <http://thecophq.org/news/pentecost-convention-centre-to-serve-isolation-centre-for-covid-19-patients/> [Accessed 7th May, 2020].

⁵ Tokunboh Adeyemo, "Africa's Enigma," Deryke Belshaw, Robert Calderisi and Chris Sugden (eds). *Faith in Development: Partnership between the World Bank and the Churches of Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2001), pp. 31-38.

⁶ Molefe Tsele. "The Role of the Christian Faith in Development," Deryke Belshaw, Robert Calderisi and Chris Sugden (eds). *Faith in Development: Partnership between the World Bank and the Churches of Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2001), p. 210.

⁷ Molefe Tsele. "The Role of the Christian Faith in Development," p. 210.

⁸ Long, "Foreword", p. ix.

morally conservative, evangelical, and apocalyptic than their northern counterparts.⁹ David Barrett and Harvey Cox had previously drawn the same conclusions.¹⁰ Dena Freeman rightly observes that:

The most readily visible aspect of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in Africa is the ecstatic, Spirit-filled church service, which frequently involves speaking in tongues and outburst of ululations, as well as lively singing and dancing. These church services often last for two-three hours, sometimes all night and in many cases take place several times per week. They are emotionally charged, high-volume gatherings, with pastors “amped up” by sound systems, words to hymns and songs projected karaoke-style, and congregants frequently being moved to stand up, extend their arms upwards and exclaim “hallelujah!”¹¹

In this religious setting, members share their faith, hopes, fears, testimonies of praise, and they ask for blessing.

The Charismatic churches, also known as “neo-Pentecostal churches,” emerged in Africa in the late 1970s as a renewal movement within the larger church bodies, and later they began establishing their own congregations.¹²

In Ghana, the newer Pentecostal and Charismatic churches are principally urban. Few Charismatic churches are found in the rural communities, the two notable exceptions being the Lighthouse Chapel International and the Church of Pentecost. Lighthouse Chapel has followed the model of church planting used by the Church of Pentecost, a model that involves intentional and vigorous evangelism and church planting in all communities across the country.

The Rising Recognition of Religion and Social Services

The quest for independence in Africa was marked by at least two assumptions: Firstly, that the land was filled with natural resources; and secondly, that African leaders were capable of managing those resources for the benefit of the people. Although the first assumption was true, the second one has proved false because of the embedded corruption in the political elite, who left the masses despondent and disillusioned. Against this reality, many Pentecostal and Charismatic churches emerged with their particular theological orientations of prosperity and wellbeing, which offered hope in the face of political failure and economic deprivation.¹³

One prevalent approach to prosperity that they offered has also been quite controversial. Many of these churches often focus on issues of evil and the spiritual forces that intersect in human affairs. This is particularly evident in the theology of deliverance, which tries to root out any ancestral curses that are thought to be behind people’s misery. By doing so, this shifts the responsibility for people’s problems away from themselves. Despite this trend, not all Pentecostal and Charismatic societal interventions are “other worldly.”

⁹ Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 7-8.

¹⁰ Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the 21st Century* (Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1995).

¹¹ Dena Freeman, “The Pentecostal Ethic and the Spirit of Development” in Dena Freeman (ed.) *Pentecostalism and Development: Churches, NGOs and Social Change in Africa* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 12.

¹² Emmanuel Anim, “Who wants to be a Millionaire? An Analysis of Prosperity Teaching in the Charismatic Ministries (Churches) in Ghana and Its Wider Impact,” PhD Dissertation, All Nations Christian College, Easneye Ware, Hertfordshire, 2020), pp. 85-112. See also: <https://www.lehmanns.de/shop/geisteswissenschaften/51501298-9783643912626-who-wants-to-be-a-millionaire>.

¹³ Anim, “Who wants to be a Millionaire?”, pp. 333-334.

Many of these churches offer innovative ways of responding to prevailing economic conditions, and, in some cases, resort to certain modes of political activism.¹⁴

In the past, scholars in development studies did not recognise or pay much attention to the vital role that religion or religious communities played in the process of economic development and social advancement. Equally noteworthy is that Pentecostalism has also undergone evolution in its thinking on this subject as well.

In scholarship, the assumption was that, as societies developed and modernised, religious beliefs would undergo a process of secularisation. This theory, in essence, underpinned what is known as “modernisation theory.” This narrow focus on economic growth and societal regeneration dominated development theory and practice from the 1950s to the 1980s. However, we began to witness from the 1980s onwards “a broadening of scope within development studies, with the expansion of work on the multidimensional nature of poverty and the theoretical reorientation of development’s aims from economic growth to more holistic concerns for human wellbeing and environmental sustainability.”¹⁵

This makes way for the consideration of different routes in the development process. For example, in 2017, the Research Programme on Religious Communities and Sustainable Development at the Faculty of Theology of Humboldt-Universität of Berlin initiated a three-year research project funded by the German Federal Ministry of Economic Co-operation and Development aimed at exploring the role of African Initiated Churches (AICs) as agents of sustainable development.¹⁶ This, in effect, reflects the “increasing appreciation for the importance of non-material matters – such as beliefs, values and morality – in the development process.”¹⁷

In Pentecostalism, the debate on the priority and place of social services vis-a-vis evangelism has been ongoing for many decades, but it was not until the latter part of the 1980s that Pentecostals began to take the church’s role in social outreach more seriously. This is not to say that Pentecostals never gave any attention to this before. Acts of charity or welfare were evident in Pentecostal/Charismatic practices right from the beginning, except that they were not given a precise structure or form.

In early Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in Ghana, for example, the primary work of elders, deacons, and deaconesses was to serve tables and manage the welfare of congregation. This was often limited to funeral donations, payments of school fees for the poor and deprived members of the church, and the provision of financial and material support to those who were incapacitated or hospitalised. Support was also given to newlyweds and mothers who had just given birth. Along with this, well-to-do members of the church were encouraged to provide school fees – and sometimes housing – to those who were young and poor, food and clothing to the elderly, and jobs to the unemployed.

Now, the Pentecostal movement has matured, and its social outreach has massively expanded. Freeman rightly observes that the “Pentecostal explosion” has radically altered the religious landscape in much of the developing world. Because millions of people in Africa have joined Pentecostal churches in the past three decades, they are significant players in the mobilisation and distribution of material resources for human welfare and development. Freeman avers that Pentecostalism generally does not “separate religion from development, and for the most part does not set up development wings. [...] It does, however, bring with it a

¹⁴ Paul Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy* (Bloomington & Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2004), p. 116.

¹⁵ Dena Freeman, “The Pentecostal Ethic and the Spirit of Development”, Dena Freeman (ed.), *Pentecostalism and Development; Churches, NGOs and Social Change in Africa* (London; New York; Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 1.

¹⁶ For publications arising out of this project, see Philipp Öhlmann, Wilhelm Gräb and Marie-Luise Frost (eds), *African Initiated Christianity and the Decolonisation of Development: Sustainable Development in Pentecostal and Independent Churches* (London; New York: Routledge, 2020).

¹⁷ Freeman, “The Pentecostal Ethic”, p. 1.

radically new conception of development and broadcasts it to its followers with the tremendous energy of ‘what God wants for Africa.’”¹⁸

With this energy, Pentecostals and Charismatics have responded in practical ways to the needs of the poor, not only those in their churches but also the poor in the general society. In this regard, Freeman observes that “Pentecostal churches are often rather more effective change agents than are development NGOs.”¹⁹ One notable example is Pastor Mensah Otabil and the International Central Gospel Church in Ghana.²⁰

The ICGC was established in 1984 in Accra. From its humble beginning of about twenty members who met in a classroom, the church has expanded into hundreds of branches across the country and overseas into Europe and North America. The main branch, the Christ Temple in Accra, has some five thousand worshippers each Sunday.

Drawing on his own humble experience, Otabil motivates his congregation by saying, “If you believe God, no matter the colour of your skin, the country you come from, or the economy of the world, you can still believe for a big God to give you a big ability to achieve big things for His glory.”²¹ Otabil continues, “God has put much into us, so do not underestimate, undervalue, underuse what you have. Do not cry, pity, or fear using what you have.”²² He goes on to explain how it works, “In order to excel and expand, you need an inquiring mind. Ask why, how, when and where. Practice analysing things. When you do, you have a learning process going on that will expand you and sharpen your seed-gift.”²³ By the 1990s,

it was becoming obvious that Otabil’s teachings had struck a chord with the upwardly mobile youth “who saw every opportunity to a better lot for the future. However, there were some obvious limitations to Otabil’s messages in particular and the Faith Gospel in general. First, it did not address the glaring issue of high illiteracy, especially amongst the rural population, and what sense they could make of the rhetoric. Second, the faith message did not address the level of dependency on limited government resources and how exactly people were to harness their potential or obtain capital to invest in profitable businesses. The less economically endowed inadvertently turned to deliverance and prophetic ministries for supernatural succour to cope with life’s vicissitudes.”²⁴

Despite those limitations, ICGC has become one of the leading churches in terms of support for health services in Ghana. For example, for the past ten years, Christ Temple has given regular monthly financial support to the Children’s Cancer Unit at the Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital in Accra.²⁵ It is believed that the ICGC’s regular support led to a significant reduction in the percentage of children forced to abandon treatment for the lack of financial support from 48% in 2010 to less than 9% in 2017.²⁶

¹⁸ Freeman, “The Pentecostal Ethic,” p. 2.

¹⁹ Freeman, “The Pentecostal Ethics,” p. 3.

²⁰ See Paul Gifford, *African Christianity – Its Public Role* (London: Hurst & Company, 1998), pp. 80-84; also Emmanuel Anim, “Who Wants to be a Millionaire” Chapter 6.

²¹ Mensa Otabil, *Four Laws of Productivity: God’s Foundation for Living* (Tulsa, Oklahoma: Vincom Inc., 1991), p. 134.

²² Otabil, *Four Laws of Productivity*, p. 62.

²³ Otabil, *Four Laws of Productivity*, p. 61. For further analysis of Mensa Otabil’s teachings, see, Paul Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity; Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), pp. 113-139.

²⁴ Anim, “Who Wants to be a Millionaire,” p. 248.

²⁵ “ICGC Christ Temple donates €200,000 to Korle-Bu Children’s Cancer Unit,” 26th January 2020. [Accessed at: <https://www.myjoyonline.com/news/health/icgc-christ-temple-donates-a€200000-to-korle-bu-childrenaes-cancer-unit-aacaeacaeacae/>.]

²⁶ Mabel Faith Tannor, “ICGC donates Electro-Convulsive Therapy (ECT) machines to Accra, Pantang and Ankaful hospitals,” 19th June 2019. [Accessed at: <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/ghana-news-icgc-donates-electro-convulsive-therapy-ect-machines-to-pantang-and-ankaful-hospitals.html>.]

As part of its 35th Anniversary celebration last year (2019), ICGC donated electro-convulsive therapy (ECT) machines to the Accra, Ankaful and Pantang Mental Health Hospitals, worth many thousands of dollars. A donation of 3500 pints of blood to the National Blood Service was part of the same anniversary celebration.²⁷

The church also established “Central Aid” in 1988 as a human-oriented development agency. Its social interventions are many, varied, and impressive. For example, it offers regular support to the cardio-thoracic unit of the Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital and supports the physically disabled, the blind, and those suffering from breast cancer. It has also provided very generous scholarships to brilliant but needy students to pursue education in secondary, technical, and vocational institutions. This gesture is without prejudice to gender, religion, ethnicity, disability or denomination.

In the Church of Pentecost, acts of “diaconia,” or the provision of welfare support for the poor and needy, are taken up by elders, deacons, and deaconesses. The lay-leaders and other able-bodied members of the congregation organise resources – both financial and material – to care for the economic needs of widows, orphans, the sick, and those in need of sponsorship to continue their education. Social services and other interventions are carried to the less-privileged communities in other parts of the country and to the prison cells.

In some Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, welfare schemes have been established in which registered members are required to pay either monthly or annual dues. Members who faithfully make such payments are sure to receive support in times of need, usually at the loss of a close family member.

Two passages that form the biblical basis for these social services are Matthew 25:31-46 and James 1:27. The Matthean narrative sums up Jesus’ expectation: “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

The anonymous neighbour in Matthew 25 provides the framework for Pentecostal acts of social services, to those both inside and outside of their congregations, which is the practice of the scholarship grants, the medical support by the Central Aid, and the Pentecost Social Services (PENSOS).²⁸ These references (Matthew 25:31-46 and James 1:27) provide inspiration and drive members of the churches to do even more with their own personal resources.

Social Service Training

We celebrate all that Pentecostals and Charismatics have accomplished in social services, not only in recent times, but since the inception of the movements. However, we need to mature in our understanding of the causes that create the need for our social engagements in the first place.

Poverty, development, urbanisation, ethnic tensions, crime – these are all complex issues, and they have sparked the need for our interventions. It is important that we understand the factors that create and reproduce these conditions. Universities are now part of the Pentecostal and Charismatic landscape. I believe our curriculums should include vibrant programmes that interact with these issues and produce graduates who can wisely address them in our communities.

Likewise, churches should be deeply involved in their neighbourhoods so that they understand the people, the cultural ebbs and flows, why some problems exist, why some problems do not, and why some problems are solved. This type of ethnographic research does not need to be deeply complicated or academic. It just

²⁷ Bernard Bengan, “ICGC donates therapeutic machines to MHA,” 19th June 2019. [Accessed at: [http://www.ghanaiantimes.com.gh/icgc-donates-therapeutic-machines-to-mha/.](http://www.ghanaiantimes.com.gh/icgc-donates-therapeutic-machines-to-mha/)]

²⁸ The biblical injunction of Matthew 25:31-40 as a framework for Pentecostal social services was affirmed in an interview with the both the Directors of the PENSOS, Elder Richard Amoaning, and the Central Aid, Rev Dr Albert Rockson of ICGC. Both interviewed on 25th May 2020.

requires a socially integrated pastor. If we understand our communities, our interventions will be on target and produce sustainable results.

Occasional workshops and seminars are also important when a project is envisioned for a certain community. Experts can be called in from the larger church or from NGOs, such as World Vision. The ultimate aim of an intervention is for people in the area to be empowered to address their problems. Food, education, health, and shelter have been Africa's most critical needs, and, as we have seen, Pentecostal churches are rising to partner where governments are succeeding and to correct where governments have failed. Governmental failures have created some problems that are simply overwhelming, and the church will have a hard time solving them. Examples are the assault on the environment when poor people, in search of firewood, cut down every tree they can find, and illegal mining practices that pollute all the bodies of water around.

Generally speaking, although Pentecostal churches have made significant forays into education, they have few ongoing, formal social-service training programmes. In the Church of Pentecost, however, one sterling example of such a programme is the Pentecost Vocational Institute in Gbawe, Accra. The Institute seeks to build capacity and create employment opportunities for the youth through training and apprenticeship in catering, tailoring and dress making, cosmetology, beekeeping, carpentry and joinery, soap making, glass fabrication, mobile phone repairs, and electrical installation among others.

As part of the Church's vision to improve the quality of education in Ghana, it has established ninety basic schools, which give access to a total of 26, 349 children comprising 11, 622 boys and 11, 957 girls and at the same time creating jobs for about 2, 221 people who work in these educational institutions.²⁹

Why are ongoing vocational training programmes rare in Pentecostal churches? This is an arena in which I believe they can succeed, just as they have succeeded in other engagements.

Conclusion

Pentecostal churches play a significant role in Africa's development process. Their number has grown significantly in the last thirty years, and their role in the provision of social services to improve the lives of its members and the wider community must be taken seriously. Pentecostal churches are generally broad-based and have proven to be part of a global movement capable of addressing the needs of the poor.

Still, despite the successes, there is room for growth in breadth and in depth. Formal, ongoing, structured training programmes are rare in Pentecostal churches in Africa, and this number should increase. I believe we can do a good job in vocational and skills training if we set our minds to it. Alongside this, our interventions must display careful thought which has been nurtured by an engagement with the critical issues of our time, and this also invites special training. I refer specifically to poverty, urbanisation, crime, and development. Our universities should either add or upgrade these concerns into our curriculums.

If we are stewards of true religion (James 1:27), our helping people in distress requires knowledge of their plight and the path out of it. This does not happen by chance but through effective training systems and a willingness to learn.

²⁹ Pentecost Social Services, "Status Report as at January 2020", Presentation to Ministers and Wives Conference, 25th January, 2020.

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92. TRAINING FOR SOCIAL SERVICES IN ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY

Vladimir Khulap¹

Contemporary Orthodoxy is very diverse because of its various historical, social, political and cultural conditions; therefore, it is impossible to present a general picture of the “orthodox diaconical education/training”. We are limited to the situation in the Russian Orthodox Church, where diaconia has played an important role since the Church’s foundation. However, following the revolution of 1917, the Soviet state abolished all charitable organisations and proclaimed its own exclusive responsibility for social issues. The early 1990s saw not only the growth in the number of Orthodox dioceses and parishes, but also the revival of their charitable programmes. The majority of the first diaconal projects were conducted at the parish level by active priests, who responded to the existing social problems at their own initiative. At the turn of the 21st century, fully functional church projects began to actively develop, and many of them were fully competitive with state agencies in the social sphere.² The Bishop’s Council adopted in 2011 the document “On the principles of organization of social work in the Russian Orthodox Church”,³ which presents the organisational structures of the church’s diaconical activity at the diocese, deanery, parish and monastery levels, giving details of the job description and professional capacity of the specialists. Perhaps the most interesting innovation is the introduction of a social worker as a member of the parish staff (at least in the major urban parishes), which would potentially make these parishes important diaconal centres. Of course, a continuing positive trend is possible only if diaconia becomes one of the key categories in the church’s mentality, and this means that diaconical issues should become an integral part of the educational process in Orthodox educational institutions in order to fulfil the Church’s mission in contemporary society.⁴

Diaconic Studies in Theological Seminaries

The lack of diaconical topics in theological seminaries during the Soviet years was a sorrowful consequence of the fact that all social activities were forbidden to the Orthodox Church. Nowadays, one can observe a significant development: during the formation of the future priests in the ecclesiastical seminaries (bachelor of theology), diaconia is taught as part of the subjects “Pastoral Theology”, “Practical Pastoral Issues”, “Basics of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church”. The new handbook “Social Service of the Russian Orthodox Church” (2019) describes a wide range of the church’s contemporary diaconical programmes and gives practical instructions for the parish diaconia. In some masters programmes (for example, at the St. Petersburg Theological Academy)⁵ it is possible to offer a broader number of courses that deal with theology and history of Christian diaconia (not only Orthodox, but also of other Christian confessions), official state and ecclesiastical legislation in the social sphere, different models of diaconical

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² There are nowadays more than 4, 500 charitable organisations, programmes, initiatives and groups created by the Russian Orthodox Church (the database of diaconical activity of the Russian Orthodox Church is available at: <http://social.diaconia.ru>). On the one hand, this is an impressive number for the development “ex nihilo” in the last thirty years, but on the other, it is clearly insufficient in the face of existing social problems.

³ The Russian text is available at: <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1401894.html>; see also: <http://licodu.cois.it/?p=11555&lang=en>.

⁴ See also: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Synodal_Department_for_Church_Charity_and_Social_Ministry

⁵ https://orthodoxwiki.org/St._Petersburg_Theological_Academy.

work (disabled, alcohol and drug addicts, HIV/AIDS, pastoral care in prisons), courses in psychology, etc. A number of these subjects are also offered to parish priests during their regular advanced training.

It is very important that students perceive the courses not just as some abstract disciplines which would not be related to their future pastoral life, but that they get a practical opportunity to help concrete people in need during their studies. That is why the lectures and seminars are accompanied by the students' social practice, which takes place not only in ecclesiastical, but also in state and non-government institutions. The possibility to choose a specific area of diaconical work allows the students to begin self-realisation in this area already during the educational process. They can get acquainted with the most interesting models and transfer them later to their own parishes. Elective courses have proved very popular for those who would like to deepen their experience in some special fields (e.g. basics of Sign Language and translation of the Orthodox worship into it; it also helps to strengthen the connections with inclusive parishes where such work is already conducted). The goal of including social topics in the theological curriculum is the diaconical sensitisation of church parishes, their growing self-awareness which crystallises as it points in various important areas of social life. In this regard, priests should be able to co-ordinate social work, not only at the parish level, but also at the deanery and diocese levels, organise the work of the diocesan departments for charity and social services and closely co-operate with the relevant synodal structures.

The introduction of a "parish social worker" into the staff of the (large city) parishes would potentially make the parishes not only liturgical, but also important social centres. These people can obtain their education at specialised departments at theological seminaries, at faculties of Orthodox universities and institutes, in the joint educational programmes with state universities on the basis of bilateral agreements, or at the diocesan centres of continuing education. They can attend full bachelor or master programmes, as well as short-term programmes, including by distance learning. An outstanding role in Russia is played by the Synodal Department for Church Charity and Social Service.⁶ It co-ordinates all diaconical activities of the Russian Orthodox Church and also offers a number of diaconical educational and training programmes (webinars, seminars, internships, methodological literature, etc.). Church universities and institutes (first of all, St. Tikhon Theological University and St. John Russian Orthodox University) are understandably the most important places for qualitative professional education, including in the field of diaconical service. They have a unique opportunity to combine the high standards of contemporary social work with an Orthodox worldview and its theological values; of course, this way should be not mechanical, but complementary and integrating. They can also effectively interact with "secular" universities in the field of social service: through exchange of students and teachers, joint scientific conferences and seminars, common research and publishing projects, volunteer activities, etc.

Diaconic Curriculum Development

Because of the vast territory of Russia, distance education e-learning technologies have played an increasingly important role in recent years. Their advantages are obvious: lower costs of training; accessibility for students from different geographical areas; flexible schedules; the possibility of building an individual learning plan; accessibility for people of different age, socio-psychological status, physical condition; the ongoing relevance of the programmes and the possibility of regularly updating their content, strengthening the interaction of specialists, etc. The Western experience of other Christian confessions could also be important for developing Orthodox diaconical education. For example, in Germany, the Caritas- and *Diakoniewissenschaft* have long become not only educational, but also scientific fields in Catholic and Protestant theological faculties. Of course, in the Russian realities, it is impossible to mechanically copy this experience; however, the most

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Synodal_Department_for_Church_Charity_and_Social_Ministry.

talented students studying abroad would allow the churches to become acquainted with this diaconical knowledge and adapt it to the Orthodox context.

The quality of Orthodox diaconal work in Russia will largely depend on the motivation, professionalism and competence of its participants – and this is all closely connected with education. Of course, it should not be regarded as a cognitive acquaintance with a set of certain technologies, but as a living connection of faith and deed, theory and practice, based on the theological, anthropological and historical foundations of Orthodox diaconical ministry. Professionalism in this case is not an end in itself, but a means to implement the Christian witness of God’s love. At the same time, only a clear strategy will allow the creation of reliable educational architecture, avoiding segmentation, and establishing effective connections between different church levels. Therefore, a responsible approach to diaconia also implies a responsible attitude to diaconical education. In this case, it will serve not only as a transfer of relevant knowledge, a reflection on existing problems and practices, but also will be able to move forward, actively contributing to the building of the Church and society.

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93. *SEEING-JUDGING-ACTING: A LEARNING METHOD FOR EMPOWERMENT IN DIACONIA FROM A LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE*

Carlos E. Ham¹

Introduction

This article begins with a brief overview of the socio-political and religious reality of the Latin American context, which exhibits huge levels of inequality, and paradoxically an overwhelming presence of Christian communities. The article will argue, therefore, for the importance of building capacity and cultivating spirituality for the churches to fulfil their call, in order to serve “the least of these” (Mt. 25,40) and to seek justice in all its manifestations. The piece will look at a particular example practiced by the Cuban churches.

It will then introduce a notion of Empowerment in Diaconia, highlighting the relevance today of shared capacity building for service, understanding that all involved in this effort are actually subjects, agents. This diaconal community is called not only to address resourcefully the various and immediate needs of the people, but also to tackle the root-causes and to move towards transformation.

The article goes on to address a particular learning method applied by churches from the Latin American context, namely, the theology of liberation’s methodology of *Seeing-Judging-Acting*. This model “has been widely accepted as a useful tool for connecting theory to praxis. It has also proven to be a very helpful method for planning and implementing diaconal activities.”² The method starts by observing the social, political, economic reality, from the standpoint of the excluded and marginalised; it goes on to judge this reality reading from the Scripture and through the Tradition lenses; and finally, it seeks a transformative action.

The Latin American Context

Latin America is a region of the world that spans two continents, North America (including Central America and the Caribbean) and South America. It includes 19 sovereign nations and one non-independent territory, Puerto Rico. Most people in the region speak Spanish or Portuguese, although French, English, Dutch, and Kreyol are also spoken in parts of the Caribbean, Central America, and South America.³

It has been said that Latin America is the most unequal region in the world and at the same time, it is the most Christian. This fact is precisely one of the main motivations of the liberation theologians in the 1970s, i.e. to promote the *Seeing-Judging-Acting* methodology in the continent, namely to address creatively the challenge of impoverishment in the light of the Christian faith.

According to Marcelo Justo, “Despite the growth of the past decade and the application of redistributive policies, Latin America continues to be the most unequal region on the planet, beaten only by a region plagued by war and famine: Sub-Saharan Africa. The social advances are unquestionable. Over the last 15 years some 100 million Latin Americans have risen out of poverty. However, the distance that separates them from the

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² LWF, *Diakonia in Context. Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment. The Lutheran World Federation* (ed) Kjell Nordstokke (Geneva, 2009), p. 59.

³ Rebecca Bodenheimer – “What Is Latin America? Definition and List of Countries” [Available at: <https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-latin-america-4691831.>]

richest has barely changed [...]”⁴ This inequality – which unfortunately will further expand as a result of COVID-19 – manifests itself in practical terms through violence, crime, powerlessness, migration, terrorism, drug abuse and trafficking, low standards of education, nourishment and health care, as well as climate change, among others.

The majority of Latin Americans are Christians (90%), predominantly Roman Catholics (69%). Membership in Protestant denominations (19%) is increasing; in particular, Pentecostalism has experienced massive growth. This movement is increasingly attracting Latin America’s middle classes. Anglicanism also has a long and growing presence in Latin America. In some countries, there is a growing presence of Evangelicals in political parties and governments. Indigenous creeds and rituals are practiced in countries with large percentages of Amerindians. Various Afro-Latin American traditions such as Santería, Candomblé, Umbanda, Macumba, and tribal-vooodoo religions are also practiced, as well as other world religions.⁵

Even though there is a very long way to go, various churches proclaim and pursue a prophetic diaconia that tries to comfort those in need and, at the same time, to confront the powers which produce such an inequality in the first place. In this regard, in the region there is an increasing awareness and practice of this discipline. There are various initiatives, such as the *Empowering Diaconia* model (which focuses on visional, normative, need-oriented, contextual and transformative dimensions); Diaconia as *sharing at the table*; Diaconia, *following the example of Jesus*, i.e. with the children, with the sick, with the women and with the impoverished in general. There is a rising tendency to work with ACT (Action by Churches Together) Alliance and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in order to serve more effectively and in partnership with other Faith Base Organisations (FBOs), the civil society in general, Non-Government Organisations, as well as with various governments and states.

Simultaneously, there are an increasing number of theological institutions that are including diaconia as a discipline in the curricula, as part of the *missio Dei* (God’s mission). As we will observe in the particular example of Cuba, the *Seeing-Judging-Acting* method of learning is an important scheme for empowerment in diaconia so critical in a context of such level of inequality.

It is, nevertheless, fair to say that not all of Latin American churches are interested in this. In fact, I would argue, the majority, as far as number of members is concerned, are not interested in this ecumenical approach of social practice and commitment, but rather has no other interest than to “evangelise”. Many of them claim to be “apolitical”, preaching an escapist theology and practicing a “Prosperity Gospel”.⁶ This approach, of course, has, I would say, a negative impact in theological formation.

Empowerment in Diaconia

In the ecumenical movement, we find a plethora of definitions on diaconia. The “Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in the Twenty-First Century” document expresses: “The Church, as a community called into being through baptism and led by the Holy Spirit, participates in this mission through its very being, proclamation and service. Commonly understood as service, diaconia is a way of living out faith and hope as a community, witnessing to what God has done in Jesus Christ [...] Through its diaconia, the Church witnesses to God’s

⁴ BBC World News “¿Por qué América Latina sigue siendo tan desigual? [Why is Latin America so Unequal?]” https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2014/06/140617_latinoamerica_desigualdad_am.

⁵ “Las religiones en tiempos del Papa Francisco” (PDF) (in Spanish). Latinobarómetro. April 2014. p. 7. Archived from the original (pdf) on 4th April 2015. Retrieved 22nd September 2019.

⁶ According to Christianity Today, “Prosperity Gospel” is an aberrant theology that teaches that God rewards faith – and hefty tithing – with financial blessings. The prosperity gospel was closely associated with prominent 1980s televangelists Jimmy Swaggart and Jim and Tammy Bakker, and is part and parcel of many of today’s charismatic movements in the Global South – <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/topics/p/prosperity-gospel/>.

purpose in Jesus Christ and participates in God's mission. In its diaconia, the Church follows the way of its Servant Lord who claimed that he came to serve and not to be served (Mk. 10,45).⁷

In other words, diaconia is the service proclaimed and lived by the Christian community as a response to God's mission, following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, who proclaimed God's kingdom. This service includes material as well as spiritual support, "For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. The one who thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and has human approval." (Rom. 14,17-18)

In many cases, urged by the pressing needs of the people, diaconal projects and efforts conceive those persons to whom the service is directed, as objects, as passive or mere recipients of the aid. Nevertheless, the notion of empowerment helps to understand that those who are being served are actually subjects or agents, rather than objects, who are called to participate actively in their individual and communitarian development and transformation.

The Brazilian educator and philosopher of liberation, Paulo Freire's "understanding of empowerment can help us to observe critically some seemingly misconceptions of the term, at least in three aspects, which I find helpful for the development of this essay, particularly when it implicitly relates to diaconia. Firstly, for him, empowerment is not about giving power to a powerless person from a paternalistic and individualist point of view, rather it consists of helping to activate the potential creativity of the persons; secondly, and related to the first, empowerment is a social and political act, in relation to the other, to the community; and finally, it binds together *conscience* with the notion of freedom, enabling dignity and capacity to transform situations of injustice; since for him, it is impossible to be free without going through a process of conscientisation."⁸

Therefore, following Freire's logic, we come to an understanding of "Empowerment in Diaconia" that would facilitate a communitarian and socio-political process of conscientisation by which the hidden resourcefulness among the people, is discovered and practiced, seeking participation towards dignity and transformation.

This takes us to the whole question of the use and abuse of power in diaconal mission. In the book "The Gospel of Power-Service", written by the Brazilian theologian Clodovis Boff, there is an interesting approach on how the understanding of power relates to service (diaconia). He notes that, "For Jesus, the power is, in its concrete reality, lost. It needs to be evangelised; converted and saved [...] the proposal of Jesus is the metanoia of power. It has to be rescued. It must be converted from power-domination into power-service. In one word, the power needs to be transformed, revolutionised internally, and this not only within the Church, but also at the level of society. All power (religious and political) should become service. It really is the 'revolution of power'."⁹

Martin Luther King, Jr. defined power as "the ability to achieve a purpose, whether or not it is good or bad depends on the purpose."¹⁰ Again, applying this logic to the notion of empowerment in the line of this article, the purpose of empowerment is called to be one that builds a joint and ecumenical capacity to serve.

Seeing-Judging-Acting:

A Learning Method for Empowerment in Diaconia from a Latin American Perspective

In his explanation of the basic schema of this method, Clodovis Boff notes:

⁷ WCC, "Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in the Twenty First Century. Document Adopted at the World Council of Churches Conference on Theology of Diakonia, 2012," in *Resource Book WCC 10th Assembly, Busan 2013* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), p. 2.

⁸ Carlos Ham, "Empowering Diakonia: A Model for Service and Transformation in the Ecumenical Movement and Local Congregations," PhD Thesis – Free University of Amsterdam, 2015), p. 28.

⁹ Clodovis Boff, *El Evangelio Del Poder-Servicio* (Bogotá, Colombia: Confederación Latinoamericana de Religiosos – CLAR, 1985), p. 51.

¹⁰ Grassroots Policy Project. [Available at: www.grassrootspolicy.org/power.htm], [Accessed on 2nd September 2014].

Liberation theology develops in three fundamental moments, corresponding to the three 'times' of the celebrated pastoral method: *seeing*, *judging* and *acting*.

Liberation theologians speak of three principal mediations: the socioanalytic mediation, the hermeneutical mediation and the practical mediation. We use the term *mediation* because we are speaking about means or instruments of theological construction [...]

The *socioanalytic* mediation contemplates the world of the oppressed. It seeks to understand why the oppressed are oppressed. The *hermeneutic* mediation contemplates the Word of God. It attempts to see what the divine plan is with regard to the poor- Finally, the *practical* mediation contemplates the aspect of activity and seeks to discover the appropriate lines of operation for overcoming oppression in conformity with God's plan.¹¹

These three *mediations*, underscored by Clodovis Boff, denote a process of relationships, that reminds us of the Holy Trinity. José Marins points out that "The ecclesial community, without worrying about alarmist suspicions, used the method to put their faith into practice and specify their mission as well as their theological reflection. This means that the method makes us see with the Father's eyes, judge coherently with the teachings and testimonies of Jesus and his community and act under the influence of the Spirit: pretty Trinitarian!"¹²

According to Carlos Ayala Ramires, this method is "deeply rooted in biblical faith. The core of Israel's faith has Ex[odus] 3 as its starting point – the cry of a people who suffer and who demand justice. God 'looks' (oppression), 'hears' (cries), 'knows' (sufferings) and 'act' (releasing)."¹³

In other words, the Latin America theology of liberation's methodology of *Seeing-Judging-Acting*, "begins with *seeing* social reality from the perspective of the most vulnerable; it proceeds to *judging* that reality in light of Scripture and Tradition and moves to *acting* for change."¹⁴ Biblical faith and spirituality are a fundamental grounding for the reflection and action of this method. Therefore, the Christian Base Communities (CEBs –acronym in Spanish) and other Christian communities, particularly in Latin America, when they apply this method, typically begin with their concrete situation (*see*), proceed to read that situation in the light of faith (*judge*), and then determine how to transform that situation in a way which accords with the liberating and life-giving will of God (*act*).

In the first step of the methodology, the community perceives the situation with all senses and with intelligence. It does not "only see problems and challenges to overcome, but also joys and victories (large and small) to be celebrated."¹⁵ This celebration is part of the Latin American idiosyncrasy, where people rejoice in spite of the sufferings caused by mainly unjust systems of exploitation. Furthermore, this celebration becomes even more meaningful and genuine as a result of our biblical spirituality.

After taking account of the concrete situation, the community passes to the next phase of the process, in which it seeks to judge, to diagnose that situation with the help of social sciences and, fundamentally, in the light of faith, in close connection with adequate hermeneutics. This phase is for synthesising, for affirming various ideas and concepts, and for interrelating them.

Having seen and analysed the concrete situation and having interpreted that reality in the light of the faith, the community then moves to praxis by which they seek to transform, that very reality according to the

¹¹ Clodovis Boff, "Epistemology and Method of the Theology of Liberation," in *Mysterium Liberationis. Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology* (eds) Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino, English Edition (New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1993), p. 74.

¹² José Marins, "El Ir y Venir Del Método Ver-Juzgar-Actuar. La Metodología Ver, Juzgar y Actuar, Un Ícono de La Teología y de La Pastoral Latinoamerica y Caribeña.," Indo-American Press, 2007, p. 1.

¹³ Carlos Ayala Ramires, "Ver-Juzgar-Actuar Un Método de Estar En La Realidad," *Adital Sábado*, 2007, p. 3.

¹⁴ Elizabeth O. Gandolfo, "Acompañando La Vida: The Integration of Catholic Social Teaching and Popular Education in the Ecclesial Base Communities of El Salvador" (Not published, 2007), p. 2.

¹⁵ Gandolfo, "Acompañando La Vida", p. 13.

liberating plan of God. Here, the group or community decides to behave in a particular way, to do something specific in order to solve, at least in part, the problem at hand. This is the time for responsibility, integrity and consistency, since oftentimes we are good in seeing and in judging evilness from the outside, but then we are urged to do something to liberate, to change this situation.

Regarding this third *practical* mediation, i.e. translating the liberating plan of God into transformative actions in the concrete realities of life, Clodovis Boff points out the following, in a deeper and more detailed scheme. As the logic of practical action in local communities is extremely complex, it includes many steps, such as a rational, prudential assessment of all of the circumstances of action proposed and an anticipation of the possible consequences. In all instances, however, the practical mediation embraces certain distinct discursive levels:

1. Level of *conjunctual analysis*: an assessment of the correlation of forces at hand, such as resistance from parts of society and the church, the capacity of the people that will bear the proposals made, and so forth.
2. Level of *projects and programmes*: proposals of the historically viable objectives for the short- and long-term. Without this step, we would only have pure utopias and sheer good intentions.
3. Level of *strategy and tactics*: definition of the concrete means for reaching the proposed objectives, that is, alliances, resources, various means, all through prudential judgments that arrive at the actual concrete level in the form of tactics.
4. *Ethical and evangelical level*: assessment of the means proposed in terms of the values and criteria of morality and faith, with priority accorded to, for example, nonviolent methods such as dialogue, moral pressure, and active resistance.
5. *Performative level*. Finally, there is even a discourse of direct operation, with its appeals and attractions to action. This level of discourse performs the function of a bridge between decision and execution.

In this third moment in the method of liberation theology (i.e. “practical mediation”), we note the presence of a cognition constructed more of practice than of theory. That is, here the process is more executive than systematic. Thus, at this point, rather than formal reason, it is the wisdom of life and the prudence of action that are at work. And here the common people, those “doctors in the school of life” often have the advantage over the “wise and prudent.”¹⁶

Therefore, this method incorporates an interdisciplinary approach, particularly in the first step of *seeing*. It is critical to observe the reality from the standpoint of the various social sciences, such as sociology, psychology, economy, politics, philosophy, anthropology, among others. This holistic approach is also crucial for the third and last phase where co-ordinated action is required. In order to be more effective, the church has to work in partnership, creating synergy with other agents who are also serving in the community. This is even more effective and relevant if the church is reaching out to those excluded and rejected by society and in many cases, even rejected too by the churches.

This *Seeing-Judging-Acting* methodology can be summarised in the table on the next page, which also includes a set of questions to focus more intentionally on each one of the steps.

The *Seeing-Judging-Acting* Method for Empowerment in Diaconia, a Cuban Experience

The diaconal mission of the Cuban churches has gained a new momentum, primarily for the following reasons:

- a) the growing improvement of the relations between the state and the churches, by which the latter have more freedom to carry-out their mission;
- b) the needs of the population have increased as a result of the economic crisis (caused, among other factors, by the US embargo); and

¹⁶ Boff, “Epistemology and Method of the Theology of Liberation”, p. 84.

- c) as a consequence of the decentralisation of the economy by the state, which challenges and stimulates the civil society in general, including the churches.¹⁷

THE METHOD SEE-JUDGE-ACT
SEE – Socio-analytical mediation
Social sciences to analyse the reality and condition of the impoverished, vulnerable, excluded
To see the situation and the problems of the people today
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is happening? 2. Who are the people involved? 3. Why is it happening? (Causes) 4. What is the situation doing to people? (Consequences)
JUDGE – Hermeneutical mediation
Examination of the Scriptures, Tradition and History
The Word of God comes from the events illuminated by the Bible, the tradition and the history of the churches
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do you feel about this situation? 2. What do you think should be happening/ 3. What would the ideal be? 4. What does your faith say about it?
ACT – Practical/pastoral mediation
Application of the Social Sciences and Scriptures
These events (described above) urge God's call towards transformation, acting with various partners
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What can we do to bridge the gap between what is happening and what should be happening? 2. What action are we going to take? 3. Who can we involve in our action?¹⁸

This relatively new situation of the churches' social involvement requires the "know-how", the necessary capacity building in order to carry-out their task in a more relevant and effective way, and precisely here is where the *Seeing-Judging-Acting* Method for Empowerment in Diaconia has been so pertinent.

For many years, the Evangelical Seminary of Theology in Matanzas has organised various editions of the *School for Diaconia*, co-sponsored with the Martin Luther King Jr. Center in Havana and the Diaconia Area of the Cuban Council of Churches (CCC). As we will note below, in one of the sessions, conducted by the latter, two other elements of the model were added, namely, *evaluation* and *celebration*.

The CCC colleagues, who also organise workshops with churches all over the island, argue in their presentations that rather than a methodology, this approach ought to be a lifestyle; it is inductive because it starts from reality and is complemented with appropriate tools of various sciences, at each one of the moments. It demands the accompaniment of people with knowledge of the Bible and the message of Jesus Christ

¹⁷ Ham, "Empowering Diaconia: A Model for Service and Transformation in the Ecumenical Movement and Local Congregations", p. 190.

¹⁸ These three set of questions included in this table are taken from the Irish Young Christian Workers' website – <https://www.ycw.ie/pdf/See-Judge-Act-Cards.pdf>.

contained in it, since it presupposes the search for answers in the Scriptures in order to connect the Christian faith with daily life.¹⁹ The description of each phase can be summarised as follows:

SEE - it:

- Emerges from the concrete facts of life.
- Analyses the present situation without discarding the historical memory.
- Focuses on people (not ideas or things).
- Motivates transformative actions that will address the root-causes of the problems.
- Recognises “lights and shadows” (both positive and negative facts).

JUDGE - it:

- Analyses the facts of reality in light of the faith, the message of Jesus and his Church, since faith is connected with everyday life.
- The time to ask yourself what the Word of God, the documents, traditions and history of the Church say as they are confronted with the situation identified in the previous moment.
- Demands an ever-deeper knowledge of the Christian message.
- Urges to take a position facing the fact analysed in light of the Scriptures. For this, the fact is valued positively or negatively, similar to the teachings and life of Jesus, in particular and to the Bible in general.
- Demands for an “atmosphere” of prayer and of spirituality.

ACT - it:

- The time to concretise the transforming action.
- The point of convergence between the reality (seeing) and what has been discovered about God’s plan about it (judging).
- Emerges from people’s needs (so relevant for the diaconal endeavour).
- Seeks to attack the root-causes of the problem.
- Is not only reduced to the personal sphere, but it tries to really influence social and ecological reality.
- Involves others.

EVALUATE - it:

- Time for critical assessment.
- The moment to become aware of what was done yesterday in order to improve the action that will be carried out tomorrow.
- The stage to evaluate all the successes, mistakes, advances and setbacks that are identified.
- Complemented with appropriate tools (e.g. impact matrices).

CELEBRATE - it:

- The thanksgiving time, the opportunity to express gratitude for the lived experience.
- The occasion to strengthen the faith and to put all people involved in the process (both those who serve and who are in need) before the central mystery of Christianity: the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- Can be celebrated through the liturgy in which gratitude is expressed to God for all the experiences achieved and to gather new strength to continue carrying out the diaconal ministry.²⁰

¹⁹ Cuban Council of Churches’ Diaconia Area, “Power Point Presentation on the ‘See-Judge-Act’ Method” (Matanzas: School for Diaconia, 2019).

²⁰ Cuban Council of Churches’ Diaconia Area.

Conclusion

In this article, we have explored the topic *Seeing-Judging-Acting: A Learning Method for Empowerment in Diaconia from a Latin American Perspective*.

The method begins with an analysis which “should, as its first step, pay attention to experiences and witnesses from the context [...] The second step is *to reflect* – which is the moment of bringing in concerns and impulses from Christian identity and faith when reflecting on praxis [...] The third step is *to act* – and to bring the insight from the first two steps into the arena of diaconal activity [...]”²¹

This scheme, which, as we have seen, also includes *evaluation* and *celebration*, is a lifestyle and is like a spiral, winding in a continuous and gradually widening curve, unfolding in a cyclical and holistic process, very pertinent for Empowerment in Diaconia. This diaconal ministry is understood ultimately not as an end in itself, but rather an instrument used by God, together with others, to build an inclusive and just community – an *oikos*, a household in which the entire creation is included, enjoying the fullness of life intended for all.²²

Suggestions for Further Reading

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²¹ LWF, *Diakonia in Context. Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment*. The Lutheran World Federation, pp. 59-60.

²² This thought is based on the report of the WCC general secretary at the time, Philip A. Potter, to its 6th Assembly, held in Vancouver, Canada, in 1983. He said: “The ecumenical movement is, therefore, the means by which the churches which form the house, the *oikos* of God, are seeking so to live and witness before all peoples that the whole *oikoumene* may become the *oikos* of God through the crucified and risen Christ in the power of the life-giving Spirit” – David Gill, *Gathered for Life. Official Report, VI Assembly of the WCC, Vancouver, Canada, 1983* (Geneva, 1983), p. 197. <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/about-us/organizational-structure/general-secretary/since-1948>.

94. METHODS FOR ENGAGING YOUTH WITH AND FOR CHRISTIAN DIAKONIA: THE CASE OF THE LIVING GENERATION CHURCH

Elorm Nick Ahiale-Mawusi¹

Setting the Context: The Living Generation Church

The increase in migration over the past two decades from the “Global South” to Germany has contributed enormously to the diversification of the German population. Among those who have migrated to Germany and other European countries are many West Africans. They bring along with them, among many other assets, their “social, cultural and spiritual capital”² which has facilitated the establishment of African Diaspora churches. For the past twenty years, Germany has recorded a significant increase in the establishment of these churches. The reasons for this development include:

- An increase in the presence of African Christians in Europe;
- Racism in Europe, which can be felt even in the European churches; and
- A significant Christian and cultural self-confidence of Africans.³

These churches serve many purposes, including offering a spiritual home for many Africans, preserving African identity, social networking and help in overcoming different challenges faced in the host lands.⁴ For many Africans, these churches serve as “home-away-from-home”.

In the second decade of this new century, the second generation of immigrants, who have grown up in Germany but whose parents hailed from Africa, are steadily breaking away from their parental churches and forming their own. For these younger people who are Germans by nationality, whose mother tongue is German and could hardly speak the mother tongues of their parents (although they do understand them); and many of whom do not have personal migration histories, the purposes the parents’ churches serve for their parents are less relevant to them due to the fact that their experiences differ significantly from those of their parents. In addition to that, they find it difficult to relate meaningfully to the African cultural practices and worldviews that inform the belief system and church practices of their parents’ churches. They are compelled to negotiate their identities between two different and sometimes incompatible cultures; that of their parents and Germany. Consequently, they are challenged to establish faith communities where they can feel at home, and where their concerns can be addressed in meaningful ways. Likewise, these places will be a platform for the experience of support groups of like-minded people with similar experiences and similar spiritual orientation. Such is the case of the Living Generation Church (LGC) in Hamburg.

LGC: Mission and Vision

Founded in 2014 by Elorm Nick Ahiale-Mawusi (i.e. the author of this article), a young pastor at the time, LGC has a recorded official membership of 200 people of whom more than 80% are Germans of African descent; ranging between the ages of 15 and 35, the majority of whom grew up in African migrant churches. There are other nationalities as part of the membership: Germans with German parents, British, Turkish, Americans, Portuguese etc [...] Many more adults above the main age range continuously join the church. As

¹ Pastor Elorm Nick Ahiale-Mawusi aus Togo is an ordained minister of the Living Generation Church e.V. in Hamburg, he has completed his theological studies in FIT in Hermannsburg: <http://living-gen.com/about/our-pastor/>.

² Afe Adogame, *The African Christian Diaspora* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), pp. 101-122.

³ Werner Kahl, *Vom Verweben des Eigenen mit dem Fremden: Impulse zu einer transkulturellen Neuformierung des evangelischen Gemeindelebens* (Hamburg: Missionshilfe Verlag, 2016), p. 55.

⁴ Kahl, *Vom Verweben des Eigenen mit dem Fremden*, p. 55

a result, not only is LGC diversified in terms of nationality but also in terms of generation. However, it remains a pre-dominantly youth congregation.

The Mission Statement of the Living Generation Church, an adaptation of the Lutheran World Federation's document, *Mission in Context*,⁵ reads as follows:

The Mission of the LGC is to carry the Good News to all generations for *transformation* of lives of individuals and communities, *reconciliation* among people and between people and God, *empowerment* for good and better living. Focusing on youths and young adults, LGC is dedicated to reaching out to people with the transforming power of the Gospel in words and in deeds. LGC is a model church with an unswerving commitment to mission in a holistic way encompassing *celebration, proclamation, and diakonia* [sic].⁶

LGC understands itself to be a missional church; a community of God's people that defines itself and organises its life around the purpose of being an agent of God's mission to the world. This mission is carried on through *celebration, proclamation and diakonia*. The church organises regular Sunday church services for celebration, as well as other weekly activities such as Bible studies, prayer sections, and fellowships in small groups. The proclamation is carried out in different forms: ranging from the more traditional form, that is preaching, to non-traditional forms. Such non-traditional forms include:

- The 'spoken word': It consists of coding the Gospel into poetry. It is highly artistic, and its appreciation is in performance.
- Testimonies: Hereby, the members recount their lived-experiences, challenges and struggles, and more often, how God helped them. This form of witness is effective in offering hope to the youth who generally share the same experience (also considered as a diaconal element).
- Theatre: whereby the Gospel themes are acted and dramatised.
- Music: whereby the Gospel is conveyed through modern contemporary music such as rap etc.

The purpose of the non-traditional forms of proclamation is to reach the youth with the Gospel by means that are attractive and meaningful to them. To LGC, these are other ways of preaching the Gospel.

The last but not the least is diakonia. LGC understands diakonia as the caring ministry of the Church, the Gospel in action, and the practical Christianity. It is considered the main ministry for, and agent of transformation, reconciliation and empowerment. Hence, LGC organises itself (the members) at three levels of carrying out diakonia activities, namely:

- Individual level: where the individuals are encouraged to carry out the concept of Neighbour-Love by assisting and supporting the needy around them.
- Congregational level: The church organises itself to respond to the needs of the people within the church and without. This is carried out by the diakonia ministry (department) of the church.
- Institutional level: The diakonia ministry of the church seeks institutional help for situations beyond the realisation of the church and for more sustainable solutions; e.g. in legal matters, in professional matters and in matters of social integration and education.

Youth Diakonia: Diakonia of the Youth, by the Youth, for the Youth

The concept of youth diakonia is not peculiar to LGC. It is an existing concept in diaconal youth work which underlines four important facts about Christian youth work and diakonia:

- Christian youth work is part of the Church's pillars which are: *koinonia, leiturgia, kerygma* and *diakonia*.

⁵ *Mission in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment: An LWF Contribution to the Understanding and Practice of Mission*. LWF, Geneva, 2004.

⁶ Living Generation Church, "Mission" [Available at: <http://living-gen.com/about/our-mission/>, accessed 09/07/2020.]

- Diakonia is an integral part of Christian youth work, opening the door to the whole world.
- The visibility and the significance of youth diakonia in the moment of changes and crisis in the society
- And that youth diakonia pays special attention to the need of those who cannot get help elsewhere.⁷

Youth diakonia at LGC shares the same conceptual framework. However, LGC goes an extra mile with the concept: “Youth diakonia is a diakonia of the youth, by the youth for the youth.” Under this conceptual framework, young people appropriate diakonia as a youth Christian identity; they are the agents of diakonia (deacons) and the target remains young people. The underlying logic is that, often, the agency of young people is undervalued in faith communities (this is highly reflected in the church leadership and decision making), and their experiences which differ from those of the older members, in the rapidly changing social contexts, are misconstrued as a result of the generation gap. Consequently, their needs are inadequately and ineffectively responded to. Young people are, therefore, to be regarded as experts of their situations and indispensable agents of diakonia to the youth, in ways that are effective and productive. As far as the second and the third generation of African migrants in Germany are concerned, there are two factors that make them special in terms of youth diaconal Agency; namely: (i) the experience of the “margins” and (ii) intercultural competence.

Paying attention to experiences and witnesses from the context is integral to diakonia. Understanding how realities are seen from the perspective of the poor and the marginalised is indispensable to a relevant diakonia. In the rapidly changing context in Germany, with the current debate on migration and its apparent crisis in the society, there is an increase in discrimination, racism, marginalisation and exclusion in the societies. The second and the third generation of Africans in Germany often experience these themselves due to the colour of their skin. As a result, they can relate meaningfully to those experiences and understand the realities of such contexts.

With regard to intercultural competences, growing up with multiple cultures; at least two or three, namely; those of the parents and the German society, they develop naturally the ability to manage multi-cultural or intercultural situations. This ability to manage and navigate in-between multiple cultures make them experts of interculturality that is indispensable for diakonia in a pluralistic society. This intercultural competence acquired over years enables them to become effective bridge-builders between other cultures and the host culture.

Contextualising: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment

In line with the Lutheran World Federation, LGC consider transformation, reconciliation and empowerment as three dimensions of mission and diakonia ‘that permeate all mission endeavours and provide criteria with which the Church judges its faithfulness in before Christ who has sent it into the world’.⁸ The motto of LGC is:

Transformation – of lives of individuals and communities

Reconciliation – among people and between people and God

Empowerment – for good and better living.

Transformation is understood as an ‘ongoing process of total reorientation of life, with all its aspirations, ideologies, structures and values’.⁹ LGC identifies three stages involved in the process namely: Information – Formation – Transformation. The logic behind these stages is primarily derived from the admonishment of Paul to the church in Rome whereby transformation is directly linked to the renewal of the mind (Rom. 12:2).

⁷ Joukko Porkka and Florian Tuder, ‘A Study on Diaconal Youth Work in Europe Today’, *REDI- Reports from Practice 2019*, [Available at: <https://www.diaconiaresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/2019-04-A-study-on-Diaconal-Youth-Work-in-Europe-today.pdf>], [Accessed 11/01/2020].

⁸ *Mission in context*, p. 32.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

Hence, the process is understood as follows: Information brings about (re)formation (which implies the doing away with dis/misinformation including false narratives and perceptions), and formation leads to transformation. However, these are not to be regarded as mutually exclusive. Once transformed, youth become agents of transformation in their families, communities and societies. This explains the popular slogan of LGC: “transformed to transform”.

Reconciliation is a major orientation of diakonia at LGC. This orientation is situated in the general position of every Christian being an ambassador of Christ, entrusted with the message of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:19). LGC identifies three forms of reconciliation in youth diakonia:

1. Reconciliation with oneself: Many young people live constantly in self-blame and accusation for some mistake of the past (wrong decisions, unhealthy relationships, substance abuse etc) or some circumstances to which they were victims or over which they had no control (e.g. rape, death of a loved one, failures in education etc). Youth diakonia helps the individual to “forgive” and to reconcile with themself by offering hope and a “narrative of truth” that overcomes the narrative of self-accusation and blame.
2. Reconciliation with and in the family: Many young people feel hurt by immediate family members. In the case of the second and third generation, most of the offences and discontentment are directed towards the parents. The accusations range from negligence to irresponsibility or unsupportive, and sometimes abusive. In many cases, these are proven to be true but one-sided. Youth diakonia works in reconciling the parties through a process of forgiveness, healing and reconciliation. Family is highly valued at LGC.
3. Reconciliation in the society: In the current polarised socio-political realities in Germany, where right-wing ideologies are on the rise, with false narratives aiming at dehumanising and criminalising the vulnerable and the minorities, taking precedent over tolerance, acceptance and hospitality, and creating a highly polarised but divisive society, LGC works towards unity, reconciliation, forgiveness, truth and justice.

The major challenge that young people continually face is that they do not possess enough power or control over their lives. They are deemed incapable of making decisions over their own lives or are in need of protection and guidance. Some have given up along the way. Youth diakonia at LGC seek to empower young people to take control of their own lives and to make them the writers of their own life story. Many young people who abandoned education for one reason or the other have been encouraged to return to school and have been encouraged to go for professional training. Thereby, they retake control over their own lives. This is the case with many teenage mothers and fathers and many who had suffered from substance abuse. LGC achieves this through various empowerment programmes, seminars, workshops led by young people capable of empowering others by providing them with the necessary tools and skills and by motivating them with their personal life stories.

Best Practice Models

Faithful Leadership Seminar (FLS)

Concerning its *Conceptual Framework and Goals* LGC equips and engages young people for diakonia through a training programme called Faithful Leadership Seminar (FLS). FLS is a one-year programme with the following goals:

- Young people are trained and equipped for diakonia work at all levels
- Young people are activated and offered opportunity for diakonia in practice
- Young people are trained to become responsible advocates for peace, justice and democratic values in the society.

The concept of ‘*Leadership*’ as reflected in FLS is conceptualised in two ways:

- *Stewardship and Servant Leadership*: That every believer is a steward by calling and by sense of duty;
- *Influencer*: That every believer is called to be a *light, salt* and a *city on a hill* (Mt. 5:13-14). These are metaphors that reflect the impacts that Christians should have on their societies.

Concerning its *Content and Methodology* the programme is divided into three major parts. The first part consists of diakonia, its identity forms and the second part consists of means of mobilisation of resources for diakonia. The third part is the practical aspect which consists of field work activities whereby young people are involved in practical diaconal activities including advocacy. The trainers are different experts in different areas such as: lecturers in diakonia, Diakonia practitioners, activists, politicians, agents of NGO’s, and pastors.

The methodology used includes workshops, teaching, case studies, sharing of perspectives, practical engagements. Through the FLS programme, several young people are enabled to take up responsibilities in the diaconal department of the church. This department undertakes projects both within and without the church.

“The Great Banquet” Project (GBP)

One of the diaconal initiatives of LGC is the Great Banquet Project (GBP) which takes place every Sunday and other special Christian feasts such as Easter, Pentecost, Christmas and others. It is a feeding scheme project. After service, food is served and opportunities are given to people to sit together, eat and have conversations.

Not only does this practice successfully meet the hunger needs of people who attend, it also provides a platform for social interaction for people who otherwise might not have the opportunity. The programme aims at providing opportunities for people not to be alone, especially during festive days like Christmas and New Year.

LGC Diakonia Department

The diakonia department of LGC is responsible for all the official diaconal activities of the church. The activities are both internal and external. Some of the activities include: the feeding scheme project, care and assistance for single mothers by providing them with relevant support and assistance, asylum assistance scheme by which asylum seekers are assisted and accompanied, this can be in the form of providing a temporal accommodation, financial support, accompaniment in legal matters, translation and writing of official letters etc., assistance to the homeless through the feeding scheme and also by accompaniment and guidance to the appropriate state supports etc. Other areas of engagement are: education assistance where the more advanced in education assist those in lower classes academic works and mentoring programmes where the younger ones are mentored by the older ones. The department is also responsible for assistance in situations of bereavement. Bereaved young people are given a special support, counselled and accompanied in their mourning. There are also special visits to people who are sick, either at home or at the hospital to offer them any form of help, from prayers to house chores and so on.

Conclusion

The Living Generation Church considers diakonia to be indispensable to the mission of the Church. Not only is diakonia considered as the practical implementation of “love your neighbour”, but it is also understood as the apparent mission of the Church. The Church is called to serve, and diakonia is the serving act of the Church. Diakonia transforms the lives of people, reconciles people and empowers people for a better life. Diakonia is about the dignity of life. Diakonia is about the restoration of life.

[...] I have come that they may have life and have it to the full (John 10: 10).

Through its FLS programme, LGC empowers youth for Christian diaconal engagement both within and without the Church. They provide platforms for diaconal engagement through various projects undertaken by the church, in the form the “great banquet” project, and other feeding schemes and support systems led by the diaconal department of the church, to cater for people in need. The overall goal is to contextualise the concept of “transformation, reconciliation and empowerment” within the framework of Christian anthropology, namely the understanding of *imago Dei*, to make transparent the Church’s participation in the mission of God and to make transparent the Church’s mandate to be “light, salt and city on the hill”.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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Kahl, Werner. *Vom Verweben des Eigenen mit dem Fremden: Impulse zu einer transkulturellen Neuformierung des evangelischen Gemeindelebens*. Hamburg: Missionsverlag, 2016.

Living Generation Church, *Mission* [Available at: <http://living-gen.com/about/our-mission/>], [Accessed 09/07/2020].

Mission in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment: An LWF Contribution to the Understanding and Practice of Mission. LWF, Geneva, 2004.

Porkka, Joukko and Florian Tuder, “A Study on Diaconal Youth Work in Europe Today”, *REDI- Reports from Practice 2019* (2019) [Available at: <https://www.diaconiaresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/2019-04-A-study-on-Diaconal-Youth-Work-in-Europe-today.pdf>], [Accessed 11/01/2020].

95. ENGAGING YOUTH WITH AND FOR DIACONIA IN ITALY: FROM PEER EDUCATION TO SOCIAL WORK

Stefano Bertuzzi¹

“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid.” (Matthew 5:13-14)

Introduction

One important turning point in the relationship between youth and diaconal work of the last few decades in Italy was the co-organisation in the 2015 by Diaconia Valdese (the main diaconal organisation of the Waldensian Reformed and Methodist churches in Italy) and FGEI (Protestant Youth Federation) of the annual conference of Diaconia Valdese. It was not only an arrival point but also a starting one: the event pushed the youth to reflect about the precious work of a big organisation that connects and co-ordinates the social activities of the Waldensian Church, providing assistance to elderly people, minors and young people, disabled people, migrants and asylum seekers, people in need.² The verses from Matthew 5 introduced the conference (Work, rights, talents, vocation): some young people said to other young people – and at the same time to everyone – they must be “*the salt of the earth*” and “*the light of the world*”.

The Evangelical Youth Federation in Italy (la Federazione Giovanile Evangelica in Italia – FGEI): Letting the Youth Follow Their Objectives

FGEI is a Federation made up of young protestants from all over Italy with the vocation to witness their faith in Jesus Christ. It was founded in the 1969 by the unification of the Baptist, Methodist and Reformed (Waldensian) youth movements: the unity among young protestants was encouraged by the student protests in 1968, focusing on the relationship between political commitment and faith.³

At the very beginning, this movement was therefore focused on changing the churches with new political and theological point of views, trying to reconnect young people to the big themes of the faith. Since “*For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead*” (James 2:26), FGEI, from 1980, in a spirit of reconnection with the churches, began to collaborate with some large diaconal structures in the south of Italy: their founders needed to “pass the torch” and many services had to be reconsidered. In the context of new attention on the south, FGEI wanted to re-open the reflection on social works: for some young people, it was the beginning of new lives and new adventures.⁴

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² Diaconia Valdese, “Chi Siamo,” <https://www.diaconiavaldese.org/>.

³ Federazione Giovanile Evangelica in Italia, “Chi Siamo,” <http://www.fgei.org/la-fgei/chi-siamo/>.

⁴ Paolo Naso, “La Fatica Gioiosa di una Generazione di Mezzo,” *Gioventù Evangelica*, no.228 (2014), pp. 13-16.

It is noteworthy that all FGEI's activities – managing systems, communication, training camps, materials, etc. – are driven by the principles of the non-formal education, the learning by doing, the peer education: everything is organised by the youth to the youth (the age of the people ranged from about 15 to 35 years old) and experts are involved only if necessary. This allowed some generations of young people to grow up able to follow their own attitudes and gifts. By contrast, the churches did not have “the direct control” of the youth, to guide them in their services. This particular aspect is changing and, nowadays, the FGEI and the diaconal services of the churches are increasing dialogue to move toward a common strategy.

Diaconia Valdese and Its Relationship with the Youth

In 1993, the Synod of the Waldensian and Methodist churches in Italy created the “Commissione Sinodale per la Diaconia” to organise and co-ordinate the majority of its diaconal activities (those that are gathered under the name of “Diaconia Valdese”). This new “framework law” of the social work allowed to better organise the diaconal activities,⁵ also including new aspects, such as the involvement of youth (see below). With one unique executive commission, the relationship with the young people of the churches and in particular with FGEI (Evangelic Youth Federation in Italy) evolved. A first step was the involvement of young people in the committees of some guesthouses where FGEI hold its activities.

Moreover, in the next chapters, some methods and activities applied by Diaconia Valdese in its services for children, teenagers and young adults are described.

The Importance of Gaming to Involve Young People

The sociologist and pedagogist Pierre Parlebas defines the game as an initiation to the rules and as a social factor, which gives the player the opportunity to express their personality;⁶ acquisition of the rules and development of autonomy are two essential ingredients in education. The playful experience of a group has a broader meaning than those with a single person. Gaming is synonymous with learning: the young child in the first weeks of life begins to play with their own body. As they grow, they focus attention beyond its immediate range of perception, attracted by visual and sound stimuli.⁷ Playing is very important in any moment of our lives because it helps us to develop all the social skills necessary to establish healthy relationships with others. A correct use of the game can involve children and young people in educational activities, and, at the same time, helps to increase their empathy and understanding of others. Throughout the game, it is therefore possible to promote the relationship between youth and diaconal activities.

From Children to Teenagers: a Critical Passage with Great Potentials

Working with teenagers means taking into account the specificity of that life moment, paying attention to the potential, problems, enthusiasm that characterises their behaviour, that also depends strongly on their social and familiar context.⁸ The promotion and support of the “protagonism” is a keystone to engage teenagers in common activities and, therefore, in social and diaconal action. Protagonism is obtained through the creation

⁵ Ermanno Genre, *Diaconia e Solidarietà. I Valdesi dalla Borsa dei Poveri all'Otto per Mille*. (Torino: Claudiana srl, 2017), pp. 126-131.

⁶ Pierre Parlebas, “The Destiny of Games Heritage and Lineage,” *Studies in Physical Culture and Tourism* 10(1) (2003), pp. 15-26.

⁷ Sigrid Loos and Karim Metref, “Giocando si Impara. L'importanza del Gioco per l'Apprendimento,” *Diaconia e Formazione, I Quaderni della Diaconia* no.5 (2013), pp. 17-20.

⁸ Susanna D'Amore, “Spazio Adolescenti: linee guida per il lavoro di aggregazione giovanile,” *Diaconia e Formazione, I Quaderni della Diaconia* no.5 (2013), pp. 71-84.

of spaces for exercising the rights and to “take the word”: replacing the concept of “designing an activity of or for” with “designing with” is therefore necessary.⁹ The activities and the spaces for teenagers have to be organised following some important methodological concepts: i) the customisation of the action to the single person; ii) the ability to act globally, beyond contingent circumstances; iii) developing the sense of responsibilities; iv) keeping the teenager in the plane of reality.

From Teenagers to Young Adults: Out from the Comfort Zones

Once teenagers understand their talents, gifts and abilities, they are almost ready to experiment outside of their comfort zones. In the experience of Diaconia Valdese, one step in this direction is to attend one or more international exchanges, meeting other teenagers and young adults from other countries, different cultures and lifestyles, attending activities that allow them to test themselves.¹⁰ Another possibility is to allow teenagers to move “from pupil to mentor”, involving them in activities with the youngest (e.g. children).

Ready to Serve: National and International Volunteering

A further important step towards growth, autonomy and awareness is for teenagers to spend a period of their life volunteering. The Italian Civil Service (Servizio Civile Universale) for example, offers a unique opportunity to serve in different diaconal structures, learning how they work to “serve with people” (Diaconia Valdese’s motto). The international volunteering projects (e.g. those in the framework of the European Solidarity Corps) put together the best aspects of the youth mobilities with those of the civil services. As for Erasmus projects, volunteers, when asked for outcomes, attributed the highest values to cultural enhancement, personal development and foreign language proficiency.¹¹

Conclusions

Italian experiences of Diaconia Valdese, FGEI, and many other protestant institutions, show that engaging youth with and for Diaconia is a process that needs to be shaped in terms of different generations and individual persons. Some shared guidelines and a good pedagogical preparation are necessary; however, it is fundamental to increase the youth awareness that young people are called together to contribute to the well-being and growth of our society, churches and diaconia, as Jesus had called the disciples to take their responsibilities as “the salt of the earth”, “the light of the world”.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Kit! International Volunteering with Social Organization. A tool for change, inclusion and growth. Diaconia Valdese (2017) (*in English*) [Available at: <https://projectnextgeneration.wordpress.com/>].
 Gioventù Evangelica, no.243 (2019) (*in Italian*) Special edition about 50 years of the FGEI [Available at: http://www.fgei.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/GE_243-1.pdf].

⁹ Massimo Brusciagioni and Stefano Gheno, *Il Gusto del Potere. Empowerment di Persone ed Azienda*. (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2004).

¹⁰ Andrea Panero Geymet, “Giovani in Movimento. Programma di Educazione non Formale e Mobilità Giovanile,” *Diaconia e Formazione, I Quaderni della Diaconia* no.5 (2013), pp. 85-92.

¹¹ Vittoria Jacobone and Guiseppe Moro, “Evaluating the impact of the Erasmus programme: skills and European identity” *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 40(2) (2014), pp. 309-328.

On-line Resources

Waldensian Church Website (*in Italian*): <https://www.chiesavaldese.org/>.

Evangelic Youth Federation in Italy (FGEI) Website (*in Italian*): <http://www.fgei.org/>.

Diaconia Valdese Website (*mainly in Italian*): <https://www.diaconiavaldese.org/>.

Blog about International Volunteering Youth Projects by Diaconia Valdese (*in English*):
<https://projectnextgeneration.wordpress.com/>.

96. APPLYING LIBERATING PEDAGOGY IN EASTERN AND CENTRAL EUROPE – INNOVATIVE LEARNING PROGRAMMES FOR DIACONIA BY INTERDIAC

Oksana Prosvirina¹

Introduction

This chapter aims to highlight and explore how the main principles of liberating pedagogy can be integrated in educational programmes for Diaconia and Christian social practice. It is grounded in the experience of interdiac, the International Academy for Diaconia and Social Action in Central and Eastern Europe, and focuses on the issues of learning as transformative liberating practice for the lives of people and their environment.

The Interdiac Learning Process

The educational process of interdiac is participatory from the very beginning. This entails that the learning programmes are developed in collaboration with the interdiac partners and the learning delivered emphasises the dialogical nature of knowledge, rooted in practice. The following key-principles are followed in the organisation of the learning process:

- Education is phenomenon-based. It steps away from a subject-organised process, highlighting the holistic phenomena of the real world in their complexity, and inviting a multidisciplinary approach to the studies of the chosen phenomenon.²
- Blended learning – ensures the integration of theory and practice and allows participants to contextualise and test theoretical knowledge in their working environment.
- Workshops, face-to-face events – in the course of the workshop, learning from the participant's own context which is shared and reflected on with others, along with contributions from and discussion with experts who may also be experienced practitioners.
- New knowledge is shared in the learning community and disseminated in the partners' network.³

In this way, interdiac strives to remain a dynamic organisation which can respond to the various needs for learning which are arising within the diverse contexts in Central and Eastern Europe.

Implementing a Liberating Pedagogy Perspective in Learning and Practice

The principles of liberating pedagogy pioneered by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, form a cornerstone of the learning process of interdiac. According to Freire, liberating pedagogy should focus on the participant as an active learner, who re-discovers the world and co-relations with people through analysing everyday experience:

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² For more information, see: <http://www.phenomenaleducation.info/phenomenon-based-learning.html>.

³ For more details of interdiac and its work, see chapter II of this book: Janka Adamecová and Tsovinar Ghazaryan, "Diaconia and Conviviality in Central and Eastern Europe".

Education as the practice of freedom – as opposed to education as the practice of domination – denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exists as a reality apart from people. Authentic reflection considers neither abstract man nor the world without people, but people in their relations with the world. In these relations consciousness and world are simultaneous: consciousness neither precedes the world nor follows it.⁴

Let us have a closer look at how the principles of liberating pedagogy may be pursued in the learning and what impact they have on the participants of the learning programmes and development of the practice.

Following the ideas of liberating pedagogy, the learning model of interdiac is built on four core aspects:

- a) learning starts close to everyday life and experience. The participants are invited to reflect on *what they see* in a concrete phenomenon of social reality (social inequality, poverty, conflicts, etc.) and *how they respond* to it and how their seeing and responding relates to their biography and socialisation;
- b) the participants are directly involved in the learning process by integrating practice and theory in their context and reflecting on it. Therefore, the dominant “expert” knowledge is scrutinised and examined from the perspective of everyday work with service-users;
- c) in learning, participants recognise personal identity and motivation as a factor in work motivation and orientation in working with people, respecting the diversity of lived experience and of conditions which include issues of gender, race/ethnicity, disability etc. and creating a service model which works towards society in diversity and life in dignity;
- d) support of reflection on personal experience and understanding the spiritual and theological basis of working with marginalised people, using an approach which respects the diversity of religious background.

Consequently, the learning process becomes an open journey where the participants discuss and reflect through dialogue their insights and findings from everyday practice in order to transform it and thereby the lives and situations of those with whom they work.⁵

Nature of structural changes	Liberating structures	Traditional oppressive structures
Starting point for change	Seen as an issue and an opportunity to act.	Seen as a problem to be solved (either a problem for the people or that the people are the problem!)
Involvement of participants	Changes from below rooted in local context	Top-down changes, managed by invited experts
Application of power	Power with people	Power over people
Character of changes	Slow, co-created together	Rapid, forced, algorithmised
Result	Open, organic change of habits and beliefs	Conformity but no deep change; reversion when the expert leaves

The learning process of interdiac reflects the interdiac understanding of diaconal practice as seeking to achieve meaningful sustainable changes in the lives of marginalised people and communities. However, these changes should not be imposed on them, nor should they be introduced as transferrable expert “know how”. On the contrary, our understanding of practice is that practitioners seek to develop changes together with marginalised people in reciprocal ways, so that action emerges in the process of working close to the life

⁴ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), p. 81.

⁵ Oksana Prosvirmina and Tony Addy, *interdiac pedagogy. Introduction and Guide*. Český Těšín: interdiac (2020). Available at: <https://www.interdiac.eu/resources/interdiac-pedagogy-an-introduction-and-guide>.

world of people and communities.⁶ The table above visualises the difference in the structural changes that are formed under the influence of liberating pedagogy in contrast to the traditional oppressive “banking” system.⁷

On this basis, we can conclude that the changes that participants are aiming to achieve are empowering and emancipating, granting the service-users their dignity and involving them as active decision-makers over their own reality. In this way, the core-principle of liberation, pointed out by Freire, is upheld. When people are already dehumanised, due to the oppression they suffer, the process of their liberation must not also employ the methods of dehumanisation.⁸

Below we will look into the specific challenges that arise for the participants during the interdiac learning programmes, as they emerge in the development of new forms of liberating and emancipatory practice in the face of marginalisation, oppression, inequality and the need for care:

- The first challenge is to overcome previous pedagogical experience, which for many participants is still based on an oppressive “banking” approach to collecting and repeating knowledge. This process of unlearning has a direct implication on the concept of professional expertise and the position of the social, diaconal or community worker. The participatory approach to learning leads to personal empowerment and, consequently, to seeing the service user or participant as an expert through their own experience.
- Secondly, the reflective process in interdiac enables a more nuanced reflection on the position of the worker, in between the world of systems (state, economy, mainstream culture etc) and the worlds of everyday life. From this reflection, it is possible to develop a model of practice, which is sensitive to overt and hidden oppression. It is at the root of a rights-based approach and is the bedrock of anti-oppressive practice and work for transformation.
- Thirdly, interdiac developed a core concept for diaconia – seeking conviviality – which focuses attention on building relationships, especially relationships across diversities. In this approach, the whole working culture of the organisation or church is examined in the light of taking responsibility with and for the “other”. It means that the service model is more directly linked to community development work or work for empowerment and transformation. It is also closely linked to spiritual reflection on personal vocation and re-establishing relations with the “other” in a new, reciprocal way.
- Fourthly, self-reflection is placed as a central element of learning in interdiac. This is a process, whereby the person constantly reflects on the way in which learning in context changes their personal and professional service model and enables them to act differently. Through this process, they are able to integrate changes into their lives, work and environment, thus achieving a holistic approach in the perspective of transformative learning.

Interdiac is constantly seeking to enrich the basis of its pedagogy in order to build a relevant programme to cope with newly arising challenges. It expresses its commitment to fostering the personal and professional growth of everyone involved in interdiac by supporting transformative learning, empowerment and the preservation of dignity.

⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action Volume 2 Life World and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1987), p. 113-197.

⁷ Adapted from: Henri Lipmanowicz and Keith McCandless, *The Surprising Power of Liberating Structures: Simple Rules to Unleash A Culture of Innovation*. (Seattle, WA: Liberating Structures Press, 2013).

⁸ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 67.

Conclusion

Liberating pedagogy is not a set of tools or methods that secure the process or determine the result. Quite the opposite, as we see it, it puts new challenging demands on the learners in the most essential components of life: re-discovering relations with the world, with the “Self” and with the “Other”. This task cannot be accomplished by detached intellectual observation or abstract theorisation, nor does it readily accept conventional answers that suit the mainstream society. Therefore, a liberating pedagogical process should motivate learners as they follow the path to work for transformation, by challenging the oppressive practices and structures and supporting innovation. The learning process should be open and dialogical and rooted in practice and reflection. In this chapter, we have looked into the implications of liberating pedagogy for the development of innovative diaconal practice and shared the related learning model and process-related findings developed over a ten-year period by interdiac. The contexts of the many countries involved with interdiac are very diverse, but this rich diversity makes “learning from each other” extremely fruitful and opens the door to the search of life together in peace and justice across the differences.

Suggestions for Further Reading

- Adameová, Janka and Tsovinar Ghazaryan. “Diaconia and conviviality in Central and Eastern Europe”. See page 248 in Section II of this volume.
- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of Oppressed*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014.
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97. DIDACTICS OF INCLUSION: DIAKONIA AS A ROUND TABLE

Rodolfo Gaede Neto¹

Introduction

If, out of curiosity, we look in a dictionary for a definition of the word “table”, we will find, among other answers, this one: “a piece of furniture that consists of a flat top supported by legs”.² If we investigated in the same dictionary about the table’s usefulness, it would certainly tell us that, among other functions, it can be used as a support to have meals. In this case, one uses the horizontal top (which is sustained by one or more legs) to put the utensils on containing the foodstuffs prepared to be eaten. Besides that, one puts on it the knives, forks and spoons used as tools to ingest the food.

This explanation, besides being funny, is simply objective and cold. It does not take into consideration the much more subjective role that a table can have when people gather around it to have a meal. In this case, the table becomes an instrument and physical space for people to come together, to appease their physical hunger and, at the same time, to talk, to speak about life’s joys and sorrows, to celebrate important events, to toast, to strengthen their friendship and trust and, ultimately, to have table fellowship. The table’s round format enables people to sit in front of each other, to look in each other’s eyes and have a more profound encounter and experience.

When the table becomes an instrument and space for the encounter of people, for the healthy relationship, for the appeasing of their hunger for bread and thirst for fellowship, it plays a relevant role for the good of human beings. Thus, we can define it as an *ethos* in which people can have an encounter with their best values for the exercise of human life together.

However, this good function of the table can be warped. At the table, one can also have bad experiences. For instance, when the table is there, full of good food, but someone considers themselves the owner of the table and only invites people from their restricted circle. Or there is no physical access to the table. Or the food offered on it has a price that many people cannot pay. Or there is food on the table, but it is unhealthy because it is contaminated with agrochemicals. Or there is food on the table but it is insufficient or is not properly distributed so that all people can enjoy it. Or, at that table, the company of people with a different skin colour, a different culture or a different religion are not accepted. Thus, the table can also be a space where one experiences scarcity, injustice, discrimination and exclusion.

Therefore, the human community needs didactics of inclusion, with the aim of creating environments in which people are aware of belonging to each other, of being part of one and the same body that, in spite of their members’ diversity, functions as a healthy organism.

In this essay, we want to understand diakonia as a round table which, based on its original meaning of serving at the table (in the way in which Jesus understood and practiced it), may become a significant space for promoting the inclusion of those people whose access to the table is being obstructed. Therefore, in the Christian community’s practical life, the challenge of diakonia consists in constructing welcoming and inclusive tables.

Thus, here we focus on the table with its ambiguities and contradictions, but mainly with its potential to experience the presence of the kingdom of God in this world. We will have as our main reference the biblical

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² A. S. Horny, *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English*, 8th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 1572.

passages that describe the practice of Jesus' inclusive commensality in the presence of people experiencing exclusion from the table; and passages in which Jesus uses the table as a metaphor of living the Kingdom of God. Before carrying out a hermeneutic exercise with biblical passages, we want to draw attention to the importance given by the evangelists to the subject of Jesus' table communions. At the conclusion, we will present thoughts that aim to contribute to the conception and practice of a didactic of inclusion, inspired by diakonia as a roundtable.

The Scope and Importance of Commensality in the Gospels

One can say that Jesus' commensality³ is a subject in the New Testament which is still under-researched.⁴ It may be assumed that it has the potential to add new information to Jesus' historical ministry's profile. With a much greater incidence than we can normally presume, Jesus held table communions with a variety of people (sinners, poor, indebted, sick, disabled, discriminated, and disoriented people). Few researchers link Jesus' practical ministry to this activity around tables. It has a place worthy of attention and recognition among the other activities of Jesus. Norman Perrin even states that "we can see in this table fellowship the main characteristic of Jesus' ministry".⁵ The same importance is given by John Dominic Crossan when he states that it is "the essence of Jesus' original movement".⁶

The number of biblical writings that deal with this subject is surprising.⁷ In the gospels, for example, the verb "to eat" appears in 76 passages, while *didáskein* appears 55 times.⁸ Luke dedicates a fifth of his works to the practice and teaching of Jesus about table fellowships.⁹ The evangelist Mark found a unique way to express the importance of Jesus' table communions. He culminates each of the three stages of Jesus' ministry in a supper: a) from Galilee, Jesus says goodbye eating with five thousand people (6.30-44); b) when he leaves his followers in the gentile region of Decapolis, Jesus celebrates a supper in which four thousand people participate (8.1-10); c) the farewell of his disciples in Jerusalem takes place with the last supper (14.12-26).¹⁰

³ 'Commensality' means the practice of eating together.

⁴ In this regard, I recommend looking at the important study by the Hungarian theologian János Bolyki, translated into German, entitled *Jesu Tischgemeinschaften*. I also recommend the research of John Dominic Crossan (*The Historical Jesus*), of Rúben Dri (*A Utopia de Jesus [The Utopia of Jesus]*) and of Norman Perrin (*O que ensinou Jesus realmente?* [Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus]).

⁵ N. Perrin, *O que ensinou Jesus realmente?* [Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus] (São Leopoldo: Sinodal, 1977), p. 133.

⁶ J. D. Crossan, *O Jesus Histórico: a vida de um camponês judeu do Mediterrâneo [The historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant]* (Rio de Janeiro: Imago, 1994), p. 378.

⁷ See a survey of writings on table communion in the practice and teaching of Jesus in Rodolfo Gaede Neto. *Diakonia no contexto afro-brasileiro: um estudo baseado nas comunhões de mesa de Jesus [Diakonia in the Afro-Brazilian context: a study based on Jesus' table communions]* (São Leopoldo: Sinodal/EST, 2014), p. 117ff.

⁸ See János Bolyki, *Jesu Tischgemeinschaften*. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), p. 1.

⁹ "Food and meals are important topics in Luke's Gospel. Food is necessary for life, and Luke emphasises that every person has the right to food [...] The sharing of food in the form of hospitality therefore becomes an important matter for him" (Halvor Moxnes, *A economia do reino: conflito social e relações econômicas no Evangelho de Lucas [The economy of the kingdom: social conflict and economic relations in Luke's Gospel]* (São Paulo: Paulus, 1995), p.122. Joseph Comblin also states: "The Gospel according to Luke gathers almost all the typical texts that are addressed particularly to the hungry" (*A fome e a Bíblia [Hunger and the Bible]*, 30). Reginaldo Veloso relates Luke's social concern to one of the beatitudes: "Luke, the social evangelist by excellence, aware and sensitive to the real situations that negatively affect the lives of the poor, of the excluded from society, on the shallow ground of the lowlands, understood that Jesus simply said: Happy are you who starve: you will be appeased! (Reginaldo Veloso, *Fome e eucaristia nos escritos do Novo Testamento [Hunger and Eucharist in the writings of the New Testament]*. *Estudos Bíblicos*. Petrópolis, 46 (1995), pp. 52-62: p. 59.

¹⁰ Bolyki, *Jesu Tischgemeinschaften*, p. 93.

John, the evangelist, “frames” his work with two suppers of Jesus: at the beginning, the wedding of Cana, and at the end, the resurrection supper with his disciples. The texts’ degree of historical credibility is also surprising: exegesis places most of them in the context of the historical activity of Jesus of Nazareth, having, therefore, good historical consistency.¹¹

Another relevant fact is that the passages that deal with the communion of tables are spread out in the most different of literary genres: in Jesus’ sayings, in parables, in public speeches, in narratives of miracles and biography, in the story of the Passion, in the apparitions of the resurrected Christ.¹²

Noteworthy is also the fact that the First Community took the “breaking of bread” as their distinctive feature, as an activity that had its origin not only in a last supper of Jesus, but also in a tradition of table fellowships during his whole ministry.¹³

The apostolate itself was noted for the experience of table communion with Jesus. By definition, apostle is the one who can say: “We ate and drank with him” (Acts 10:41; 1:4).¹⁴

Also worthy of mention is the fact that Jesus’ opposers called him “a glutton and a drinker of wine” (*phagos* and *oinopotes*), which can be considered a confirmation that table communions were not a peripheral practice, but central to Jesus’ ministry (Mt 11:19).¹⁵

The serious friction that Jesus had with the religious authorities due to commensality with “publicans and sinners”, in other words, the open community suppers indicate that this activity was also one of the causes for the cross:¹⁶ “There must have been something in this fact that caused serious offense to Jesus’ contemporaries,” concludes Perrin.¹⁷

In addition to practice, it is quite frequent that Jesus, in his teaching, uses table fellowship as a metaphor for the kingdom of God. Therefore, Jesus’ table communions cannot be considered a peripheral theme in the gospels. On the contrary, they assume a surprisingly significant role.

A Hermeneutic Exercise

Considering the remarkable presence of the subject of commensality in the context of Jesus’ activities and teaching, our objective now is to investigate a number of biblical narratives for the possible presence of elements that can contribute to a “didactic of inclusion”.

Matthew 8:11

“Many shall come from the east and the west and shall take place at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.” Luke adds: “from east and west, north and south” (Lk. 13:29).

Jesus expresses his conviction that in the coming kingdom of heaven, all peoples from all corners of the earth will participate. Therefore, the kingdom of God that Jesus announces is defined by openness. Its reach is universal.

¹¹ See the exegetical study of the texts referring to Jesus’ commensality in Bolyki, *Jesu Tischgemeinschaften*, pp. 69.

¹² The appearance of this subject in diverse literary genres makes us suspect that the communicators of the different types of stories have used common material of tradition and that different oral collections have been based on the same historical facts. On this, see Bolyki, *Jesu Tischgemeinschaften*, pp. 1-65.

¹³ Community meals in early Christianity “are an extension of a regular practice in the ministry of Jesus” (Perrin, *O que ensinou Jesus realmente?*, p. 130). See also Crossan, *O Jesus Histórico*, pp. 398-405.

¹⁴ Bolyki, *Jesu Tischgemeinschaften*, p. 2; p. 70.

¹⁵ Bolyki, *Jesu Tischgemeinschaften*, p. 70.

¹⁶ For the religious elite of that time, there were two things considered scandalous in Jesus’ behaviour: a) the source of the food he ate; possibly it was impure or tithing had not been collected from it; b) the people with whom he ate were unclean, had a dubious profile, and did not observe the law (See Bolyki, *Jesu Tischgemeinschaften*, p. 72.).

¹⁷ Perrin, *O que ensinou Jesus realmente?*, p. 127.

Matthew 22:1-14

Jesus tells us that a king has prepared a great celebration, with a great banquet. He invited his friends. But these were busy, each with their own plan.¹⁸ Faced with the invitation's refusal, the king called: a) those who are "at the crossroads"; b) "as many as you may find"; c) "good and bad". Luke adds: d) the people in the streets and alleys; the poor, the crippled, the blind and limpers (14:21).

The first invitation was selective. It was based on a restricted view of the messianic kingdom, addressed exclusively to the people of the covenant. The banquet was prepared for a private group. The second invitation included a new list of guests, an open list. The "Others" are invited.

An open place for all people is what Jesus imagines for the banquet in the kingdom of heaven. The passage reveals which hope moves Jesus in his ministry. This eschatological expectancy illuminates his historical presence: he carries out inclusive, open communions at tables. Jesus acts according to what he expects.¹⁹

Mark 7:24-30

The passage tells about the table Jesus was at and from which the Syrophoenician woman was separated. The gentile woman, of another ethnic group, different culture and religion, claimed the right to take part in the kingdom of God's benefits. The "Other" proposes that the table be open for strangers.²⁰

This woman's profile was not that of a daughter of the covenant people. At first, Jesus defended the idea of having been sent exclusively to his own people. His presence in a strange land (Mark 7:1-24), however, is a sign that "his own did not receive him" (John 1:11).

In the face of the woman's argument, Jesus decides to fulfil her request: to heal her daughter. She starts to enjoy benefits of the kingdom of God. The concept of the "kingdom of God", previously "particularised", now extends to the universal perspective: it is open to all people. Jesus could not withhold from this woman what the rich man denied to poor Lazarus: a place at the table.²¹

The challenge of the meeting of cultures and ethnicities is dealt with in this passage. It suggests the creation of an open table communion, of a community reconciled on the ethnic-cultural level.

Luke 16:19-31

Lazarus represents the hungry, the socially excluded people in Palestine, who were the majority of the population. Moreover, he was a disabled person, for he was *lying down* in front of the house in order to beg (16:20). The rich man, in contrast, represented a minority group at the top of the social pyramid and made private use of his table.²²

The parable conveys the message that the rich man wasted the opportunity to open the door to the beggar, to invite him to his bountiful table, to share bread and to have fellowship with him.²³

The parable, therefore, proposes eliminating the social abyss that separated these two persons and the social classes they represented (16:26) and the creation of an inclusive community, built upon the paradigm of

¹⁸ See A. v. Jüchen. *Jesus zwischen reich und arm: Mammonworte und Mammongeschichten im Neuen Testament*. (Stuttgart: Alektor, 1985), p. 51.

¹⁹ G. Eichholz. *Gleichnisse der Evangelien: Form, Überlieferung, Auslegung*. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1971), p. 142.

²⁰ See Bolyki, *Jesu Tischgemeinschaften*, p. 87.

²¹ See Bolyki, *Jesu Tischgemeinschaften*, p. 86.

²² See the socio-economic reality of Palestine in the times of Jesus in G. Brakemeier, "Pobres e pecadores na ótica de Jesus [Poor and sinners from the perspective of Jesus]". *Estudos Teológicos*, 25(1) (1985), p. 20.

²³ See Rodolfo Gaede Neto, *Diaconia no contexto afro-brasileiro: um estudo baseado nas comunhões de mesa de Jesus* [Diaconia in the Afro-Brazilian context: a study based on Jesus' table communions] (São Leopoldo: Sinodal/EST, 2014), p. 137; see Bolyki, *Jesu Tischgemeinschaften*, p. 80.

sharing, of distributing accumulated goods. Therefore, Jesus indicates the table as a place of reconciliation between people divided by social factors.

*Luke 15:11-32*²⁴

According to the religious system in place at the time of Jesus, the youngest son mentioned in the parable had become an outcast. As such, he represented a large number of people condemned by the legal apparatus, which was maintained by scribes and Pharisees. In spite of this, his father welcomed him with a table abundantly set, with a great banquet, without demanding anything. It was his older brother who did not welcome him, representing the watchmen of the religious law apparatus, that is, the scribes and Pharisees. He wanted a closed, private, exclusive table for the “faithful”.²⁵

The passage strongly emphasises the father’s effort to bring his two sons to the table. Verse 28 explicitly says in relation to the elder son: “The father tried to conciliate him”. The son, irreducible, reluctant to dialogue, fundamentalist, chose the particularism of his religious group.

The message of this text is the testimony of Jesus about God who, at his table full of bread and fellowship, unconditionally welcomes people, be they those who are banned, or those who ban.

This table presents the commitment to overcome exclusion based on religious fundamentalism. At the father’s table, there is a commitment to reconcile groups in the people of God, divided by religious reasons.

Mark 6:30-44

Jesus meets a hungry and disoriented crowd like sheep who have no shepherd. The metaphor “shepherd-sheep” comes from the Old Testament, where it is used to designate the relationship “ruler-ruled”.²⁶ The rulers were called “shepherds” and it was up to them to care for the well-being of everyone. The metaphor, herd without a shepherd is used in the context of the prophets to criticise Israel’s leadership: the ruling class is busier protecting its own privileges than the general prosperity of the people, thus, therefore, becoming mercenary rather than pastoral.²⁷

In Jesus’ time, the role of “shepherd” was Herod’s. The text reveals that he is not fulfilling his role of caring for the people’s well-being. Only the elite enjoy the benefits of their government, a group with whom they meet in closed banquets in the palace, where even the death of popular leaders is plotted, like John the Baptist (Mk. 6:14-29). Their banquets are feasts of death, also because the people of Palestine at the time died of hunger as a result of improper distribution of wealth.²⁸

In contrast to Herod, Jesus held banquets of life. The passage says that “everyone ate and had enough”. This is, among the various messages in the passage, undoubtedly a message for the political field. Jesus was moved by a different “political” paradigm: that enables the table to be set with abundance for all people.²⁹

The practical aspect of this paradigm is shown in Jesus’ instruction to his disciples: “You give them something to eat” (Mk. 6:37). This states the all-important challenge of sharing. A fair economy must aim at social relations based on solidarity among all members of society. The distribution of bread will then be a natural consequence.³⁰

²⁴ See Bolyki, *Jesu Tischgemeinschaften*, p. 78.

²⁵ See René Krüger, *Lucas 15. 1-3, 11-32. Proclamar Libertação: Auxílios Homiléticos [Proclaiming Liberation: Homiletic Aids]* (São Leopoldo: Sinodal, v. 17, 1991), p. 91.

²⁶ See Ched Myers, *O Evangelho de São Marcos [The Gospel of Mark]*. (São Paulo: Paulinas, 1992), p. 258.

²⁷ See Myers, *O Evangelho de São Marcos*, p. 258.

²⁸ I recommend Uwe Wegner, *Jesus e Economia no Evangelho de Marcos. Reflexos da Brisa Leve [Jesus and Economy in Mark’s Gospel. Reflexes of the light breeze]*. (Belo Horizonte: CEBI, 1991), p. 99.

²⁹ See Bolyki, *Jesu Tischgemeinschaften*, p. 89.

³⁰ Günter Wolf, *A organização motivada pela fé em Jesus traz pão para todos [Organisation motivated by faith in Jesus brings bread to everyone]* (Estudos Bíblicos, v. 5) (Petrópolis, Vozes, 1985), pp. 18-25: p. 20.

The solidarity table, where “everyone eats and is satisfied” is a monument to the honour of a society and a sign that, in this society, the relationship between the governed and the rulers has become a state of authentic reconciliation.

Luke 14:7-14

Jesus accepts a Pharisee’s dinner invitation. At the table are the Pharisee’s friends, his brothers, relatives, rich neighbours (Lk. 14:12). This was a usual practice among villages’ wealthy people. Friends would meet regularly for lavish dinners. These took place by turns, and each host would bear the expenses of the occasion. Thus, in a reciprocal system, all group members enjoyed and contributed equally.³¹

These dinners provided a time for discourse (*symposium*). The guest, Jesus, was given the opportunity to speak. From his speech, it is possible to deduce the following evaluation as to the type of hospitality offered by that group.³²

First: this system of reciprocity only works with people who can afford to promote the dinner on their turn. It only works in a group of people that have the same social level, with the same purchasing power. It only works with the same guest list. Therefore, it only works in restricted groups.³³

Second: in this sort of hospitality, where everyone has their turn to contribute, nobody actually spends anything other than what they would on themselves. In the end, each one pays their own expenses. There is no donation, no help.³⁴

Therefore, Jesus challenges the Pharisee: “When you offer a supper, do not invite your friends, brothers, relatives, or rich neighbours; that they may not in turn invite you and you may be rewarded. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind; and you will be blessed for they have nothing to reward you with” (Lk. 14:12-13).

The alternative way of hospitality, presented by Jesus, includes people who are on the outskirts of the village or outside it (the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind),³⁵ those who have nothing to reciprocate with. He suggests a rupture of a model that is built around the table of equals. In a society marked by inequality, Jesus challenges a hospitality that has, in itself, the potential of disrupting social differences: those who have resources invite those who have not. Those who have more, share without expecting a return.

In fact, behind Jesus’ argument shines the idea of a new economic paradigm, built on the principle of distribution. The passage illuminates economic relations with a different logic: that of a table at which one distributes the existing bread among *all* people, an economical table that always includes people and groups who “have nothing to give back,” who are not in a position to compete in an economy ruled by a premise of concentration of goods, of reward, of “give and take”.

In Jesus’ understanding, the table is not a place for maintaining the *status quo*, but a place where new invitation lists are made, including those people unable to reciprocate the invitation. The passage challenges us to rethink our old invitation list, which can be excluding.

When, guests who have nothing to return are included free of charge, there will be reconciliation in the economic field.

³¹ See Halvor Moxnes, *A economia do reino: conflito social e relações econômicas no Evangelho de Lucas* [*The Economy of the Kingdom: Social Conflict and Economic Relations in the Gospel of Luke*] (São Paulo: Paulus, 1995), p. 123.

³² See Bolyki, *Jesu Tischgemeinschaften*, p. 87.

³³ According to Halvor Moxnes, the purpose of hospitality within a group is to “maintain mechanisms of sociability among people of the same status. By means of such hospitality the group is preserved in its identity as a group; their group loyalty and internal bonds are strengthened” Moxnes, *A economia do reino*, p. 125.

³⁴ Food sharing in elite groups, in a society divided into rich and poor, results in exclusion. According to Halvor Moxnes, “the guests’ behavior purely and simply reflects the social dynamics” Moxnes, *A economia do reino*, p. 123.

³⁵ According to the rule of the Essenes, disabled people could not be part of the Qumran community (see Joachim Jeremias, *Neutestamentliche Theologie* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, vol. 1, 1971), p. 173.

Diakonia as a Round Table: Didactics of Inclusion

Reading some writings related to the theme of Jesus' commensality indicates the presence of challenging elements for the diakonia of our times, in the sense that it can be close to the reality suggested by the *round table* metaphor, which is radically inclusive. We will highlight the following elements as contributions to the conception of a didactic of inclusion.

A New Epistemological Place

First of all, one should raise the question: from which standpoint do we theologially consider diakonia? Leonardo Boff suggests that theology should be built from the perspective of the victims in the context of a system that generates social and human problems, and the poor should be the epistemological place, the place from which the concept of God is thought.³⁶ José Ramos Regidor challenges us to question whether we are building our diaconal thought based on the periphery of the world.³⁷ Jesus' commensality points to the periphery, the place where the *poor, the crippled, lame and blind* are; the leprous people; the "poor Lazarus", the "Syrophenician" women, the hungry and lost crowd like sheep with no shepherd, the strangers, the victims of religious discrimination, etc. From this environment of exclusion at the outskirts comes the theology of Jesus about God's kingdom (the theology of inclusion); a kingdom often presented and experienced as a radically inclusive banquet.

Still with reference to the epistemological place of diakonia, it is worth mentioning, as an example, the testimony of Silvia Regina de Lima Silva, a black Brazilian theologian, as a representative experience for all discriminated and excluded groups. She, studying the biblical passage that narrates the encounter of the Syrophenician woman with Jesus (Mark 7:24-30), compares the exclusion condition of this woman with that of the Afro-descendant community.

She notes that this community feels like the woman and her daughter when,

they take the last place within the geographical range of the text. The woman is in the house as an unexpected and unwanted person. Jesus speaks from a table where she has no place. He mentions a family, speaks of children, where she does not participate. He speaks of a bread to which she has no right. Her remaining place is under the table, eating the crumbs that fall from the children's table.³⁸

According to the author's testimony, the place intended for people of African origin in our society is *under the table*. The table is, therefore, a place where one can experience exclusion, in the socio-economic sense as well as in the ethnic-cultural, racial, religious and gender sense (which was the case of the Syrophenician woman). It is worth questioning whether "under the table" should not then represent the perspective from which to think diakonia and elaborate its didactic of inclusion.

At the same time, the table can be a place where one experiences the sharing of bread and communion that breaches cultural, ethnic, racial, physical, religious and gender barriers (as ultimately occurred with the Syrophenician woman when she had her wish granted by Jesus – her daughter's healing). Therefore, the hope of all people's communion around the table is what moves diakonia to exercise its didactic of inclusion.

³⁶ Hugo Assmann, *Crítica à lógica da exclusão: ensaios sobre economia e teologia* [*Critics to the logic of exclusion: essays on economics and theology*]. (São Paulo: Paulus, 1994) p. 40.

³⁷ José Ramos Regidor, *Vinte e Cinco Anos de Teologia da Libertação* [*Twenty-Five Years of Liberation Theology*]. In: Leonardo Boff (ed), *A Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas* [*Liberation Theology: Balance and Perspectives*]. (São Paulo: Ática, 1996), p. 18.

³⁸ Silvia Regina de Lima Silva, *Comunidades em diálogo na causa afro-brasileira* [*Communities in dialogue in the Afro-Brazilian cause*]. In: *CEBs: Povo de Deus, 2000 anos de caminhada* [*Ecclesial Base Communities: People of God, 2000 years of journey*]. (Paulo Afonso: Fonte Viva, 1999), p. 221.

The Main Issue

The challenge of doing theology from “under the table” requires that we constantly seek to realise and understand what is the *main fact*³⁹ of the moment, that is, which events define reality in society and in the world nowadays, that originate and maintain the victimisation process of so many people and which challenge the Church in her vocation of solidarity. What are the great diaconal, contextual challenges facing our churches nowadays? Who are the challengers that might trouble churches the most in our time and in our place?

The changes in the world’s economic situation, which began a few decades ago, are promoting humanity’s division into, on one side, potential consumers – the “attractive” part – and, on the other side, the “unattractive” and “disposable” ones, which make up about two thirds of humanity and live predominantly in the southern hemisphere.⁴⁰

Hugo Assmann points out the *system of exclusion*⁴¹ as the *main fact* of the world’s present situation and calls for theology to keep its flag raised on this front.

Moving in the Opposite Direction

It is necessary to be aware of the denunciation these data represent against the current model of civilisation, “which is not able to survive without excluding the two thirds of humanity living in the South”,⁴² and, at the same time, it is necessary to perceive the demand that these data imply when organising a didactic of inclusion for diakonia.

This means – much more than a possibility – an urgent need to rethink diakonia and understand it as a “movement in the opposite direction”⁴³ of all which the logic of exclusion is generating. If the result of today’s civilisation is a “humanity prone to the most cruel indifference”, it is up to theology and the Church to assume the cause of solidarity.⁴⁴ Diakonia, in its prophetic dimension, becomes a countercultural movement.

It is from the multitudes of “humiliated and afflicted in today’s history”⁴⁵ that the Church is challenged to constantly redefine its diaconal action.

The Poorest of the Poor

However, this macro-reality of misery is still not everything in the analysis of our context: new, special causes, emerge to our conscience from within this macro-reality: that of the so-called “poorest of the poor”.⁴⁶

This expression was originally used to refer to native peoples and African descendants in Latin America. Considering the meaning attributed to this expression, we can add all other communities and groups that are known to suffer not only socio-economic exclusion but also cultural, ethnical-racial, religious, physical,

³⁹ Assmann, *Crítica à lógica da exclusão*, p. 14.

⁴⁰ Assmann, *Crítica à lógica da exclusão*, p. 19. If two thirds of humanity are poor people, “almost half the world’s population still live below the poverty line and struggle to provide for their basic needs” as reported by the World Bank. 3.4 billion people, or 46% of the world’s population, live on less than \$5.50 a day – the threshold amount for poverty in median high income countries. [Available at: <https://www.cartacapital.com.br/politica/quase-metade-da-populacao-mundial-vive-abaixo-da-linha-da-pobreza/>], [Accessed: 12th Dec 2019].

⁴¹ Assmann, *Crítica à lógica da exclusão*, p. 19.

⁴² José Ramos Regidor, *Vinte e Cinco Anos de Teologia da Libertação*, p. 53.

⁴³ Herbert de Souza, *Ética e Cidadania [Ethics and Citizenship]*. 11th ed. (São Paulo: Editora Moderna), 1996), p. 24.

⁴⁴ Assmann, *Crítica à lógica da exclusão*, p. 35.

⁴⁵ Leonardo Boff, *Do lugar do pobre [About the poor's place]*. (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1984), p. 45.

⁴⁶ Original document from Puebla, regarding indigenous and Afro-American communities; see José Oscar Beozzo, *Luzes e Sombras*. In: Aloísio Lorscheider and José Oscar Beozzo, *500 Anos de Evangelização da América Latina [500 Years of Evangelization in Latin America]* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1992), p. 59.

sexual, gender, generational exclusion etc., which for theology and the Church represent those voices with the most strident appeal in today's world.

Given the picture of discrimination and exclusion of the different groups mentioned, it is necessary to distinguish two things: a) one is to realise the challenges of diakonia in the face of the exclusion of this part of the population; b) the other is perceiving its emancipation, solidarity and libertarian practices. For this reason, it is also necessary to know the reality in which these groups appear as subjects in their ethnic, racial, cultural, religious, gender, etc. universes, in which they assume proactive and protagonist attitudes in the solidarity, emancipation and liberation field.

Thus, we consider that evaluating the Christian churches' diakonia in today's world considers not only the solidarity given to or withheld from these groups, but also learning from their solidarity. Communication in these relationships cannot be unidirectional. It must be a two-way process, going back and forth. The willingness must be to give and to receive.

Diakonia as a Round Table

The challenge for the Christian diakonia is to build round tables. Jesus' table communions allow us to know these tables' characteristics, as we can see below.

Open tables

Jesus' commensality proposes the construction of open tables that foretell the banquet of God's kingdom (Mt. 8:11; Mt. 22:1-14), as an alternative to the way of life according to which particular plans prevail over attending the community and collective banquet.

God's kingdom has a universal character. The kingdom's banquet is served to all people. The "serving table" of Christian diakonia refers to a service provided without the condition of barriers and boundaries. The diakonia aims to always contribute to the welfare of people, even if action takes place at the local level.

Tables free from ethnic and cultural barriers

Jesus' commensality proposes the construction of tables aiming at the deconstruction of ethnic and cultural barriers (Mk. 7:24-30), as an alternative to privatising God's kingdom benefits, that is, as an alternative to the privilege of some people *being able to sit around the table*, at the expense of those restricted to the space *under the table*, where only the bread crumbs fall.

Diakonia is not intended for a particular ethnic or cultural segment. The Christian religion was born when Jews and Gentiles were able to sit at the same table to eat the same food (Acts 10). Diakonia aims to contribute to establishing tables around which all people take their places, regardless of their ethnic or cultural identity. Diakonia is a privileged space for united, ecumenical actions embedded in ethnic, cultural and religious diversity.

Tables with social justice

Jesus' commensality proposes the creation of tables to satisfy the hunger of the poor Lazaruses, thus bridging the gap between the social classes (Lk. 16:19-31) and the abyss between empires and world peripheries. This is as an alternative to the private table where the man in the parable squanders food and wastes the opportunity to open the door of his house and share bread with the hungry beggar. Diakonia aims to contribute to the deconstruction of social differences.

Tables free from fundamentalism

Jesus' commensality proposes establishing tables capable of facing religious fundamentalism and building signs of the reconciliation table between divided segments of God's people (Lk. 15:11-32), as an alternative

to the excluding table of the parable's older brother. Diakonia aims to foster deconstruction of religious fundamentalism so that God's people are not divided by religion.

Hunger-free tables

Jesus' commensality proposes creating tables where politics can be conceived as a place to prepare the banquets of life, where all people can eat and be satisfied (Mk. 6:30-44); this as an alternative to Herod's privatised table for the elite of his government. Diakonia aims to contribute to the construction of a political paradigm that allows everyone to eat and be satisfied.

Solidarity tables

Finally, Jesus' commensality proposes building tables to create new relationships on the economic level, built on the paradigm of wealth distribution (Lk. 14:7-14), as an alternative to the excluding table sustained by a centralising economic model, sustained by the elites of "villages". Diakonia intends to contribute to the creation of fairer economic relations, following the example of what the solidarity economy proposes.

Conclusion

The table, in addition to a piece of furniture that serves as support for holding meals, is the symbol of a place in and around which inclusion processes are developed. It is the ethos in which people can meet with their best values for the exercise of human co-existence. It is the place of people's inclusion in their diversity. It is the place of overcoming hunger, of fair distribution of food, of social justice, of healthy eating, of food and nutritional sovereignty and security. It is a space for the construction of new paradigms for politics and economy that promote banquets of life, banquets of solidarity. In short, it is a space in which all people can eat and be satisfied with both bread and communion. It provides space for people's inclusion in the universe of human dignity in its deepest sense; a space of meeting, dialogue, sharing, communion, abundance and joy, where "table service" seeks universal reconciliation and the well-being of everyone. Thus, the round table becomes a metaphor for God's kingdom, that every day wants to burst into our world.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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98. LEARNING DIAKONIA IN ORGANISED CHURCH INSTITUTIONS – BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR TRAINING FOR PROFESSIONAL DIAKONAL WORK

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Diaconia in Organised Church's Institutions

Diaconia as the *doing of the church*, involves not only the everyday small or big actions of each singular Christian but also the daily action of the church as an institution. In some church traditions (Roman Catholic Church, Anglican Church, Lutheran Church, etc.), a specific ordained ministry of deacons and deaconesses has been established. In some Lutheran churches, the deacon is recognised as an integral part of the ordained ministry and other churches have even specific schools for training them. Of course, the perception of ordained deacons and deaconesses is very controversial for different church traditions. However, in many cases, their mandate is focused on health and social institutions.² This means that in institutions, diaconal work involves various kinds of actors: volunteers, professionals and ordained deacons. All these actors require a specific training in the ecumenical diaconal ministry.

Learning in Diaconal Engagement as a Volunteer³

In organised diaconal work, all actors are not professionals. Most of them are ordinary people working as volunteers. Only some of them are highly qualified and use their professional skills during their free time to volunteer in diaconal activities without receiving a salary, to help people in need.⁴ For these, a different specific training is highly recommended, not in their area of expertise but rather in gaining a better understanding of the theological and spiritual meaning of their diaconal engagement. It is essential for them to realise the difference between their regular professional work and the diaconal work although both may be in the same field. A simple example is a doctor who offers their holiday or free time to a diaconal clinic for helping poor people or persons with disabilities, where they do not expect to be paid. Although they may work every day to help people in a hospital for professional and economic reasons, this diaconal engagement is more motivated by a desire and spiritual intention of “goodwill service” rather than a lucrative service.

In addition, some churches have established a system of sending young people away to volunteer for a specific period, within or outside their own country. The volunteers learn to deal with different issues in a different context to their own on the ground. The intervention required of them may fit with their training background, but not always. Some young volunteers have found themselves in situations where professionals are sparse, and so, they are expected to improvise in the field where they are not well-equipped. This situation requires a at least a minimum amount of preparation, whenever somebody is ready to work as volunteer in a new context. For example, very often volunteers in refugee camps face such challenges when they are obliged

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² Kjell Nordstokke, *Diakonia in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment*. An LWF Contribution to the Understanding of Practice of Diakonia (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2009), pp. 71-72; page 37ff in this volume.

³ For more diaconal practical experience, see also Rachel Norborg-Jerkeby, *People Changing the World. 40 Years of Diakonia* (trans. Katherine Cash). (Sundberg: Diakonia, 2006).

⁴ See also Kjell Nordstokke, *Diakonia in Context*, p. 68.

to help a woman to deliver her baby. If the training of the volunteer is specific to the context and the need, the professional training might be different.

Specific Learning Approaches for Professional and Ordained Workers in Diaconia

Professionalisation of diaconal work is not a recent development in the church history. Even during the ministry of Jesus, some elements show a basic diaconal organisation. For example, in the Gospel of John 13:27-29, Judas Iscariot was referred to as the one who could “*buy things for the needs of feast*” or who could “*give something to the poor*”. He is even the one, according to the Gospel of John, who expressed concern regarding the expense of perfume asking why it was not “*earning money to help the poor by selling the ointment, instead of wasting it in anointing the feet of Jesus*” (Jn.12:5). In this particular context, the other disciples seem not to have been directly involved.

However, in other extracts, Jesus has involved the whole group, not only in diaconal action, but also in learning through experience. The biblical story of the *multiplication of bread* in the Gospel of Mark 6:30-44 and John 6:1-15 provides a rich learning model for organised diaconia. This is beyond individual responsibility, because it is about *feeding a large group of more than five thousand people* gathered in the context of public teaching and proclamation of the gospel.

The crowd had been following Jesus, listening to him for several hours until it got too late to get food and accommodation for them all in that desert environment. The disciples asked Jesus (1) *to send them away so that they could help themselves in the neighbourhood*, because their needs were enormous. Instead of sending them away hungry, Jesus said: (2) *you, give them what they need to eat*. In other words, the church should never escape its diaconal responsibility. Of course, the challenge was big, but the lesson was strategically that everyone had to contribute to finding a better solution. (3) *A little quantity of food was available* from a young boy, according to the Gospel of John. However, for the vast numbers gathered, five loaves and two fishes would not be enough. (4) *The group had to be well organised*. Jesus ordered the disciples to get them all seated by companies. (5) *They sat down in ranks* of hundreds and fifties. (6) *Jesus blessed the loaves and the fishes*. Diaconal work should always refer to the grace of God. It is not only ordinary humanitarian work, but it originates from God. (7) *He broke the loaves and divided the fishes*. Diaconia is driven by the principle of sharing. (8) *He gave to the disciples for distribution*. Diaconia is not accumulation while others are in need. Everyone received according to his needs. But (9) for good management, *they collected the remaining* (twelve hand-basket), surely for the needs of another day.

This biblical model profiles a well-organised diaconal work. The context of the intervention is defined, the different contributions and funding model are identified, the work management is structured, the spiritual dimension of the action is clearly expressed through the prayer and God’s blessing, and finally the next emergency intervention is prepared for.

Organised diaconal work requires professional, well-trained workers, even ordained deacons and deaconesses to assure the best quality both in the management and in the outcome. The management dimension involves the organisation of the work and proper accountability, from planning to implementation, with reflection given to each stage of the process. It also examines the proper use of the available resources and cares about good reporting after the event. The outcome dimension refers to checking whether the work done has met the goals set from the beginning, according to the clearly identified objectives. This should show how the human dignity of the beneficiaries have been respected through the process, according to the holistic worldview; how patterns of exclusion are overcome; how people are empowered to be subjects of their own lives; and eventually how this contributes to the transformation of society. This quality also includes competence in dealing with the spiritual dimension of such process concerning individual situations, the capacities to respond to spiritual needs in a professional way, and to include faith, spirituality and religion in

the overall understanding of human life.⁵ This religious aspect of the diaconal work could be facilitated by the integration of the ordained deacons and deaconess in the ministry, which is currently not adopted by all diaconal organisations.

Most of the churches who have institutionalised the ordination of deacons and deaconess refer to the biblical texts of 1 Corinthians 12:4-5 and Acts 6:1-6. The first text is about the multiplicity of services according to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the second is about *the seven chosen* men associated to the ministry of the apostle with a specific mandate of *diaconia of the tables*. However, Kari Latvus states that this biblical text does not claim that the seven men were deacons and their ordination is the beginning of new functionaries in Christianity.⁶ In his critical analysis, Latvus prefers to use the word “ministry” as the translation of the Greek word *diakonia*. For him, ministry and ministering include taking care of sacred meals and rituals, as well as being responsible for preaching.⁷ He recognises however that, the social-charity activity was a central part of the early church, but it was not especially connected to one particular group of people called *diakonoi*. Since in the early church, several different ministries were needed for the surrounding social context, Latvus presumes that they all included a social-charity function, which belongs first to the whole of Christianity. Therefore, the call to social-charity belongs equally to all ministries of the church as an elementary part of each call.⁸

It could be suggested that the understanding of the institution of *the seven* deacons cannot be isolated from the entire context of the Early Church. Thus, it is important to consider the lifestyle of the new community in Jerusalem, where most of the members were migrants and strangers who had followed Jesus from Galilee, Nazareth, Capernaum, etc. until his crucifixion in Jerusalem. Other believers had joined the group from all over the world after the Pentecostal event. In this fragile socio-economic and cultural context, the members of the new community were (1) living in the same place, (2) sharing the word of God from the Apostles, (3) living in communion, (4) breaking bread, (5) praying, (6) selling their properties for the common good, (7) sharing their belonging according to the needs of each one, and (8) Praising the Lord (Acts. 2:42-46).

For building the solid patterns of the first community, *sharing* was the common characteristic of the daily life of all of them. Then, the institutionalisation of the ministry of diaconia through the ordination of the *Seven* deacons appears as a necessity due to the community growth in number as well as in cultural diversity and ministry.

The establishment of the *seven* deacons is a wise response to solve some contextual challenges. The first challenge seems to be the *injustice towards the Hellenist widows* who were neglected in the daily service. The consequences of this problem could have perhaps been (1) the split of the young community into two groups; (2) in searching solution, the apostles, who were also the leaders of the community and primarily in charge of sharing the word of God, “*diaconia of word*”, could have been overloaded in involving themselves in the task of *sharing* the goods to the widows, “*diaconia of the table*”. They, therefore, established a new team from the marginalised part of the community, to take care of this new institutionalised ministry, according to the circumstances.

It is important to realise that the criteria of choosing the team of *seven* were more spiritual than managerial. They are already managing the material problem on their hands, but furthermore, they are witnesses of Jesus-Christ in their life, just like the twelve Apostles. In this regard, it should be remembered that, the first Christian who was killed as martyrdom, was not an apostle, but rather the deacon Stephen. The cause of his martyrdom was not related to his task as deacon, but to his preaching of the Gospel in a hostile context in the midst of the Jewish council (Acts. 6:8-7:60).

⁵ Nordstokke, *Diakonia in Context*, pp. 69-70.

⁶ Kari Latvus, *Diakonia as Care for the Poor? Critical Perspectives on the Development of Caritative Diaconia* (Grano Oy Kuapio, Kirkon tutkimuskeskuksen verkkojulkaisu 53, 2017), p. 40.

⁷ Latvus, *Diakonia as Care for the Poor?* p. 39.

⁸ Latvus, *Diakonia as Care for the Poor?* pp. 34-35.

In addition, the deacon Philip, better known as the evangelist Philip, was a preacher, exorcist and healer in Samaria. He baptised people, among them the Ethiopian eunuch, and he had four virgin prophetesses in his house in Caesarea (Acts. 8:4-8; 12:26-40; 21:8-9). A third example to be mentioned is Nicolaus. His name is linked to the heretic Nicolai.⁹ This suggests that Nicolaus was also a preacher who impacted a large number of people in developing, unfortunately, a controversial theology.

Though these *seven* elected men are more well-known for their preaching or teaching capacities, this does not mean that they did not also act as deacons, according to their ordination. John N. Collins, although not supporting the idea that they were exclusively deacons, does support the idea that they acted for the physical needs of others, stating that the *seven* extra Greek men were commissioned to look after the physical needs of Greek-speaking widows, who were being overlooked in the social work of the Early Christian Community in Jerusalem.¹⁰

In the history of the church, many deacons and deaconesses have properly accomplished this task. In the German context, Matthias Benad reminds us that the work of the deaconesses and deacons was about “serving the Lord Jesus among his suffering and impoverished”. This was formulated by Wilhelm Löhe in his deaconess dictum, which was learned by heart by all deaconesses.¹¹

Even in the context of professionals and ordained actors in diaconal ministry, specific learning is still relevant. The specificity of such training will embrace the theological understanding of this ministry, as well as some aspects relating to the multidimensionality of the ministry, like the ecumenical, diversity and management, planning work, communication and dialogue and co-operation with states and secular organisations. The reason of this learning approach is that diaconia is practiced in different forms and levels within the society. Some institutions are under international organisations, others work on a state level, and some under the municipal level. In this context, different actors, like the state, might be the source of funding on one side, and the normative regulator on the other. This means, according to the observation of Marie Steve Gray, that the state might approve a diaconal measure; such approval will usually be based on a set of laws and regulations, and a set of different requirements for structure and processes.¹² In such case, the diaconal actors should be well-equipped to understand and to co-operate with different non-religious structures.

Learning in Various Dimensions of Diaconia

Training in diaconia should incorporate the foundational principle that this work is beyond charity and rather expresses the identity and the mission of the church. The nature of this mission is subjected to different changes related to the development of the society and human history. In this changing dynamic, the roles also change constantly and quickly. The needy of today will not necessarily be the needy of tomorrow, and vice

⁹ The Nicolai were accused of not respecting the moral rules of the Christianity. They preached a kind of sexual libertinism. Revelations 2:6-15; Romans 6:15; Ephesians 2:6.

¹⁰ John N. Collins, *Diakonia Studies*. Critical issues in Ministry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 155.

¹¹ William Löhe's deaconess dictum: “What do I want? – I want to serve. Whom will I serve? – The Lord Jesus among his suffering and impoverished. And what are my wages? – I serve for neither wages nor thanks, but rather out of thanks and love; my wages are that I am able! And if I should die thereby? – If I were to die, I would die, said Esther, the queen who did not even know Him, out of love to Him I would die, and He would not let me die. And if I grow old thereby? – Then my heart will grow green like a palm tree and the Lord will fill me with grace and mercy. I go in peace and fear nothing.” Cf. Matthias Benad, *Kirchenhistorische Skizze zum Verhältnis von Diakonie und öffentlichem Wohlfahrtswesen in Deutschland*, in: *Diakonie der Religionen Band 2, Reihe Theion*, Peter Lang Verlag, Frankfurt 2005, pp. 183-196.

¹² Marie Stene Gray, “Diaconia in a contemporary socio-democratic welfare society. A qualitative research on the role of the church to care for the weak, marginalized and suffering in the city of Stavanger, Norway” (Master in Global studies, VID vitenskapelige hogskole, 2017), p. 31.

versa; those who are in the capacity of helping today, might not play the same role tomorrow, and may turn into the needy of the following day. Therefore, different wisdom, gifts, abilities and experiences from communities and different sciences should be utilised to contribute to a diaconal learning process.

In addition, the asset of diaconal training should be that the faith dimension of social action is taken into consideration and reflected in a disciplined way, related to theology and other relevant disciplines where both faith as praxis and theology as disciplined and critical reflection are included. Since people's worldviews are normally determined by religious convictions and value systems, this has consequences for their understanding of social reality and their commitment to change this situation. Diaconal workers should be well trained to understand the role of religion, both its strengths and its weaknesses, and also how to mobilise religious mindsets and values for others to work towards a transformation into a more just and sustainable society.¹³

Therefore, when considering that the *concept of diaconia has room for many dimensions that churches individually adapt and emphasise*,¹⁴ it is important to underline the multidimensional aspect of diaconia. All aspects are covered by diaconal interventions. Referring to the Norwegian church context, Olav H. Angell and Anne S. Selbekk¹⁵ have identified five profiles of diaconia:¹⁶

1. The political and emergency-oriented profile – acting in emergency phone call services, work for refugees and asylum seekers, work for human rights, social service and the environment.
2. The co-operative profile characterised by co-operation with the state, institutions and humanitarian organisations in the local community.
3. The care-oriented profile connected to running visiting services, organising grief groups, dealing with drug-addicted people, and youth activities.
4. The church-oriented profile running religious activities like prayer meetings, children's groups etc.
5. The institution-oriented profile, belonging with establishments that operate childcare services and nursing homes for elderly people.

Diaconia as a Global and Ecumenical Work

Globalisation has not only brought positive effects to world development, but it has also led to severe negative effects especially in local contexts. The Lutheran World Federation¹⁷ has listed some of these negative impacts. On the top list is the *aggravation of the gap between the richest and the poorest*. As part of economic globalisation, this gap is facilitated by the dominant capitalists' multinational corporations, who control the local as well as the international political and economic spheres. In this new form of dictatorship, no instrument can be trusted, since almost all communications through the media are being controlled and manipulated by structures of power. From this perspective, diaconal learning should help to open eyes to this economic calamity.

¹³ Nordstokke, *Diakonia in Context*, p. 76.

¹⁴ Marie Stene Gray, *Diakonia in a contemporary socio-democratic welfare society*, p. 28.

¹⁵ Olav Helge Angell and Anne Schanche Selbekk, *Kirke og helse*. Kartlegging av diakonalt helsearbeid innen Den norske kirke. (Kirkeradet, Rapport nr.3, 2005).

¹⁶ Ronald Henriksson presents diaconia in the form of six tables, containing several dimensions. (1) The Kitchen table which illustrates the everyday meeting place and charitable function such as visiting needy, work among refugees, asylum seekers and drug addicts. (2) The Altar/Communion table represents the movement towards the altar where one receives power and the propulsion towards people. (3) The Cathedra seat or table is an expression of educational function of diaconia: teaching volunteers, kids, youth, etc. (4) The Sofa table describes the pastoral role within diaconia, to stop and listen. (5) The Desk represents the administrative functions to organise and to lead. (6) The Pulpit is the prophetic function that protests against and speaks up about iniquity and injustice that affects groups and individuals. See Ronald Henriksson, *Friviligt Diakonalt Arbete* (Stockholm: Venum, 1994), pp. 37-40.

¹⁷ Nordstokke, *Diakonia in Context*, p. 13-14.

The growth of the extraordinarily wealthy in the world drives an endless *consumerism*. This second threat in the world today contributes dramatically to the severe weakening of the ecosystem, and directly contributes to climate change amongst other environmental challenges. In this fragile setting, the *feminisation of poverty* has become a common characteristic of many societies. Women have fewer economic and political opportunities to empower their well-being and the well-being of their families. In fact, poverty traps women in multiple layers of discrimination and hinders their ability to claim their rights.

When the pressure of poverty becomes too high, people migrate. This can be internal to their nation state, external and often to urban centres. The migratory journey itself is precarious as people on route can be at the mercy of others and have been sold for all kinds of misuse, including slavery. In such social instability, many societies experience a high social fluidity. For the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), social fluidity occurs when people have lost their structured life environment and have moved to a heterogenic and pluralistic living environment in which they feel lost and disoriented. In this complexity of the interconnection of different contexts, multidisciplinary diaconal didactic is not an option, rather the unique alternative.

For the World Council of Churches (WCC), the ecumenical character of diaconia is: (1) the integral dimension of the nature and the mission of the church. This is based on the belief that human beings are created in the image of God and that the church is called upon for compassion and justice to all. From this theological and biblical perspective, diaconia expresses a strong link between the being of the churches and their joint actions as a worldwide communion of churches and Christians. The second aspect describes (2) how practically churches are engaged in diaconal action across confessional and geographical orders. As an example, the Action by Churches Together (ACT) Alliance, set by the WCC and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), is recognised as co-ordination platform for ecumenical diaconia, expressing the joint vision of the ecumenical movement with the member churches and their related agencies assisting people in need and working for better world.¹⁸ In this co-ordination work, the ACT Alliance holds together bilateral and multilateral forms of partnership, which include respect and space for local churches and their diaconal resources.¹⁹ Ecumenical diaconia is therefore understood as “faith-based and right-based action” in reference not only to the biblical concept of justice and the prophetic heritage of unmasking system injustice and defending the rights of the poor, but also to the human rights and their central role in the formation of just society.²⁰ Didactics, therefore, in ecumenical diaconia requires skills from the other fields involved.

Diaconal Contextual Approach

Diaconal action is always deployed in specific historic contexts of human suffering throughout the world. Today, the local context is highly connected to the global situation. In this complexity, not only are all the key dimensions in a national situational (economic, cultural, social, religious and political) involved, but also interconnection with the global reality becomes inevitable. Therefore, in such an interconnected context, diaconal didactics requires an equally interdisciplinary approach.²¹

For example, in economic justice, many church organisations, like the United Evangelical Mission (UEM), and other diaconal actors strive for better working conditions in a local context. They advocate against the exploitation of the poor cotton farmers, for better working conditions in the mines and against the misuse and exploitation of children and women in all the industry work channels. They protect minorities and indigenous people in the complex issue of land grabbing. All these local issues can be seen as the results of bad

¹⁸ Called to Transformative Action, p.9. Draft Version of the WCC-LWF Study Document Called to Transformative Action - Ecumenical Diaconia. See: <https://kirken.no/globalassets/kirken.no/smm/dokumenter/2019/wcc-ecumenical-diakonia-study-document.pdf>.

¹⁹ Called to Transformative Action, p.18.

²⁰ Called to Transformative Action, p.10.

²¹ Kjell Nordstokke, *Diakonia in Context*, pp. 12-13.

governance, corruption and a lack of social policy and regulation from local government. However, considering only the national context will not be enough to understand and to stop the misery of exploited and marginalised people. An understanding of the global context is also needed. In fact, the main actors and beneficiaries in mining industries, textile production, mega-agriculture systems, forest and land exploitation, etc. are directly connected to the biggest and powerful multinational corporations. These global operators take advantage of the open trade market which is itself characterised by marking the maximum profit driving to endless exploitation, capital accumulation, and endless greed. In this kind of competition, global corporations try to respond to the needs of the society which have become addicted to consumerism and have an unlimited desire for the development of new technology. For this capitalistic trend, the human component of the development must be disregarded. Diaconal actors need to be aware of this whole picture in order to respond adequately to the real suffering.

Kjell Nordstokke is right when he suggests that the awareness of the global situation should not take attention away from the local and its importance. However, global trends can only be properly understood from the perspective of the local – interpreting and evaluating the effect they have on everyday life for ordinary people. However, the potential of the local context to resist, and even to present alternatives to global trends, should not be underestimated.²² The question is then: which educational system and what form of empowerment are required on a local level to be able to foster a positive change in the global context?

Didactics of Empowerment in a Diaconal Perspective

Making a community capable of impacting the global from the local requires high training and preparation, but also, a conjunction of educational approaches. On one hand, the community needs to be aware of its rights and its capacity for transformation. Furthermore, they need to be aware of strategies for making changes not only in their local situation, but also on the global sphere. For this strategy, the community unity needs to be consolidated around some common interest.

On the other hand, individual capacities need also to be improved. For developing such a diaconal didactic approach, Nordstokke suggests three main elements: *advocacy, education and mobilisation*. He considers that, on a personal level, people need to overcome attitudes of inferiority or a kind of fatalism which accepts destiny without raising questions. On a social level, he considers the need to build knowledge and skills, and to be trained to participate in organised activities.²³

Such an empowered community will be able to address their own needs, to strive for their rights and to contribute actively to the liberation of the marginalised, from the local context to the global one. Hence, the integrated approach, which is governed by the knowledge that all different areas are mutually related, is highly recommended. The attitude of diaconal educators will not consist of orienting or manipulating the outcome of the process, rather, they will listen more and participate in a sharing approach with the people in need and taking their cultural experience and wisdom into consideration.

In addition to that, the success of a diaconal action in a community might be facilitated by approaches connecting theory and practice. Nordstokke calls it the “*model of see-reflect-act*”.²⁴ Its first step consists of seeing what has been done, using the insights of the social sciences and other relevant disciplines in order to get an authentic picture of the context in which diaconal action is deployed. It considers how reality is seen from the perspective of the poor and the marginalised. This model takes into account the experience of other committed actors on the ground, and their strengths and weaknesses. The second step is to reflect on how the Christian faith impulses can be translated into praxis. While the first step is primarily analytical and related

²² Kjell Nordstokke, *Diakonia in Context*, p. 16.

²³ Kjell Nordstokke, *Diakonia in Context*, p. 61.

²⁴ Kjell Nordstokke, *Diakonia in Context*, p. 59-60.

to secular knowledge, the second is more hermeneutical, in the sense that, it seeks to interpret what is seen and analysed. The third step is to act and to bring the insight from the first two steps into the arena of diaconal activity.

Innovative Learning Approaches

In the diaconal learning process, the identification of new categories of people considered to be needy has been experienced as a productive approach. It might happen that some people face a situation which is not traditionally recognised as a diaconal intervention field. Their misery will therefore be overlooked, because their case is not taken into consideration. In her recent research into the role of the church to care for the weak, marginalised and suffering in the city of Stavanger, Marie Stene Gray notes that *loneliness* has been identified as one of the largest challenges in Stavanger. She realised that the new culture of privatism had created a tendency to only be concerned with issues and ideas that affect one's self as an individual. Globalisation has caused people to be more connected than ever before, yet, at the same time, people lack real, genuine relationships. In such a context, she says that loneliness becomes a serious and growing issue in today's society. It is not specific to one age, group or gender. However, loneliness is often invisible to the eye and unrecognisable to those who are not looking for it.²⁵

This observation opens one's eyes to the fact that the change in the lifestyle of most societies generates new forms of vulnerability not yet identified, and therefore not yet taken care of by diaconal intervention. Therefore, diaconal didactic should incorporate the research from anthropology, demographic studies, social and human sciences. Moreover, empirical research and contextual research approaches are still appropriate.

Conclusion

Didactics in diaconia is multidimensional. This character is due to (1) the diversity of the actors; (2) the multiplicity of fields and the forms of intervention; and (3) the complexity of the contexts in which the diaconal work is deployed.

Regarding the component of the actors, diaconal intervention is the work of every Christian in their individual lives, according to the nature and the Christian mission in the world. Even if it is well-organised and well-structured, everyone can intervene in diaconal ministry either as a volunteer or as a professional worker. For all these reasons, didactics in diaconia should be inspired by the teachings and actions of Jesus and the experience of his apostles in applying relevant classical pedagogical approaches. This education should first aim to raise awareness of the fact that *sharing with the needy* is the nature of being Christian. This is the essence that Jesus himself gave to his own ministry: he said he has come *"to serve and not to be served and to give his life [...]"* Christians, as *disciples of Jesus also walk in his footsteps*.

Diaconal education should secondly help the church to understand that only diaconal actions give credibility to the proclaimed word in the world. Diaconal actions reveal God's love to the world. Therefore, training in diaconia should help the learner to develop their internal capacities of getting individual and faith-based motivation in doing diaconia. Nevertheless, their training should take into account the fact that not all actors in this field are necessarily Christians. Therefore, diaconal education should always remember its spiritual and religious meaning and heritage.

The area of diaconal intervention is not a closed system. It touches economic issues, not only by meeting the basic needs of people in distress, but also by advocating for a fairer economy. It takes into account health issues, emergency responses to natural disasters and ecological concerns. Diaconia also deals with justice by defending the rights of the marginalised people, and all those experiencing abuse of any sort, whereby their

²⁵ Marie Stene Gray, *Diaconia in a contemporary socio-democratic welfare society*, p. 53-54.

human dignity has been threatened. In this multiplicity of intervention areas, only interdisciplinary didactics can properly qualify an actor for diaconal ministry.

Furthermore, in this era of globalisation, any context becomes very dynamic and this influences the forms of learning processes in diaconia. Understanding the nature of diaconal intervention in a local context today is no longer dependent on what is happening in the region alone, but depends on the influence of the global context. Therefore, learning in diaconia requires a global knowledge of global shift and development and how it impacts at the smallest local level. In this dynamic of rapid changes, all the aspects of life are connected. Changes in the socio-politic sphere directly impact the culture of a people group, their religion and the ecosystem. As a consequence, in what seems to be just a blink of an eye, stable states, regions or prosperous economies collapse, driving peace to war; abundant life into misery. This means, transition from stability to vulnerability has been very fluid. Therefore, people in a capacity of contributing financially and materially to diaconal work can turn, without transition, into needy people themselves.

Education for diaconia there has become an urgent priority of churches in all the different contexts and should include both multi-dimensional approaches to understanding the different actors, strengthening capacities both of Christians and Non-Christians and defending the rights of the marginalised people, and all those experiencing the violation their human dignity.

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99. CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ACTION AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Gordon Zerbe¹

With the current resurgence of nationalist and racialised populisms,² and alongside the interconnected challenges facing our planet, the imperative for realising and enacting a Christian global citizenship as a core diaconal commitment is as urgent as ever. The notion of a “global citizenship” is, however, a contested matter, and what is distinctive about a Christian diaconal framework for global citizenship and thus education for global citizenship will need to be carefully put into the foreground. This article will begin with a review of core frameworks of global citizenship and global citizenship education (GCE), and will then move on to consider the theological foundations for a Christian global citizenship and thus Christian social action. The last part of the article will review major features of the practice of global citizenship education, especially in the context of Christian diaconia.

Frameworks of Global Citizenship and Aims of Global Citizenship Education

The past twenty-five years have seen a surge of interest in “global citizenship” as a framework for education, in civic education more generally, as well as higher education institutions, national educational policy institutions, governmental entities, and non-governmental agencies.³ Global citizenship education has become an increasingly significant catch-all rubric or convergence point, especially in the western English-speaking world, for multiple themes or areas of education: human rights, peace and peacebuilding, sustainable development, (national) citizenship, international or global education, and education for intercultural understanding. Global citizenship education has taken its place in mainstream curriculum policy, and accordingly has become a major focus in educational research. Meanwhile, UNESCO has promoted GCE since the launch of the Global Education First Initiative in 2012,⁴ which made fostering global citizenship one of its three educational priorities.⁵ In 2015, global citizenship education was specifically included in the UN’s Strategic Development Goals for 2030 (SDG 4.7).⁶

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² For one lucid (and now prophetic) commentary and analysis, see Umberto Eco, *Turning Back the Clock: Hot Wars and Media Populism*, trans. A. McEwen (New York: Harcourt Inc., 2006), a collection of articles and speeches from 2000 to 2005.

³ This is termed the “curricular global turn” in education by Greg Mannion, Gert Biesta, Mark Priestley and Hamish Ross, “The Global Dimension in Education and Education for Global Citizenship: Genealogy and Critique,” *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 9 (2011), pp. 443-456.

⁴ UNESCO, *Global Citizenship Education: Preparing Learners for the Challenges of the 21st Century* (Paris, UNESCO, 2014); *Global Citizenship Education: Topics and Learning Objectives* (Paris: UNESCO, 2015); *Schools in Action: Global Citizens for Sustainable Development* (Paris: UNESCO, 2016).

⁵ The three priorities are: to put every child in school, to improve the quality of learning, and to foster global citizenship. See <http://www.globaleducationfirst.org/about.html>.

⁶ See <https://sdg4education2030.org/the-goal>.

At the same time, significant ambiguities and points of tension remain in the implicit or explicit frameworks⁷ and aims of GCE, such that it is called “a new paradoxical policy slogan.”⁸ Even UNESCO concedes a lack of “consensus about what global citizenship means, and consequently what GCE should promote,” as it seeks some kind of middle ground in an attempt “to provide common perspectives and to clarify some contested aspects of GCE.”⁹ Common to the assessments of the challenges that GCE must meet in an increasingly interconnected and globalised world, are linkages that are (a) social and cultural (through media, communications, travel and migration), (b) economic (through trade and market integration and interdependence), (c) ecological (through sharing one planet), and (d) political (through international relations, treaties, and systems of regulation).¹⁰

But there are significant fault lines in fundamental aims and frameworks, largely over whether GCE should prepare learners to “succeed” and “participate” in an increasingly globalised world, and thereby to improve the competitive advantage of individual nations (in accordance with a neoliberal [global capitalist, and market-oriented] perspective, often in association with western liberal humanist frameworks), or whether GCE should foster transformative engagement toward the goals of social justice, global equity, emancipation and decolonisation (in accordance with “critical democracy” or “postcolonial” perspectives). In actual fact, these dichotomous frameworks are often found side-by-side in some form of conflation.¹¹ Thus, Oxfam explains that GCE (as articulated for relevance for schools in the UK) is designed to help learners “both to participate fully in a globalised society and economy, and to secure a more just, secure and sustainable world than the one they have inherited.”¹² Still, Oxfam’s overall perspective leans toward the latter side, as it articulates the following “big ideas in global citizenship” in regard to goals for “knowledge and understanding,” and correlated with particular “skills” and “values and attitudes”:

1. social justice and equity (co-ordinated with the skills of critical and creative thinking, and the values and attitudes of sense of identity and self-esteem);
2. identity and diversity (co-ordinated with the skills of empathy and the values and attitudes of commitment to social justice and equity);
3. globalisation and interdependence (co-ordinated with the skills of self-awareness and reflection and the values and attitudes of respect for people and human rights);
4. sustainable development (co-ordinated with the skills of communication and the values and attitudes of value diversity);
5. peace and conflict (co-ordinated with the skills of co-operation and conflict resolution and the values and attitudes of concern for the environment and commitment to sustainable development);

⁷ For an attempt to delineate a typology of conceptions of “global citizenship” more broadly, see Laura Oxley and Paul Morris, “Global Citizenship: A Typology for Distinguishing its Multiple Conceptions,” *British Journal of Educational Studies* 61 (2013), pp. 301-325.

⁸ Mannion et al, “The Global Dimension,” p. 451.

⁹ UNESCO, *Global Citizenship Education*, p. 5.

¹⁰ These domains are articulated, for instance, in Oxfam’s *Education for Global Citizenship: A Guide for Schools* (2015), and *Global Citizenship in the Classroom: A Guide for Teachers* (2015). For these and other “global citizenship guides” by Oxfam, see <https://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/who-we-are/global-citizenship-guides>.

¹¹ S. Camicia and B. Franklin, “What Type of Global Community and Citizenship? Tangled Discourses of Neoliberalism and Critical Democracy in Curriculum and its Reform,” *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 9 (2011), pp. 311–322; they stress that critical democracy “is based upon a deep commitment to multiculturalism, critical awareness of global power asymmetries, emancipation and social justice” (p. 314); Alexandre Pais and Marta Costa, “An Ideology Critique of Global Citizenship Education,” *Critical Studies in Education* (2017), [Available online at: DOI: 10.1080/17508487.2017.1318772]; Mannion et al, “The Global Dimension,” pp. 443-456; V. Andreotti and L. M. De Souza (eds), *Postcolonial Perspectives on Global Citizenship Education* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

¹² Oxfam, *Education for Global Citizenship*, p. 5.

6. human rights (co-ordinated with the skills of ability to manage complexity and uncertainty and the values and attitudes of commitment to participation and inclusion); and
7. power and governance (co-ordinated with the skills of informed and reflective action and the values and attitudes of belief that people can bring about change).¹³

Mainstream GCE, emerging especially out of the global north, has been subject to critique both from the right¹⁴ and the left,¹⁵ and is often received differently in the global south compared with the global north.¹⁶ Postcolonial and indigenous/aboriginal approaches argue that much of mainstream GCE, in the western enlightenment liberal humanist tradition, (a) gives insufficient attention to asymmetrical power relations and knowledge construction, such that it can reinscribe or perpetuate structures of neocolonial global inequality in the distribution of wealth, power, and labour, (b) often uncritically exports western paradigms of knowledge and knowledge construction, and (c) often operates on a paternalistic benevolence model of seeking “to make a difference” on or for Others, not *with* Others.¹⁷

In broad terms, as used especially in educational settings, global citizenship itself is understood: (1) as an “extension,” not an invalidation or transcending of national citizenship, albeit toward increasing global engagement; (2) to be non-legal and a voluntary choice; (3) without an actual identity with specific commitments or responsibilities; (4) as a way of thinking (self-awareness and awareness of others) and of living and acting; and (5) as a practice of intercultural empathy.

Theological Foundations for a Christian Perspective on Global Citizenship

A specifically Christian notion of global citizenship has its foundation in the Bible, where Christian fidelity, identity, and social formation are together understood as a citizenship, one that is inherently transnational and thus global. Crucial to this framework is the core biblical theme of the “reign of God,” fundamental to which is the expression of God’s reign in all of creation: God is the source of all things (including a common humanity sharing in the image of God, and designed to live in harmony with all creation), and so seeks the wellbeing and renewal of all things, and will ultimately reunite all things in Godself. Thus, in the Gospels, responding to God’s “announcement of wellbeing” (*euangelion*) is expressed as an invitation to a primary and complete allegiance to God’s reign of generosity, compassion, peace and justice, an allegiance that has both a spiritual and social dimension, and simultaneously an inward and a political aspect, based on radical divine generosity but also involving unbounded human responsibility, notably love of neighbour, which

¹³ Oxfam, *Education for Global Citizenship*, p. 8.

¹⁴ It is argued that CGE either diminishes role of the nation and allegiance to it, while promoting the ascendancy of global governance structures, or involves an uncritical or inappropriate imposition of political ideology or social value, raising the question of whose morals and values these are based on. For this characterisation of resistance in the American context, see Martha F. Green, “Global Citizenship: What Are We Talking About and Why Does It Matter?” *Trends and Insights for International Leadership Education*, January 2012, Association of International Educators, pp. 1-4; [available online at: https://globalhighered.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/ti_global_citizen.pdf].

¹⁵ For instance, Camicia *et al*, “What Type of Community,” who stress that “critical democracy” perspectives need to challenge neoliberal perspectives in GCE; Mannion *et al*, “The Global Dimension,” resist the framing of global citizenship in terms of individual “competencies” as opposed to what is practiced together, and question the prioritising of cultural and economic themes in much of GCE.

¹⁶ Especially in the context colonised or neo-colonised nations or disempowered racialised groups, local struggles for justice or fostering south-to-south solidarity and linkages may be considered more crucial and prior than the concerns of “global citizenship.” Furthermore, UNESCO (*Global Citizenship Education*, 2014, pp. 18-20) observes that in many countries, internal challenges of national identity or solidarity may be considered to be of greater priority, or there is resistance to participatory and non-hierarchical methods of pedagogy associated with GCE, or there is fear that GCE may undermine the status quo.

¹⁷ Andreotti *et al*, *Postcolonial Perspectives on Global Citizenship Education*.

reaches to the marginalised and even to the enemy (thereby subverting the very category of enemy), and involves “receiving the foreigner” (*xenos*)¹⁸ as a supreme act of *diakonia* (Mt. 25:35-45).¹⁹

In the writings of the Apostle Paul, this matter of allegiance to and participation in the Messianic kingdom is articulated with the specific Greek terminology of “citizenship.”²⁰ For instance, the core exhortation to the community of Jesus’ loyalists under pressure in Roman Philippi is this: “Only one thing matters: be a citizen body and practise that citizenship in a manner worthy of the Messiah’s announcement of wellbeing” (Phil. 1:27, author’s translation), by implication, neither in terms of the identity and legal norms of the coveted Roman citizenship and the virtuous deeds of Caesar Augustus, nor in terms of the potentially exclusionary norms of some dimensions of the Judean Torah.²¹ Central to that “political practice” is the inversion of status and power in human relationships, modelled after the very pathway of the Messiah (Phil. 2:1-3:19), in a way that subverts Roman social norms and legally defined hierarchical “orders.” Later in the letter, Paul encourages the struggling community with the claim that “our government-citizenship exists firmly in heaven” (as a government-in-exile, in waiting); and from that place of temporary exile, the Messiah will undertake to draw the entire creation (“all things”) into the gracious reign of God (3:20-21). For this beleaguered outpost of God’s reign, Paul even uses the imagery of having one’s citizenship records securely kept in the heavenly archives (Phil. 4:3). In Paul’s perspective, citizenship in Messiah’s kingdom is constitutively a kind of global citizenship, based on the world-wide horizon of God’s redemptive and reconciling work in Christ.

This global citizenship identity was, for Paul, not merely an aspirational, spiritual or theoretical construct. Indeed, Paul sought to enact this global citizenship with a transnational *diakonia*.²² Indeed, it is crucial to observe that Paul frames this international *diakonia* work specifically in the framework of a partnership (*koinōnia*), such that there are mutual obligations and responsibilities that are transnational, even as participation stems from voluntary goodwill. Paul realises that this global partnership may well be asymmetrical in some respects, but he consistently turns upside-down the prevailing norms of Roman patronage and benefaction that divided the world into the haves and have-nots (the donors/benefactors and the recipients/clients). Crucially as well, Paul frames international *diakonia* as a work of “justice” and aiming toward “equity.” Paul is well aware that the food insecurity problem faced in impoverished and colonised Judea stems not just from drought and famine, but also from imbalanced, oppressive²³ tributary geopolitical structures. Moreover, donors must always realise that all they have owes to God’s prior generosity, such that any resulting thanksgiving must be directed to God, not needing to be lavished upon benefactors by those who (this time around) are recipients who cannot directly reciprocate except in asymmetrical ways.

¹⁸ Translations have consistently softened the explicit sense of “foreigner” in the translation of *xenos* in this passage.

¹⁹ *diakonein* occurs by way of summation in Matthew 25:44.

²⁰ G. Zerbe, *Citizenship: Paul on Peace and Politics* (Winnipeg, MB: CMU Press, 2012); *Philippians* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2016), pp. 95-114, pp. 181-229, pp. 268-272; for an accessible summary, see “Discipleship as Citizenship: The Legacy of the Apostle Paul,” *Canadian Mennonite*, 24 (December 16, 2013), pp. 4-8, [Available online at <https://canadianmennonite.org/articles/discipleship-citizenship>].

²¹ Paul’s basic problem with Torah (e.g. as articulated in Romans and Galatians) is not that it teaches a “works-righteousness,” nor that it imposes an excessive psychological burden, but that it excludes in a way contrary to its own intent and God’s original purposes. Fundamental for Paul is the original promise to Abraham through whom “all the nations of the world will be blessed,” something that those laws of Moses that are “judaising” could never invalidate.

²² The reference is to Paul’s collection, lasting over six years, among the wealthier Gentile communities to aid the impoverished in Judea. See Gal. 2:6-10; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8-9; Rom. 15:25-32; Acts 11:27-30; 12:25; 22:18-26; 24:17; and my “Partnership and Equality: Paul’s Economic Theory,” in Zerbe, *Citizenship*, pp. 75-92. Paul calls this work of solidarity with the poor an “act of generosity” (*charis*), a “partnership” (*koinōnia*), a “ministry” (*diakonia*), an “act of public welfare” (*leitourgia*), and an “act of justice” (*dikaioynē*).

²³ Accordingly, Paul can refer to the existing status of Jerusalem and its people as being in actual “bondage” (Gal. 4:25), admittedly using that image with *double entendre*.

Meanwhile, to forestall any form of triumphalism (supersessionism) and exclusionary social identity or diaconal limitation to the elect only, Paul's visionary teleology (or "eschatological ecclesiology") is also relevant in this connection. The ultimate *ekklēsia* (citizen assembly) that Paul envisions, as articulated in Romans 9-11, involves the collapsing of the "portion" (the "remnant"), and its re-absorption into the "all," according to a process by which ultimately, as Paul puts it, "God will have mercy on all humanity" (Rom. 11:32), and whereby "God will be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28).²⁴ The *telos* that Paul envisions is nothing short of the shattering of the boundaries by which fidelity and infidelity (believers and unbelievers) mark divisions among humanity, further to the shattering of the boundaries marked by ethnicity, nationality, class and gender (Gal. 3:28). Thus, the *ekklēsia* that exists in Paul's contemporary is entirely provisional, interim, and contingent – a mere proleptic or vanguard expression of what must obtain ultimately through God's ongoing love story with all creation. In other words, it is an entity which exists to lose itself. Ecclesiology in Paul is subject to a crucial tension point between the so-called "not yet" and the "already," a tension point that in Christian tradition has been typically collapsed into the "already," just as the overall drama of messianic salvation has been spiritualised into the drama of the individual's pilgrimage to heaven, and/or else muted into a drama of salvation-history, in which the church understands itself as the climax of God's redemptive work (and not as sign and agent toward the ultimate and inclusive, world-transforming reign of God).²⁵

Drawing especially²⁶ on Paul's language of the Christian faith and practice as a distinctive "citizenship" that transcends other identities, Christian apologists and theologians of the second and third centuries developed the notion of the Christian commonwealth as a *triton genos*, a "third nation" or a "third type" of polity, namely, neither Judean nor Greek (as a rubric for all Gentile nations).²⁷ The classic formulation is in the anonymous Letter to Diognetus, a panygeric on Christian identity and character as a special kind of citizenship, probably from the late second century:

For the distinction between Christians and the rest of humanity is neither in land nor language nor customs. For they do not dwell in cities in some place of their own, nor do they use any strange variety of dialect, nor practise an unusual livelihood [...] Yet while living in Greek and barbarian citizen-states (city-states, *poleis*), according as each obtained his lot, and following the local customs, both in clothing and food and in the rest of life, they show forth the admirable and confessedly paradoxical constitution of their own governance-citizenship (*politeia*). They dwell in their own homelands (*patridas*), but as resident aliens (*paroikoi*); they participate in all things as citizens (*politai*), but endure all things as foreigners (*xenoi*). Every foreign country (*xenē*) is their homeland (*patris*) and every homeland (*patris*) is a foreign country (*xenē*) [...] They offer open hospitality (*trapeza koinē*, "a common table") [...] They pass their time upon the earth but they have their citizenship (*politeuontai*) in heaven [Phil. 3:20]. They obey the appointed laws, but they surpass the laws in their own lives [...] To put it shortly, what the soul is in the body – that is what Christians are in the world (*kosmos*). The soul is spread through all members of the body, and Christians throughout the citizen-states (*poleis*) of the world. (5:1-6:2)

²⁴ Thus, it is not a notion of the heavenly congregation, past, present and future, nor is it some notion of the church invisible, and especially not the church universal as some "remnant" of humanity, a mere portion of all those who are the subject of God's unfailing promises.

²⁵ For a consistent apocalyptic-eschatological framework for Paul's ecclesiology, see esp. J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), pp. 135-81; pp. 303-349. The eschatological framework for Paul's ecclesiology is a neglected theme in most treatments of his ecclesiology.

²⁶ But also, for instance, 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 7.

²⁷ The notion appears first in the apocryphal but widely read *Kerygmata Petri* (early second century), and subsequently in the *Apology* of Aristides (mid second century), and the *Stromata* (ca. 198-203) of Clement of Alexandria. See Judith Liew, *Neither Jew nor Greek: Constructing Early Christianity*, 2nd edition (London: T & T Clark, 2015), p. 72; Erich S. Gruen, "Christians as a 'Third Race'," in *Christianity in the Second Century: Themes and Developments* (eds) J. Paget and J. Liew (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017). For other examples in the first few centuries of citizenship language to describe the Christian faith and social (ecclesial) formation, see Zerbe, *Philippians*, pp. 111-115.

But during the fourth century, this emphasis was largely lost, as the kingdom of God and “third nation” concepts were spiritualised and depoliticised, alongside a symbiotic (mutually supporting) co-dependency between temporal (“secular”) and spiritual authority, as Christianity was absorbed and reframed as the state religion in some localities. In the West, the Christian *oikoumenē* was understood to be coterminous with the Roman imperial rhetoric of *oikoumenē* (a regional dominion claiming itself to be “global”).

In sum: theologically speaking, Christians are by definition and constitution “global citizens” of a specific sort, and their allegiance to Christ means that this “global citizenship” will in principle (and sometimes in practice) supersede the claims and responsibilities of national identity, loyalty, and citizenship. Arguably, Christianity has its origins as a self-consciously transnational citizenship community, in which global citizenship is not merely an extension of nation-state citizenship, but surpasses other domains of citizenship.

Christian social action, therefore, is first to be understood in terms of the very being and especially the gathering of the *ekklēsia* in its biblical sense as “citizen assembly,” enacted in its liturgical life where its collective identity and mission is nurtured, and understanding its sacred sanctuary space as God’s global community space.²⁸ Christian social action is further expressed in the church’s various mutual support-solidarity ministries, institutions and projects (*diakonia*), “what it does” locally and globally, and further in its ministries and targeted causes for the public and global good, often in alliance or in partnership with other communities and institutions, whether in public and media campaigns, or even rallies and public demonstrations or protests. Furthermore, Christian social action is expressed in “how it persuades,” proclaiming wellbeing (*euangelion*), whether inviting people into solidarity with God’s gracious reign, or seeking to shape a public, a government, or policy by advocacy and lobbying, and sometimes calling the Christian community itself to greater faithfulness.

The Practice of (Christian) Global Citizenship Education

In guides for GCE in formal school settings,²⁹ from which Christian *diakonia* can also draw guidance and knowledge, some of the following themes can be regularly seen:

- GCE is both a “consciousness” (with moral and ethical aspects or values) and a set of “competencies” (knowledge, skills, dispositions, attitudes).
- GCE must be holistic, attentive to domains that are cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioural, and oriented to “learn-think-act” or “dialogue, learning, action.”
- Core learning outcomes or learner attributes in GCE are for learners to become: informed and critically literate; socially connected and respectful of diversity; ethically responsible and engaged.
- GCE should be implemented with a “whole school approach,” taking into account school ethos, curriculum, staff development, and community engagement.
- GCE should be expressed across the school curriculum in a transdisciplinary way, not sequestered as a particular theme or aim.
- GCE always involves a local-global intersection.
- GCE should be student-led or student-driven, emphasising participatory teaching and active learning.
- GCE is best approached through a case-study or project-based approach.

²⁸ I have thus encouraged Canadian churches to put a sign at the entering threshold of the sanctuary that reads “leaving Canada,” and one at the exiting threshold that reads “entering Canada.”

²⁹ See for instance, UNESCO, *Global Citizenship Education* (2014 and 2015); Oxfam, *Education for Global Citizenship* (2015), *Global Citizenship in the Classroom* (2015).

In higher education institutions, we find additional themes or approaches related to GCE, broadly speaking:

- Specific interdisciplinary fields of study (with various labels)³⁰ in the formal curriculum.
- In some cases, some aspect of GCE might be promoted in a “core curriculum” or in “general education” requirements for a degree.
- Study abroad and intercultural encounter programmes.
- Student and faculty exchange programmes.
- Overseas internship or practicum programmes.
- An emphasis on experiential learning, or service learning.

Programmes within institutions and agencies that have a more explicit diaconal and/or Christian framework are (and ought to be) characterised by further commitments, especially in light of the Christian bias toward “justice-peace”³¹ and equity, and partnership and solidarity (*koinōnia*):

- They will seek to establish real networks and relationships of partnership, mutuality and dialogue. Instead of attempting to be globally conscious and engaged in the abstract, they will pursue real ties of friendship alongside ecclesial and institutional partnerships and intercultural/religious dialogue and encounters.
- They will draw especially from (or find alliances in) “critical pedagogy” and be committed to a distinctive GCE “otherwise,”³² seeking to avoid benevolence models that perpetuate asymmetric engagements or alignments (as in the case of many “short-term mission trips” or even “service learning” ventures), while interrogating the patronising, neocolonial and/or neoliberal-oriented features of some “study abroad” and “volunteering-helping-serving” schemes.
- They will seek to establish programmes that are meaningfully bilateral or multilateral in design,³³ administration and implementation (e.g. faculty or student exchanges), even as they acknowledge (and wrestle with) the contradictions inherent in sponsoring one-way “learning tours” for young adults or adults originating from wealthy nations.³⁴
- They will not only have to contend with the cost of truly bilateral programmes (where there are significant financial asymmetries and limits) but also increasingly the ethical problem of carbon emissions produced by international travel.

³⁰ For instance, global studies, intercultural studies, international studies, international development studies, and so on.

³¹ In Christian discourse, “justice-peace” is a hendiadys (“one-through-two”). See *Just Peace Companion: Second Edition* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2012); G. Zerbe, “Peace and Justice in the Bible,” in *Peace and Justice: Essays from the Fourth Shi’i Muslim Mennonite Christian Dialogue*, Harry J Huebner and Hajj Muhammad Legenhausen (eds) (Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2011), pp. 124-43.

³² See especially Andreotti et al, *Postcolonial Perspectives on Global Citizenship Education*, pp. 1-8; pp. 87-235.

³³ One (somewhat) bilateral program articulated specifically to promote “global citizenship” is the combination of Mennonite Central Committee’s (USA and Canada-based) IVEP (International Volunteer Exchange Program) and SALT (Serving and Learning Together) programs; see <https://mcccanada.ca/get-involved/serve/volunteer/ivep> and <https://mcc.org/get-involved/serve/volunteer/salt>.

³⁴ Thus, for instance, Mennonite Central Committee has traditionally promoted “reverse mission” as a core outcome of international voluntary service or learning tour programmes.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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- UNESCO, *Global Citizenship Education: Preparing Learners for the Challenges of the 21st Century* (Paris, UNESCO, 2014), [Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000227729>].
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100. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND RESOURCE MOBILISATION IN DIACONIC ORGANISATIONS

Bright G. Mawudor and Debora Suparni¹

Introduction

Diaconal organisations or institutions play a significant role in becoming the driving force for the development sector. Yet, the global trends have significant consequences for diaconal work, they create new challenges and change the condition for diaconal intervention. In most contexts, it has become more difficult to maintain diaconal organisations. They need a strategy on how to mobilise resources and practice a good financial management system for shared commitments, in order to maximize results, goals, accountability and visibility as well as minimise risks. Professional diaconal competence particularly in resource mobilisation and financial management should be enhanced, in order to achieve organisational goals and ensure sustainability.

Diakonia is part of the mission and work of the church. Diakonia has been an aspect of the nature of the Christian Church from its conception. The term diakonia comes from the Greek word *diakonein*, meaning service. Diakonia serves as part of the history of the church, and although the grounds, content and organisation have varied and developed from its beginning; its aim as a caring and serving ministry has stood the test of time. Theologically, it is part of the mission God gave His church. To practice diakonia is to serve humanity, to serve the created world and through this, also serve God. Therefore, one could argue that diakonia should be a central aspect of every church regardless of the form it takes.

As society's progress and new challenges in both church and society arise, the concept of diakonia has undergone change. There has been a paradigm shift, which resulted in a professional way of undertaking diaconal work through diaconal organisations.

This article presents the challenges of diaconal funding and the opportunities in resource mobilisation and financial management. It explores the reality of funding challenges, theological reflections on resource mobilisation and financial management, resource mobilisation strategies and the practice of good financial management systems. The last part of the article presents the principles of financial management.

Reality in Diaconal Actions

Diaconal action has changed from one generation to the next according to contextual conditions. In most regions, global trends have significant consequences for diaconal work. They create new challenges and change the conditions for diaconal intervention. There are also local or regional realities that impact diaconal work. In many countries in the Global South, the general impoverishment has consequences for diaconal work. In most contexts, it has become more difficult to maintain diaconal institutions such as hospitals, schools and social programmes. Financial support from partners in the North is diminishing. Yet, it is painful when organisations have to give up their health work, especially in a time of enormous challenges such as the AIDS pandemic. In its local setting, poverty has distinct expressions and specific root causes. Weak governance, corruption, ethnic conflict and civil war are some of the factors that add suffering upon suffering for people living in poverty. At the same time, these are also factors which urge diaconal organisations to

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renew their diaconal commitment and find new ways of caring for, and working with the poor and oppressed, lifting up their dignity and defending their rights.

Management and Accountability in Diaconic Work

Mutual accountability is often pointed at as a basic value in international diakonia. Accountability refers to the practice of being mutually responsible, as for instance in co-operation between two or more partners. Normally, accountability includes two key components: answerability and enforceability. The first refers to the obligation to justify decisions and actions, the second to the ability to ensure that an agreed action is undertaken. When accountability is mutual, it gives all partners an equal right to hold the other responsible for delivering on their commitments. In reality, this is not always the case as there will often be asymmetries in the relations between the partners. Traditional donor-recipient relations carry imbalances in power and decision-making with them and should be questioned, especially in diaconal work. It also needs to be strongly affirmed that management competence and effective work practice are crucial in diaconal work, with mutual accountability being an integral part of this. Without such competence, even the best of intentions will not translate into solid and responsible action.

Good management and working practices are needed for the sake of the work that needs to be done. Professional diaconal competence should be enhanced above all, for the sake of the people involved in the work and their dignity in struggling for a better life. There also is a need for more accountability within organisations.

Theological Foundations of Financial Management and Resource Mobilisation

In the Biblical concept of Stewardship, God provides resources for the church and church related institutions. It is critically important that Christians understand that all resources belong to God, we are all simply stewards. "The earth belongs to the Lord and everything in it, the world and all who live in it". (Psalm 24:1).

God is sovereign and can do whatever He wills, including provide for all our needs without any effort on our part. Yet, human beings are also responsible to manage it well.

Using Local Resources: The Story of Moses (Exodus 4:2-3)

God had informed Moses that he was to return to Egypt and should lead the Israelites out of their mental and physical prison into a land groomed and cultivated by God. Moses refused because he realised he had nothing and was not able to convince people. God only asked Moses: "what is that in your hand?" God asked Moses to throw the stick on the ground, then suddenly the stick became a snake.

God did not give Moses additional resources but rather affirmed and used what was already in his hand. This story also affirms that Christians should use what God has given to us and try to identify and find out our potential and resources. It becomes our strength to change our lives.

The Parable of Talents (Matthew 25:14-30)

Jesus told the story about the Kingdom of God, by using the parable of talents. For those who receive talent and maximise them for God's purposes, they will be blessed abundantly. Those who are entrusted with a small talent but they do not use it properly, it is appropriate that the Lord calls them: "Evil and lazy slave". The talent that the man in the parable had was finally taken and given to the diligent slave instead (Mt. 25:26, 29).

Developing Strategies for Resource Mobilisation

Organisations without a resource mobilisation strategy and/or a dedicated function to co-ordinate implementation of that strategy are potentially at risk of investing a lot in unco-ordinated interaction with donors without getting much in return. Even organisations which have an established strategy and function have to create guidelines in order to define the division of labour and set procedures in place for the approval of new initiatives in order to prevent freelance behaviour.

Resource mobilisation is the process of identifying and obtaining resources to help achieve organisational goals and ensure sustainability. Resource mobilisation refers to all those steps and activities undertaken by an entity to secure new and additional resources, while ensuring maximisation of its existing resources. Organisations mobilise resources for shared commitments, to maximise results, goals, accountability, visibility and minimise risks. The majority of organisations determine their resource mobilisation targets based on their multi-year strategic plans. Funding decisions are based on their own assessments of the effectiveness of the organisation, its core mandate, the leadership shown by the executive head, alignment with foreign policy priorities, oversight, and related factors. These resources can be in either monetary form such as donations and grants or non-monetary forms such as assets, volunteers or expertise.²

In order to effectively mobilise resources, an organisation needs to build a strong case for giving, develop organisational systems and structures, set clear priorities, understand the community needs and understand the donor environment and requirements.

A resource mobilisation strategy is to ensure that there is a clear, systematic, predictable and co-ordinated approach to solicitation, acquisition, utilisation, management, reports, monitoring, and evaluation.

The resource mobilisation strategy answers the following questions:

- **What** are you raising funds for (linking legacy and strategic priorities to resource mobilisation)?
- **Who** in your organisation is responsible for resource mobilisation and are they clear about their roles and expectations?
- **Who** are your priority donors (donor characteristics)?
- **How** will you identify, approach, and cultivate your priority donors and who will do it?
- **When** will you execute your action plans?
- **What** kinds of practical systems do you have in place to support your resource mobilisation efforts?

In a nutshell, diaconal organisations are human-change agents and their actions and results must, therefore, always result in change in people: in their behaviour, in their circumstances, in their vision, health, in their hopes etc. These institutions must, therefore, bear these in mind as they evolve strategies for resource mobilisation.

Organising Structures for Resource Mobilisation

In modern management, concepts such as partnerships, results-based management, strategic planning and mode of assessing value for money are demanded by donors during fundraising. Resources have to be spent in order to raise more resources. As more and more organisations are competing for a limited amount of funds, the strategies and resource mobilisation structures of organisations become more important. A number of entities, but not all, have dedicated structures in place for resource mobilisation with a clearly defined hierarchy and delineation of roles and responsibilities, especially for managing and nurturing long-term relationships with the funding partners. Organisations which have large portions of their revenue coming from voluntary contributions have separate structures for dealing with private sector corporates, foundations and individuals. Organisations, however, reported that significantly more work is required to raise resources from

² The professional Association Strengthening Project “Module 8: Resource Mobilization – Survive and Strive” [Available at: <http://www.strongProfAssoc.org>], [Accessed on 22nd December 2019].

the private sector; it consumes more time and resources as compared to dealings with donors. While some donors and partners request customised reporting, dealings with the private sector require due diligence, development of a longer-term relationship and reporting on the use of funds.

Mobilising Resources is an Art

Resource mobilisation is critical to any organisation for the following reasons: it ensures the continuation of your organisation's service provision to clients, supports organisational sustainability. It allows for improvement and the scale-up of products and services that the organisation currently provides. It is a necessity in the business of generating new business to stay in business. Resource mobilisation refers to all activities involved in securing new and additional resources for your organisation. It also involves making better use of, and maximising, existing resources. Resource mobilisation is often referred to as 'New Business Development'.

Successful resource mobilisation requires experience and skill. Overall, the need for specialised training for resource mobilisation is gaining recognition. Apart from such training for resource mobilisation specialists, most organisations recognise that every staff member is in some way involved in resource mobilisation and should therefore receive some training in the subject.

A diaconal organisation that is operating with persistent deficits due to diminishing donor funding could diversify by undertaking a social venture like a food stand to enable it generate additional funds to support its core mission.

Managing Finance in Diaconic Work

Finances are regarded as a backbone of any organisation regardless of their nature or size. This is because most of the activities require financial input for them to be successful. In diaconical work, finances are needed to run the projects and provide services to communities or various activities organised. Financial management is one of the three broad categories in finance.³ Brigham and Houston⁴ state that financial management suits both profit and not-for-profit organisations. In their definition, financial management refers to decisions relating to how much and types of assets to acquire, how to raise the capital needed to purchase assets and how to run the firm so as to maximise its value. McMenamin⁵ posits that a lack of effective and strong financial management leads to the collapse of an organisation. It entails determination, acquisition, allocation and stewardship of financial resources.

A sound financial management system is critical for the efficient and effective decision-making required for the success of the project. This includes proper planning, budgeting, accounting, financial reporting, internal control, auditing, disbursement and physical performance of the project with the aim of managing the project resources properly for achieving the project objectives. Proper financial management revolves around the basic principle that all financial transactions are carried out in accordance with the established rules, procedures and principles, executed in a transparent manner and are duly accounted for, for future review and audit. Application of financial management techniques as well as regulations set for accountability will help in attaining the main objectives of financial management.

³ Frank J. Fabozzi and Pamela P. Peterson, *Financial Management and Analysis* 2nd edn. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2003)

⁴ Eugene F. Brigham and Joel F. Houston, *Fundamentals of Financial Management*, Concise 7th Edition (Boston, MA: Cengage Learning, 2011).

⁵ Jim McMenamin *Financial management: An Introduction Guide* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2002).

[...] Good Financial Governance is the responsive, prudent, effective, transparent and accountable management of public financial resources and requires robust budget and financial management, audit and oversight institutions that operate within the rule of law.⁶

Financial management involves planning, organising, directing and controlling the financial activities such as the procurement and the using up of the funds of an enterprise. Therefore, from an institutional point of view, the process of financial management is associated with financial planning and financial control. A good reputation is linked with integrity and the reputation of an organisation and its individual players are its most valuable asset and its highest risk.

Nine Principles of Financial Management

Be prudent, diligent, and ever about your business; do not idle, for time is money; cultivate your credit worthiness and put it to good use, for credit is money; be punctual and just in the repayment of loans and debts, for to become a person of known credit-worthiness is to be master of peoples purposes; be vigilant in keeping accounts.⁷

1.	Stewardship	Individuals and Organisations should take good care of the resources they are entrusted with and make sure that they are used for the purposes intended. (Mt. 25:14-30; Lk. 19:11-27)
2.	Accountability	Proper, detailed documentation, clear organisation with a defined vision, mission, responsibility and follow-up. <i>For we are taking pain to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men</i> (2 Cor. 8:21).
3.	Transparency	Openness about all activities and willingness and ability to show all details of all our doings to any stakeholder <i>Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in Heaven</i> (Mt. 5:16).
4.	Integrity	This requires the organisation to operate with honesty and propriety. For example, managers and trustees should lead by example in following procedures and by declaring any personal interests that might conflict with their official duties. The integrity of financial reports depends on the accuracy and completeness of financial records.
5.	Sustainability or Viability	Expenditure must be kept in balance with incoming funds, both at the operational and the strategic levels. Viability is a measure of the organisation's financial continuity and security. All diaconal institutional must have built in financial and organisational sustainability plans.
6.	Adherence to Accounting Standards	The system for keeping financial records and documentation must observe internationally accepted accounting standards and principles. Any accountant from anywhere around the world should have the same interpretation of the organisation's system for keeping financial records.
7	Consistency	The organisation's financial policies and systems must be consistent over time. This promotes efficient operations and transparency, especially in financial reporting. While systems may need to be adapted to changing

⁶ OECD Guidelines on effective development co-operation, "Manila Consensus on Public Financial Management Partnering to Strengthen Public Financial Management for Effective States" [Available at: <http://www.OECD.org/dac/effectiveness/48780763>] p. 2. [Accessed: 26th August 2020].

⁷ Marshall Gordon, *In search of the Spirit of Capitalism – An essay on Max Weber's protestant ethic thesis* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1982), p. 18.

		needs, unnecessary changes should be avoided. Inconsistent approaches to financial management can be a sign that the financial situation is being manipulated.
8	Security	Established, proper policies and routines for handling of money, financial documentation and systems. <i>We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift (2 Cor. 8:20).</i>
9.	Punctuality	Posting and handling of transactions and reports as per deadlines set by the organisation, laws and regulations. <i>Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful (1 Cor. 4:2).</i>

Conclusion

The 21st century is characterised by a re-engineering of organisations in order to make them more relevant to the challenges of our times. Today, we know that in many areas of life we cannot guarantee more of the same: work, money, peace or freedom, health, happiness etc. In other words, change is not what it used to be and maintaining the status quo cannot be the way forward.

Diaconal organisations are not an exception to these challenges; especially in the ways that they mobilise resources and manage funds for their social ministry. Gone are the days when people in the pews gave money to a diaconal organisation “because it is doing the Lord’s work”. Good intentions must be converted into tangible results.

Resource mobilisation today has to be done professionally. You have to nurture the spirit of goodwill through strategically planned and executed resource mobilisation programmes; innovation, develop effective plans for marketing and fund development.

People now want to see evidence of effective financial management principles like accountability, transparency, security, accuracy, timely reporting and auditing etc. bearing in mind the axiom: In God we Trust, All others we Audit.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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Zietlow, J., A. Hankin and G. Seidner. *Financial Management for Nonprofit Organizations: Policies and Practices*, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2007.

Appendices

Resource Mobilisation checklist

Does your organisation have the following in place?

Items	Yes/ No
1. Clear sense and commitment to your vision and mission – who you are, where you are going, and how your mission relates to the communities served.	
2. Innovative approach and programmes that yield results.	
3. Evidence of past accomplishments.	
4. Effective management and leadership by your board members and staff who will ensure the accountability and transparency of the organisation.	
5. Financial systems that will safeguard the resources, including adequate financial controls that demonstrate good management and builds trust.	
6. Solid reputation, credibility, and ability to add value to donors’ or prime contractor objectives.	
7. Mutual respect and knowledge sharing between the organisation and the community it benefits, as well as other stakeholders.	
8. The ability to attract, create, and sustain new resources, especially those based in the local community.	
9. Built financial and organisational plans to continue if donor fund is withdrawn.	
10. Cost effectiveness and cost competitiveness.	

Resource Mobilisation Systems Checklist

Does your organisation have the following in place?

	Yes	No
1. Clear system or basic database for organising, managing, and updating new donor contacts and relationships		
2. Clear system for organising, managing, and updating current donor relationships and reporting deadlines		
3. Updated key boilerplate documents (Corporate capabilities statement, etc.		
4. Budget template with budget notes		
5. Updated staff CVs		
6. Past performance recommendations		
7. Letters of support		
8. Copy of financial statements		

9. Audited financial statements		
10. Basic brochure		
11. Copies of success stories		
12. Documented evidence of achievement		
13. Program effectiveness (evaluation; case studies)		
14. Is there a clear understanding in your organisation about who is responsible for the following tasks?		
14.1. Identifying and researching new donors		
14.2. Managing reporting deadline calendar		
14.3. Building relationships with existing donors		
14.4. Scheduling key networking activities		
14.5. Managing and updating boilerplate templates for proposals		
14.6. Tracking and updating resource mobilisation		

Financial Management Checklist

Budgeting

Items	Yes	No
1. Do you have a finance committee in place that approves the budget?		
2. Is the preliminary budget based on all necessary information (membership estimates, other sources of income)		
3. Does the budget show all sources of income, totalled and balanced, against all total expense categories		
4. Has the budget been formally adopted by the appropriate body (i.e. board)		
5. Are policies in place to permit changes to budget line items as needed during the fiscal year		
6. Are monthly financial reports made to the appropriate body?		
7. Does the organisation perform an independent audit at the close of each fiscal year		
Financial Controls		
1. Does your organisation use an accounting system with accurate records of income and expense transactions		
2. Are all bank signatory cards up-to-date with at least two signatures that have been approved by the Board of Trustees?		
3. Are at least two people involved in the process of keeping financial records, depositing revenue, issuing cheques and handling cash		
4. Are all funds deposited in a timely manner?		
5. Does your organisation perform monthly bank reconciliation by individuals other than those who are authorised to sign checks?		
6. Does your organisation have salaried staff?		
7. Are appropriate withholdings made (state and federal taxes, etc.) and submitted to the proper agencies?		
8. Are quarterly reports filed as required and within the proper deadlines?		

Adapted from Zietlow, J., A. Hankin and G. Seidner. *Financial Management for Nonprofit Organizations: Policies and Practices* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2007.)

101. GLOBAL LEARNING FOR DIACONIA – RETHINKING CONCEPTS AND PRAXIS

Matthias Börner, Lusungu Mbilinyi and Angelika Veddeler¹

Terms

Global Learning is a concept that has gained widespread attention and is widely used in different programmes, e.g. Education for Sustainable Development or Global Citizenship Education. In the United Evangelical Mission, Global Learning has been qualified with the perspective of faith in the UEM's new concept of "Global Learning in Ecumenical Perspective (GLEP)". Using the background of UEM's experience as an international and inter-confessional communion of churches in three continents and the von Bodelschwingh Foundations Bethel, all of which are involved in diaconia, this article describes new approaches to Global Learning and a consistent international praxis of diaconic capacity building.

Global Learning: Definitions

The term Global Learning raises a multitude of associations. Different people connect the term with different phenomena. In the German speaking context, Global Learning – usually valued positively – is mostly understood as a "movement of learning"² which started in the 1990s, rooted in earlier concepts like "Ecumenical Learning", "Development Education" (*Entwicklungspolitische Bildungsarbeit*), or "Intercultural Learning". Many people from countries in Africa and Asia associate the term with experiences of their countries with colonialism and its destructive effects on indigenous forms of learning and the lasting dominance of Western-style education systems. For some, the term Global Learning is linked to experiences of alienation and suppression, for others, to liberation from harmful traditions. The term creates feelings of joy about participating in a globally connected world, and feelings of exclusion in view of worldwide communication-flows and relationships in which supposedly only privileged people can participate. The term stands for interconnectedness, for friendship and professional co-operation across the globe, and also for a growing dominance of global cultural trends and neo-liberal economic expansion. For some, Global Learning is regarded as the normal way of learning in today's world (thinking that "everything is global anyway and I am an active part of it, and there is no way out of this").

These ambivalences indicate that Global Learning is a field which needs to be reflected upon and shaped in awareness of its vast range of meanings and their implications.

Diaconia

Diaconia is understood as social support and advocacy for social justice on the basis of the Christian faith. In the institutional structures in which diaconia is organised in Germany, diaconia in Germany is mostly separated from the so-called "ecumenical diaconia". Increasingly, this separation is criticised as being

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² Dirk Oesselmann, Gert Ruppel, Peter Schreiner, *Impulse zur konzeptionellen Weiterentwicklung ökumenischen Lernens* (Münster: Comenius Institut-Evangelische Arbeitsstätte für Erziehungswissenschaft, 2008), p. 3.

artificial. Local and global dimensions of diaconia, or, rather: micro-, mezo- and macro-levels of diaconia are all entangled and intertwined. This is visible e.g. in the current developments of migration, where developments in Syria, the Congo or Romania clearly have direct effects on developments in Germany and vice versa. Even more clearly, the current COVID-19 crisis emphasises these connections with more urgency: diaconic problems in a local community are inseparably linked with diaconic problems in other parts of the world. Equally, many issues of concern for national and regional social structures in one part of the world are just as relevant in other regions of the globe. An example for this is the current worldwide demographic development which has effects and implications in each region of the world.

For these reasons, Global Learning is indispensable in capacity building for diaconia. It must not be regarded as an interesting addition to the usual, but as a fundamental dimension of all diaconic capacity building. The aim of this article is to show what Global Learning, understood in this way, means, and how it can be practically organised in a way that is adequate and useful for diaconia. The article will first discuss general considerations and secondly describe practical implementations of Global Learning for diaconic capacity building.

Globality

The term “globality” expresses the interconnectedness of all life – and, for that matter, all diaconia – on the globe. Different dimensions sound in the word:

- The knowledge about the vulnerability of our planet;
- The awareness of a multitude of relationships and communication-flows across the borders of all countries, nations, regions;
- The appreciation of cross-, trans- and inter-cultural flows, connections and entanglements;
- The awareness of economic interdependencies, relationships and co-operations across the globe;
- The existence of gross inequality in the living conditions on the earth;
- The appreciation of different specific traditions and identities within the broad diversity on the earth.

Globality as a basis for learning and capacity building is much more than adding, as a novelty, a “global dimension” to an already existing curriculum. Thinking in terms of “globality” concerns attitudes, knowledges and praxes. We therefore suggest a definition of Global Learning as: “Learning in awareness of globality as a fundamental condition of life in every region, context and environment, and in awareness of one’s own role and responsibility in shaping globality”.

Applied to capacity building for diaconia, this definition of Global Learning means:

- Respecting the global interconnectedness of diaconic phenomena and problems;
- Making use of the huge number of diaconic approaches all over the world by bringing them into communication;
- Contradicting all attempts towards globally uniform ways of doing diaconia;
- Appreciating the creative strength that lies in the community of people engaged in diaconia to find solutions to new challenges;
- Carrying the spirit and the expertise of diaconia into social and political developments in all societies worldwide.

Globality understood this way is not just one aspect of education and capacity building, but a fundamental and non-negotiable condition of every aspect of life and of lifelong learning.

Ecumenism

In Christian circles the term “ecumenism” has been used to describe a movement of churches of different confessions and from different places across the globe to come together in fellowship as one body of Christ.

This understanding of the word ecumenism is wide and inter-denominational. However, it is problematic in interreligious settings, because it limits the *oikos*³ only to Christian confessions, disregarding other religions and worldviews. Despite the difficulty this term exerts, we continue using it to denote the movements towards Christian unity in the whole inhabited world.

However, diaconia aims at and practises inclusion, also with regard to different faiths. Diaconia cannot be understood and practiced only within one's own religion. In all religions, there are concepts that are similar to diaconia, for instance the concept of *Ikhsan* in Islam.⁴ Global Learning for diaconia cannot come to a halt when the borders of Christian faith are reached. It is necessary to include the concept of "Diapraxis" into Global Learning for diaconia. By this term, we mean interreligious joint action that is inspired by our faith. It is when people of different confessions and religions take joint actions, where every participant of the action sees what they are doing as a religious imperative, and believe that by participating in what they do they are practicing their religion.

Methodological Challenges

The aim of Global Learning for diaconia cannot be to arrive at artificial "objective" definitions of diaconia, which stand above all contexts and traditions. The aim must also not be a kind of diaconic "McDonaldisation" aiming at a hegemony of certain forms of diaconia and at uniformity of diaconic work all over the world. However, taking up different perspectives on diaconia must result in more than a mere "bookbinder's synthesis";⁵ in which perspective after perspective is added. In Global Learning for diaconia, it is necessary to perceive different views and experiences on a topic, and then look for connections, to compare, to discover similarities and contradictions, to look at applications and communications. Such processes do not in the first place explain, simplify, structure or order matters, they rather lead into discoveries of complexities and ambiguities, they cause irritations and often initially raise far more questions than answers. The question is how diaconic capacity building can be structured so that it neither ends there nor turns out to be solely inefficient and puzzling. The following paragraphs try to structure the main points in UEM's work on this question.

³ The term "ecumenism" is derived from the Greek word *oikos* meaning the whole inhabited world.

⁴ *Ihsan* (*Ikhsan*) is an Arabic term meaning goodness or excellence, which is related to the word "goodness" (Arabic *Husn*). It is a matter of taking one's inner faith (*iman*) and showing it in both sayings and actions, a sense of social responsibility born from religious convictions. *Ihsan* also means to perfect, to excel or to show proficiency and excellence. Therefore, it could be considered that the Arabic word *ihsan* has a dual meaning, goodness and excellence (www.knowingallah.com/en/articles/meaning-of-ihsan). Also, the Institution of Waqf: an Islamic endowment of property to be held in trust and used for a charitable or religious purpose, all have attributes that correlate to diaconal activities (www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/waqf).

⁵ The historian Klaus Koschorke quotes this term with regard to attempts to develop a shared history of mission. The problem described can be transferred similarly to the field of Global Learning: "Fascinating and stimulating as many of these new works are, they make clear that we are still at the beginning of the project of an integrated history of World Christianity. Together with important studies which have long become classics, many of these new approaches do not surpass traditional approaches which Jürgen Osterhammel coins "mere bookbinder syntheses". They are mostly simply additions of unrelated regional histories [...]. In any case, the search for transcending structures, themes and lines of development of the non-European history of Christianity (which are not one-sidedly drafted from the perspective of the West, as in traditional mission history, but including these, of course) and allowing something like a real "shared history" are still an urgent desideratum." Klaus Koschorke (ed), *Etappen der Globalisierung in christentumsgeschichtlicher Perspektive* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012), p. 6.

How to Perceive Contexts: Global or Local – or “Glocal”?⁶

In the broad understanding described above, every diaconic context must be regarded as being part of globality. Every community – a remote rural area, the urban centre of a mega city, a squatter camp, a gated community or a middle-class suburb – is part of globality. Its globality may not be obvious at first sight, but it is there, in the diversity of people, in (pop-) cultural trends, in the economic conditions of life, in the nature around, in the connectedness of all these. Neglecting the fact of globality in diaconia will lead to limited competences and “hidden spots” in the perception of reality. This is a great risk for diaconia. Diaconia has always thrown light on unseen “hidden spots” of injustice and suffering in communities, which have emerged by tradition, power, authority or convenience, and which were perpetuated through regulations, cultural expressions, dominant discourses or definitions of a communal “common sense”. In diaconia, there are many examples that throwing light on “hidden spots” has often been done by strangers or outsiders who have a special potential to discover these, to which all members of the community are long used or are bound by obligation (as is described e.g. in the story of the “Good Samaritan”, Lk. 10:25).

Not only the separation into local and global diaconia, also declaration of a “glocal” diaconia remains superficial. The interconnectedness of social phenomena and of diaconic action should be regarded as so normal and so much a matter of course that it needs no special mentioning or naming.

This can practically be shown, for example, in the ongoing processes of recruiting and employing care-giving personnel from the Philippines in Germany. If these processes are regarded and managed predominantly from German perspectives, concentration is on the (German) goal to ensure the provision of care for a rapidly growing number of old-aged persons and a declining number of German care-giving staff. Other dimensions however, like the social and economic impacts on the Philippine society, on family structures or on the economic effects of an increasing number of overseas workers are then easily overlooked.

Example:

German members of the UEM and their diaconal institutions have turned to the offices of the UEM for help in view of the nursing crisis in Germany. As a response, church leaders and leaders of nursing schools from the Philippines were invited by UEM to Germany for an exchange, and a return visit to the Philippines with directors of diaconia, hospitals and nursing schools is planned. An international workshop will reflect on the ethical framework conditions of nursing staff recruitment in different perspectives. Nurses from the Philippines already working in Germany will report on their experiences and representatives of the church union from the Philippines will be involved in the process. Leaders of hospitals and nursing schools from the Philippines will share their opinions with regard to the health care system in the Philippines. Also, the economic and political effects of overseas staff on the Philippines will be discussed with experts. In a process of global learning, the impact of recruiting will be brought into focus in a comprehensive way and the framework conditions for ethical recruitment will be developed together.

Attitudes of Global Learning for Diaconia

The idea of globality, pointing at the global interconnectedness of all life and of all diaconia must be translated not only into the contents, but also into the organisational forms of learning and capacity building programs. Learning processes are needed in dia- (or tria- or multi-) logue. Such learning processes target much more than just looking beyond one’s own horizon. They are not limited to getting to know the perspective of other persons. They are not limited to fostering a willingness to accept the other person’s perspective. They do not serve the wish to extend one’s own view and convictions and imprint it on others. They do not only add and

⁶ Roland Robertson, Zygmunt Baumann and others coined this term “glocal” in order to express that global developments have local effects and are perceived and shaped locally and vice versa (e.g.: Roland Robertson, “Glokalisierung: Homogenität und Heterogenität in Raum und Zeit”. In: Ulrich Beck (ed), *Perspektiven der Weltgesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1998), pp. 192-220.

complement learners' prior experiences or knowledge by that of others. The broadening of horizons, getting to know different contexts, points of view and attitudes and the questioning of one's own convictions are means, indispensable requirements, but not the aims of Global Learning. In this sense, Global Learning is a consistent further development of a narrow understanding of "ecumenical learning" or "developmental education" that makes others objects of learning: "Learning about the other" here becomes "learning with the other" and finally "learning together, jointly". Therefore, Global Learning is a jointly practiced learning attitude.

Conditions of Global Learning

Global Learning for diaconia means that all steps of capacity building programs are consistently done jointly and together by:

- Jointly identifying (common) challenges to be responded to and themes of relevance;
 - Forming teaching teams which are internationally and diversely composed;
 - Composing learners' groups internationally and diversely;
 - Developing curricula jointly;
 - Setting goals and aims of programmes jointly;
 - Going through the usual struggles and irritations which are normal in a learning process jointly and together;
 - Choosing methods that allow and support multi perspectivity.
- Some aspects shall be highlighted:

The encounter

Global Learning cannot take place without personal encounter and conversation. Global Learning, however, does not take place primarily among and within the learners' group (learning from each other), but in learning processes which a diverse group undergoes jointly and together. This means that Global Learning does not render the existing forms of learning obsolete. The student of diaconia has to learn the principles of management, the terms of social science and the theological foundations of social action in order to pass their exams. Therefore, the student needs reliable knowledge – the book or the monologue of a lecture. They cannot seek common answers right from the beginning in dialogue with the diaconic institutions. However, in discussions, or later, when applying knowledge, the student or graduate can structure diaconic programmes, enter into joint processes with all concerned and develop solutions for diaconia understood in globality, that go far beyond the usual diaconic programmes.

Example:

Together with the Institute for Diaconic Sciences and Diaconic Management (IDM) of the Protestant University Wuppertal/Bethel, UEM implemented the international MA "Diaconic Management" in 2011. The curriculum centres on theology, ethics, leadership, economics and management for diaconic services from different perspectives, and students experience the science and the praxis of diaconia in different contexts. The compositions of both the students' group and the lecturers' teams are international, and the modules of the program are held in Tanzania, South Africa, the Philippines, Indonesia and Germany. Two structuring elements are guides through this high degree of diversity: Academically, the "St. Gallen Management System" integrates the different perspectives. Concerning the teaching-learning process, a team which itself is internationally composed, accompanies the students in all modules in the learning processes. Systematic evaluations and feedback from the four cohorts which have studied the MA programme until now show that the learning outcomes – not only for students but for lecturers as well – go far beyond the academically intended aims. In an evaluation, all 40 Alumni rate their own learning success most highly in the area of intercultural/global and inter-disciplinary competence, even higher than the acquired competences in theology, ethics, leadership, management and economics. This is remarkable, since

“intercultural competence” and “inter-disciplinary competence” are not taught subjects. It obviously is a logical consequence of the consistent concept of global learning.⁷

Joint physical experience of different contexts

Diaconia needs to hear, feel, smell, taste and see how people live. Taking seriously the fact that all life is part of globality, experts of diaconia need to hear, feel, smell, taste and see how people live in different contexts worldwide. They need to research reasons, identify connections, comprehend developments and discover contradictions, and they need to do that together. Such processes will initially not be “orderly”, but “messy”: They create high degrees of confusion. Social phenomena are contradictory and raise questions which cannot easily be answered. Moreover, social phenomena are perceived and interpreted in different ways by different people. Disagreements and conflicts are bound to happen within a diverse learners’ group. These must be regarded as part of the learning process and must not be avoided.

Teaching from different perspectives

Not only the learners’ group, but also the teachers, lecturers or tutors have to be internationally and diversely composed. Only this ensures multi perspective.

Common goals

As a third condition, common goals must be defined for processes of Global Learning for diaconia. They give the complexities in the learning processes the necessary orientation, so that these processes do not get lost in the arbitrariness of pluralistic worldviews or in generalities. The set goals, e.g. the acquisition of a formal degree, or the finding of a solution to a diaconic problem, form the corridor in which Global Learning moves. Global Learning relates worldviews, diversities and contextualities, brings them into communication, makes use of them. The experiences made in such processes usually change each participant’s own worldviews, and they have identity- and personality-forming effects. Results are more than simply an appreciation for diversity or homogeneity and uniformity. Results include deepened multi-perspective expertise, globally interconnected co-operations, mutual support and advice- processes and lasting global exchanges.

Example:

The incompatibility of the worldviews of an atheistic professor of psychology from Germany, for example, with a pastor of a Pentecostal church in South Africa who is engaged in exorcism is obvious. Putting them together without a task with a common interest in finding a solution leads to a clash of different interpretation of pattern and probably only reveals and manifests insurmountable differences. However, Global Learning may become possible, if both of them together seek contextually appropriate solutions for a traumatised, highly religious society, for example, post-Genocide Rwanda. They will come to common solutions that neither of them would be capable achieving by themselves. For this, the atheist professor from Germany does not have to share the worldviews of the South African pastor or convert to Christianity. However, the world view and spirituality of the South African pastor experienced in the learning process will change the professor’s view and in turn, the scientific perspective of the professor will change the pastor’s view and broaden their horizon.

One such extraordinary experience was the UEM Workshop on “Healing through the Arts” held in 2018. Three art therapists from each form of therapy (painting, music, theatre) and from each of the three continents of the UEM (Asia, Africa, Europe) met with international psychologists, psychotherapists and pastoral workers from diaconal institutions. The aim was to develop a common curriculum for an international trauma therapy training. While there were sometimes astonishing parallels in the design of therapy, initially some very different underlying trauma concepts seemed insurmountable. In the process of Global Learning, however, points of contact were increasingly

⁷ For further Information see: United Evangelical Mission, “Education. Study Courses”, [Available at: <https://www.vemission.org/en/weiterbilden/study-courses.html>].

found, for example with regard to the assessment of terms like “possession” and “exorcism” on the one hand and “obsession” and “therapy of addictions” on the other. Even though a final curriculum was not developed (again: Global Learning takes time!), the results were incorporated into a module for the International BA for Social Work, Diaconia and Development and into a certificate course for the training of trauma facilitators at the University in Rwanda.⁸ Participants reported that this conference has changed and broadened their trauma work in their own context in a sustainable way.

Community

The above example points at a fourth condition of Global Learning for diaconia: Trust and a sense of obligation towards each other and towards the common goal.

To acknowledge and respect others with different world views does not develop automatically, and it can be quite difficult to open up oneself to the other. To reveal one’s own biography, contextual and cultural imprint, spiritual experiences and beliefs makes a person vulnerable. In a diverse learning community, a high level of mutual trust is required of the participants and the educational co-ordinators in order to design the learning location as a protected and safe space and to foster acceptance, positive curiosity and mutual co-operation within the learners’ group. The atmosphere of trust also binds together in difficult phases and thus allows controversial discussions and conflicts. This is why faith-based organisations have special capacities for successful Global Learning processes. The shared faith – practically expressed in regular devotions or services – offers a basis on which the high degree of complexity in Global Learning is bearable and can be made fruitful.

Accompaniment and Integration

Pedagogically, Global Learning for diaconia applies the findings of systemic-constructivist adult education⁹ and the sociological idea of “community”. Curricula apply multi-perspectivity and inter-disciplinarity. The highly complex learning processes require accompaniment and support for integration and application. Such accompaniment and support is provided by the lecturing/teaching/tutoring team who help learners integrate what they have seen, learnt, reflected. Support for the learning processes as such is provided by facilitators who need to know the themes, but do not necessarily have teaching roles themselves. They understand themselves as accompaniers. They must not take on roles of “intercultural mediators” or “translators”, but instead support and assist. The needed competences of such facilitators are on the side of attitudes – e.g. to understand oneself as a learner as well and to be able to cope with high degrees of complexity – and on the side of skills like transcultural awareness, empathy, ability to listen actively, and sensitivity for group dynamics.¹⁰

⁸ Start of “The International BA Social Work, Diaconia and Development” is scheduled for September 2021 in co-operation with five universities from Asia, Africa and Europe (United Evangelical Mission, “Education. Study Courses”, <https://www.vemission.org/en/weiterbilden/study-courses.html>). The Certificate Program “Trauma Facilitators” is scheduled to start in September 2020 at the University of Ruanda (Protestant Institute of Arts and Social Sciences, <https://www.piass.ac.rw>).

⁹ The terminology of “facilitators of learning” is not new and comes from the concept of constructivist adult education. The concept emphasises that it is an illusion that a teacher can control what the learner learns and makes the teacher much more a companion, facilitator, and moderator of an inaccessible and individual learning process. This is based on the recognition that new information always needs a connectivity to individual experiences and knowledge of learners, which is unavailable in its diversity. In the concept of constructivist adult education, the definition of learning objectives is therefore not obsolete, but requires a processual adaptation within the learning process. See: I. Schüßler and C.M. Thurnes, *Lernkulturen in der Weiterbildung. Studentexte für die Erwachsenenbildung* (Bielefeld: Deutsches Institut für Erwachsenenbildung, 2005), p. 72.

¹⁰ Without these soft skills, the methodological competence, which can be acquired more quickly, is of limited help. Methods must be applied situation-specific and adequately.

The European Conference for Jews, Christians and Muslims (JCM), of which UEM is one of the organisers, is, by the number of its participants, the biggest annual conference of these three religions in the world. In JCM, a previous experience of global learning is taken as a precondition for all lecturers: Nobody may take over a keynote who has not already attended at least one of the one-week conferences as a participant before.

Managing Disagreement in Global Learning

This joint learning as described comes with challenges. Disagreements and even conflicts are part of such learning processes. This makes it necessary to create a conflict management mechanism that is preventive as well as able to resolve distracting conflicts.

With regard to the preventive conflict mechanism, it is important that the goals of every stage of Global Learning are predetermined and communicated clearly so that parties agree that during the set duration of time, the group of learners want to achieve the specific goals. This agreement can be made in the form of a written curriculum, module description or pre-session agreements that are formulated with the whole group. In doing this, the expectations of the group will be to a certain degree in agreement, and even where disagreements arise, one can always return to what was predetermined before the joint learning started. For a high degree of openness of results and the course of discussions, having an external framework (curriculum) which is reasonably adhered to is very helpful, as well as the adherence to basic rules of non-violent communication.

For more than 40 years, the JCM Conference has followed an almost unchanged fixed and proven schedule and procedure. Usually, only the conference topic and the names of the respective speakers change from year to year. This fixed structure gives participants and responsible persons in the highly dynamic process of global learning a security and minimises distracting conflicts. In addition, consistent attention is paid to ensuring non-violent communication. Each participant may only speak about themselves and their own experience and never speak as an (“official”) representative of their religion or about the religion of others as a whole. Lecturers are required to explain the content of their messages and concerns in their own (biographical) context. These rules are the key for the ongoing success of the conference.

Even with well-defined goals, conflict can still arise, relating to how different parties understand the goals, the ways different parties want to employ to archive the goals, and due to communication barriers. Conflicts in themselves are not bad, often there are necessary, since they are a manifestation of the different cultures, worldviews, and experiences within the learners’ group. The foundational differences may lead into practical differences that may be interesting to explore together, and could lead into mutual learning, that puts into question what has always been taken for granted. This can be the case if there is a carefully designed process where people of different faiths pressure to accomplish a joint agreed social transformation goal, inspired by their religious conviction, carefully moderated and facilitated by competent facilitators

Not all of the conflicts can and have to be resolved, but all of them have to be managed so that they do not lead into any kind of violence to the dignity of the other, be it psychological, verbal, structural or physical. It is important to note that the facilitator is not there to make sure that conflicts do not arise, or to lead the group into turning a blind eye on the conflicts, but to assist the group to recognise the underlying cultural or religious experiences and other factors that led to the conflict in the first place, and what can be learnt from them.

For conflicts, it is the duty of the facilitator to step in as mediator or even arbitrator on the base of jointly agreed rules and procedures. Despite the fact that there can be a lot to learn from any conflicts during a joint learning session, there are some conflicts that are dangerous if they are left open, since they may lead into strengthening stereotypes, polarisation or segregation. This could be the case, for instance, when the conflict has been triggered because of claims of superiority of opinion, or introduction of false propaganda. If such

escalation cannot be prevented, it may be necessary for the facilitator to interrupt or suspend the learning process.

The communion of UEM has faced challenges e.g. through the HIV/AIDS crises also in its normative settings due to the emergence of related discussions on homosexuality, promiscuity or premarital sex. The diversity of an international church community is seldom as significant as in the area of sexual morals. With regard to issues of controversy, the concept of “safe spaces” was successfully established in UEM and is still in use today. The common goal of the Safe Spaces is explicitly not to arrive at a common conviction, but rather to explain the various points of view as well as cultural and biographical backgrounds of participating members. It is done in a protected, confidential setting through “story telling” without any judgments or condemnations. Staff are not allowed to participate. The outcome of such “safe space- meetings” is usually not a joint conviction, but a joint understanding of diversity.

Going jointly through a Global Learning process often leads to lasting relationships, professionally and personally, which transform into professional networks later. Such networks continue the global and inter-contextual exchange and co-operation and thus foster further and continuing Global Learning for diaconia. How these can be shaped and used in the best ways, so that they inform global discourses on social developments and diaconia, would be a topic for another exploration.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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102. CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT FOR DIACONIA AND TRAINING IN CHRISTIAN SOCIAL SERVICES

Beate Hofmann¹

The institute for diaconic science and management in Bethel/ Bielefeld in Germany (IDM) is part of the Protestant University Wuppertal/Bethel. As an institution for academic training and research in diaconia and diaconic management, it offers a Master programme of Diaconic Management for students world-wide and a PhD in the research of diaconia. The institute was founded in 2009, but the Master programme was already established, having begun in 2004.²

Target Groups and Formats for Training in Diaconia

These target groups are quite diverse:

- Social organisations who want to prepare their employees for the special approach of Christian social services that requires expertise in professional areas as well as in Christian spirituality and theology.
- Volunteers who serve in social services need to know about their tasks, and the legal aspects as well as spiritual perspectives in their service.
- Pastors and deacons who co-operate with social services need to know about the political, legal, financial and professional perspectives of the organisations and the field in which they want to be active.
- Future leaders and entrepreneurs in social services need to know about the management of social services and the special challenge of bringing together professional, economic, legal and theological perspectives in running a social organisation.

Depending on the target group, the length and the level of training will be quite diverse. Employees and volunteers usually go for short-term seminars as continuing education in church or in their organisations, while the training of pastors, deacons, other professionals and leaders needs in-depth education, often on an academic level.

While Jutta Beldermann's contribution (see next essay in this section, page 705ff) deals with continuing education, this essay will focus on the academic training, especially at masters level for people who will be responsible for leading Christian social services and have already an academic degree and some professional experience.

Multirationality Is a Key Concept for Leadership Training in Diaconia

The goal of this training is to qualify for leadership from a multirational perspective. This means that leaders have to be able to understand the different "languages" and logics that are involved in a social organisation: There are different professional perspectives such as social work, nursing, medical studies, and education as well as business administration, public health and law. Some of these perspectives go along quite well, others contradict each other in their approach to sense making, anthropology, business goals etc.

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² (English) <http://www.diakoniewissenschaft-idm.de/studiengaenge/int-m-a-diac-management/>; (German) <http://www.diakoniewissenschaft-idm.de/institut/>.

Therefore, multirationality is more than interdisciplinarity, it needs platforms where the different perspectives can interact and discuss issues from their different perspectives. Leaders have to be able to moderate these processes and to realise what kind of strategy is necessary for any given situation.³ An interdisciplinary group of students is a good starting point while providing a challenge to explain business plans to theologians and theology to those in business.

In order to prepare for that task, a systemic approach is helpful. System theory analyses organisations as systems in their context, taking into account the different stakeholders, their interests and interaction themes and the structuring aspects of the organisation and its modes of change as well as the tasks and dynamics that management can introduce.⁴

Learning Objectives

One of the goals of academic training in diaconic management is to enable students to “read” and analyse their organisation and its context. By encountering different examples of social services, the students learn that there are very diverse possibilities when structuring and organising social services, each of which is dependent on local contexts. In addition, students have to learn about the impact of intercultural settings. Different traditions in regard to spirituality, healing, care, family systems, influence of cultural concepts such as *ubuntu* (an understanding of community in some African cultures), *pancasila* (the concept of society in Indonesia) or autonomy (a guiding principle in some western European ethics) need to be understood to see why people consider the world differently and have varying values and norms.

Therefore, training in diaconia requires multidisciplinary and intercultural competencies. It is much more than a theological training about the origin and meaning of “diakonia”.

Students have to clarify their own perspectives and the basic concepts in their theological and ethical thinking. It is helpful to ask for their “burning questions” and to develop the curriculum in response to these questions. Students in our masters programme raised questions such as: Who is stronger: ancestors or a Christian God? Is there a place for armed struggle in the diaconic work? Why is the African continent still poor in the midst of highly religious activities? How do we deal with other religions in diaconic services? Answers to these questions and concepts for Christian social services in the related churches have to take into account these challenges, local traditions, ethnic tensions etc. Students also have to understand that there is no standard answer to their questions but it has to be developed from their own context by using certain theological, economic and social paradigms. Key concepts such as love of one’s neighbour, mercy, grace, charity, advocacy, empowerment, ministry, service, and accountability may be helpful, but they have to be analysed in regard to their political, ethical and cultural implications. Furthermore, questions of intersectionality between sex, race or ethnicity, class and health have to be part of the curriculum.

The basic tasks of such training programs are designed to enable students to find adequate resources and theories that will fit for their context, to reflect on them and to develop their own perspective by discussing different theological, political and economic theories and paradigms. Guiding theories and leading principles have to be critically discussed in order to see their ideological, ethical and cultural bias.

Methods of Teaching

Methods of teaching in such a programme have to be diverse and have to foster independent thinking and thorough reflection. Running through many slides and learning by rote certain theories and approaches is not enough. A multicultural and multidisciplinary group of students and teachers is a good starting point, as is

³ See Kuno Schedler and Johannes Rüegg-Stürm (eds) *Multirationales Management*. (Bern: Haupt Verlag 2013).

⁴ See Johannes Rüegg-Stürm and Simon Grand, *The St. Gallen Management Model* (Bern: Haupt Verlag, 2016).

learning by analysing one's own context, biography and organisation, learning from examples, field research and interviews with experts in different contexts, developing and explaining one's own perspective and position in short papers or presentations and in a master thesis. Managing projects to apply what has been learnt and mentoring can be additional ways of supporting learning processes. There needs to be time for theory as well as for field trips, but also for personal interaction and sharing spirituality as a way to get to know each other. Personal storytelling is an integral part of such a training because it creates an awareness around one's own perspective as well as other approaches. Methods of adult education and group work will support reaching the learning objectives.⁵

Curriculum Development and Enhancement

In order to develop a curriculum sufficient to the challenges, it is helpful to take into account experiences of different stakeholders: church leaders, entrepreneurs, colleagues from other programmes and international agencies who can all provide important insights for the development and continuing improvement of the curriculum. Alumni of the programme are very helpful in evaluating the adequacy of the programme enabling them to respond to the challenges of the future praxis. An example for this type of curriculum development comes from German continuing education and is called "product laboratory". For a day, people from different perspectives are invited to get to know and discuss the planned programme.⁶ Their insights can enrich the programme and will produce future students. Constant evaluation and continuing quality management of the programme through academic certification will secure the adequacy and academic standards of such a programme.

Curriculum Plan for Master in Diaconic Management at the Protestant University Wuppertal/Bethel

I M 1	Multirational Management in Diaconia and Social Economy
	<p>Learning goals and learning contents Module 1 lays the foundation for perceiving diaconia as a productive social system, as a hybrid organisation and as an (economic) enterprise, in which multirational, i.e., theological, economic and further professional perspectives meet and where interdisciplinary management and co-operation are important.</p> <p>Learning Contents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to the St. Gallen Management Model • Concept of a multirational management • Theory of a hybrid organisation • Theological Perception of Reality and Economic Perception of Reality
I M 2	Diaconia: Emergence, Structures, Profiles
	<p>Learning Goals Module 2 looks deeper into the history of modern diaconia, in order to understand its coming into being in connection with historical forms of church and the surrounding society. This shall lead to a professional understanding and appropriate dealing with an enterprise's history.</p> <p>Learning contents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baselines of the history of modern diaconia in Germany and the social welfare reconstruction after the second World War

⁵ See Jörg Knoll, *Kurs- und Seminarmethoden*, 11th edition (Weinheim, Basel: Beltz, 2007); Horst Siebert, *Didaktisches Handeln in der Erwachsenenbildung*, 7th edition. Augsburg: Zielverlag, 2012.

⁶ See Rudolf Tippelt, Jutta Reich, Aiga von Hippel, Heiner Barz and Dajana Baum, *Weiterbildung und soziale Milieus in Deutschland*. Bd. 3: Milieumarketing implementieren (Bielefeld: Bertelsmann, 2008), pp. 56-67.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The expansion of the welfare sector in the context of social legislation and development of a welfare state 1961/68ff • Embedding in the context of economic diaconia
I M 3	Value-oriented Management and Diaconal Ethics
	<p>Learning Goals The third module introduces the students to value-oriented management. They get to know concepts of economic and institutional ethics in order to make ethically grounded decisions.</p> <p>Learning Contents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to value-oriented management • Concepts of Economic and Institutional Ethics • Various ethical theories/hypotheses • Ways toward ethical decision making • Diaconic ethic as a management task based on concrete examples
I M 4	Diaconic Theology: Tasks and Functions
	<p>Learning Goals In Module 4, the students gain an overview of central theological arguments for diaconic actions and of actual discourses on the role and task of theology in diaconia in its different manifestations.</p> <p>Learning Contents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biblical Aspects of Diaconia, • Models of Justification of Diaconia • Functions of diaconic theology in the leadership of diaconic enterprise and beyond • Reference to Multirationality (Relationship Theology – Economy).
I M 5	Leadership and Management in Diaconia and Social Economy
	<p>Learning Goals Module 5 imparts theories on leadership and stimulates contemplation of own leadership role and practice. Reflection on decision-making praxis in diaconic enterprises and support of one's ability to decide.</p> <p>Learning contents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Models of leaderships / Leadership in hybrid organisations, • Role of leadership and style of leadership, personnel management and personnel development • Management of social systems and corporate governance • Diaconia as social system • St. Gallen Management Model 4th Generation (SGMM 4)
I M 6	Transforming Internal Structures of Diaconal Corporations: Strategy, Structure, Culture
	<p>Learning Goals In Module 6, the students encounter central theories, actual challenges and practical examples of shaping and developing a diaconic enterprise.</p> <p>Learning Contents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business culture and their design possibilities • Diversity management in diaconic relevance • Conflict management • Theory and practice of change management • Performance management • Strategic management: central theories, case studies

I M 7	Designing Management Concretions: Instruments of Operative Management
	<p>Learning Goals Module 7 imparts foundations for the ability to act in central business fields of business leadership. For this, basic business and legal knowledge of relevant fields will be brought closer and central instruments will be introduced.</p> <p>Learning Contents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personnel Management • Strategic Finance Management (including strategic controlling) • Risk Management • Communication Management • Performance Management
I M 8	Innovation and entrepreneurial action in diaconia and social economy in international horizons
	<p>Learning goals In Module 8, the students get to know the peculiarity of social innovations and social entrepreneurship as model of financing in non-profit enterprises. In addition, an emphasis will be on European Diaconia or Diaconia worldwide in social spatial orientation.</p> <p>Learning Contents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peculiarity of social innovations • Social entrepreneurship as a model of financing • Influencing variables and learning spaces for the social economy • Conditions of worldwide diaconia • Diaconia and society or social spatial orientation
I M 9	Economy in Context
	<p>Learning Objectives Module 10 introduces students to economic contexts and provides foundational knowledge about regional forms of economy. The socio-economic contexts will be presented and compared.</p> <p>Learning Contents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundations of economics, socio-economic contexts in Germany • Socio-economic contexts and actual challenges in Africa • Socio-economic contexts and actual challenges in South Asia (Philippines)
I M 10	Theology in Context
	<p>Learning Goals Module 9 introduces students to theological approaches and contexts and provides basic knowledge about regional forms of theology. The theological contexts will each presented and compared with each other.</p> <p>Learning Contents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theology and Diaconia in the German context • African theologies (“Black Theology”) • Asian theologies (“Theology of Struggle”)
I M 11	Masters Thesis
	<p>Learning Goals and Learning Contents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Masters Thesis should demonstrate the student’s ability to do independent academic work, especially independent academic work in finding a solution to a problem in the field of diaconic management. • The students should apply their theoretical knowledge acquired in the course of the study programme in solving a complex academic task from the area of activity of leadership of a diaconic organisation or utilise it to obtain application-oriented results.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through the Masters Thesis, theoretical insights from readings and course subjects on the one hand and practical experiences and insights on-site on the other hand will be integrated.
I M 12	Scientific/Academic Writing
	<p>Learning Objectives The students can independently work diaconic-scientifically. They possess the abilities towards the technical discovery of knowledge (<i>Wissenserschließung</i>) and towards a discipline-specific academic methodological competence. They can technically and correctly process diaconic-scientific questions in written and in oral form.</p> <p>Learning Contents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to technical research • Introduction to technical argumentation with techniques of presentation • Writing of academic essays which correspond to the standards in form and content and are well-structured and consistently applied • Introduction to the methods of qualitative and quantitative social research and their application in Masters Theses
I M 13	Intercultural learning and Diaconic Management
	<p>Learning Goals Imparting different national, socio-cultural contexts, contexts of participating universities; Impartation of various cultural contexts of diaconia</p> <p>Learning contents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deepening of the reflection on the theological, religious and spiritual contexts • Deepening of the reflection on the cultural traditions of contexts of the students • Deepening of the reflection on the respective socio-cultural contexts of diaconia in the home countries of the students • Reflection on the theory-praxis transfers in the regional context after returning to the professional context • Deepening of the theory-praxis impartation between the phases of the study programme
I M 14	Diaconic Management in Context (Field Research)
	<p>Learning Goals To be able to perceive and design cultural, socio-economic and social-political dimensions of diaconic enterprise To be able to transfer learning contents under various cultural and socio-economic conditions in leadership action Getting to know the specific regional forms and challenges of diaconia and compare them</p> <p>Learning Contents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diaconia in Germany: Entrepreneurial diaconia under the conditions of the welfare state • Diaconia in South Africa as advocacy for reconciliation between the ethnic groups and for equal social participation • Diaconia in the Philippines: the special challenges of diaconic work as charity and without government support. • Community-based diaconia (<i>Gemeinwesendiakonie</i>) in Tanzania as example for diaconic work in a rural space in East Africa

Recommendations for Further Reading

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103. DIACONIC TRAINING IN THE EV. BILDUNGSSTÄTTE FÜR DIAKONIE UND GEMEINDE (V. BODELSCHWINGH FOUNDATIONS BETHEL,¹ GERMANY)

Jutta Beldermann²

Introduction

Diaconic training has a long tradition in German diaconic institutions and churches and proves to be still relevant for the diaconic culture and the social engagement of churches in secularised societies. Currently the education/training to become a Deacon is an important task of church/diaconia-related educational institutions. This essay describes the education/training for Deacons (both male and female) in the Ev. Church in Westfalia (who undergo their training in tandem with work) as it is made available by the Ev. Bildungsstätte für Diakonie und Gemeinde in Bethel.³

In Germany and other European countries, the training to become a deacon leads to a “double qualification”.⁴ Students either study a social profession in combination with theological/diaconal subjects at Universities of Applied Science or (this is the case in the training described beneath) they have already finished their vocational training or reached an academic level (mostly BA), have had some years of occupational praxis and then take the courses to become a deacon.

Diaconic training is, as described by Beate Hofmann,⁵ interdisciplinary and multirational. Issues are presented and discussed in context and in view of the students’ professional expertise, rationality and experience. Theology is taught as an important basis of diaconia and unfolds its significance for diaconia being discussed in relation to other relevant professional perspectives.

This interdisciplinary and multirational approach is fostered by the system in which it is organised in Bethel. The curriculum has 3 levels/18 modules and combines the training to become a deacon with the continuing education for members of staff. Twelve modules (green in the graphic below) are open for staff who want to gain knowledge and discuss theological/diaconic issues related to their own fields of work. Students who want to become deacons, bring into the learning process their occupational background of social professions, other participants add a variety of different perspectives, e.g. education, economy, management, from different hierarchical levels, including executives.

In a secularised and multireligious society, it is not possible to recruit all staff from Christian churches and even staff, who are church members, may not always be familiar with biblical tradition or theological

¹ The v. Bodelschwingh Foundations Bethel is a diaconic institution/enterprise with its headquarter in Bielefeld/Germany. Founded in 1867, it concentrates on work with mentally and psychologically handicapped persons, people with special social needs and children/youth in need of special care. It also runs several hospitals. Currently, it consists of more than 230 single institutions in Western, Northern and Eastern regions of Germany. In the following, the abbreviation “Bethel” will be used for v. Bodelschwingh Foundations Bethel.

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³ Many churches in Germany ordain Deacons. The training is offered by schools or universities of applied science, with which the churches co-operate. In the case of the Ev. Church of Westfalia, deacons are trained in two Universities of Applied Science (Bielefeld/Bethel and Bochum) or in Schools (Bethel and Diaconic Foundation Wittekindshof).

⁴ Thomas Zippert, Jutta Beldermann and Bernd Heide (eds), *Brücken zwischen sozialer Arbeit und diakonischer Theologie* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2016); Annette Noller, Ellen Eidt and Heinz Schmidt (eds), *Diakonat – theologische und sozialwissenschaftliche Perspektiven auf ein kirchliches Amt* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2012).

⁵ See the preceding contribution in this volume by Beate Hofmann on Curriculum Development for Diaconia and Training in Christian Social Services in the Institute for Diaconia Management.

discourse. In 2016, the Protestant Church in Germany released a regulation⁶ which formulates the legal aspects of diaconic education and training. In §2, 3 it says: “Employers have the task, to make their staff familiar with the basic Christian principles of their work. They support education on issues of faith and the Christian understanding of human life.”⁷ The regulation describes the organisational responsibility of diaconic organisations/enterprises. The “Position on Cultural and Religious Plurality” (Bethel)⁸ states: “It is part of the professionalism of a diaconic enterprise, that all members of staff know the Christian position of their employer and can take part in its shaping.” Executives are especially responsible for encouraging their teams to take a multidimensional perspective (including the theological), in discussions on religious issues amongst their teams as well as on behaviour and attitude towards patients, clients, colleagues etc.

Diaconic education plays an important role for diaconic culture, i.e. for Christian culture in a social service system. The Study of the Institute for Diaconic Research and Management at the Theological Seminary Wuppertal/Bethel in Germany (IDM)⁹ has proved that it is of great importance for the establishment of a diaconic culture to offer space for diaconic discourse and communication,¹⁰ in which members of staff may discuss both their own and their employers understanding of their work. It also proved the necessity of so-called “persons of reference”,¹¹ who in the course of work, stand for the Christian culture of the diaconic institution/enterprise.

Systematic Diaconic Education and Training in Bethel

The Ev. Bildungsstätte offers a curriculum of 3 courses each with 6 modules. The curriculum and workload is regulated by Church law¹² and an agreement among German diaconic institutions on diaconic education.¹³ The first two levels in Bethel offer non-formal continuous education in combination with the professional training for deacons (two green inner circles). Participation in all three levels formally prepares a student for the exam of the Ev. Church of Westfalia for deacons.¹⁴

Examination regulations of the Westfalian Church require:¹⁵

- Bible and Theology
- Diaconia/Church and Society
- Spirituality and Witness
- Care and Counselling
- Ethics and Responsibility
- Diaconic Identity and Community.

⁶ Richtlinie des Rates der EKD über kirchliche Anforderungen der beruflichen Mitarbeit in der EKD und ihrer Diakonie vom 9. Dezember 2016.

⁷ Translation by the author.

⁸ Positionspapier vBS Bethel 2014, translation by the author.

⁹ Beate Hofmann (ed), *Merkmale diakonischer Unternehmenskultur in einer pluralen Gesellschaft* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2018).

¹⁰ Jutta Beldermann, “Diakonische Bildung – Räume für den diakonischen Diskurs”, in: Heidi Albrecht, Frieder Grau and Daniela Krause-Wack (eds), *Diakonische Unternehmen und Gemeinschaften – Partner für gelingende Diakonie* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt 2019), p. 242; Thorsten Moos (Hrsg.), *Diakonische Kultur* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2018), p. 258.

¹¹ German: *Ankerpersonen*.

¹² Kirchengesetz über das Amt, die Ausbildung und die Anstellung der Diakoninnen und Diakone in der Evangelischen Kirche der Union (Diakonengesetz – DiakG) vom 5. Juni 1993.

¹³ Zehlendorfer Verband, Kaiserswerther Verband, Verband Evangelischer Diakonen- und Diakoninnengemeinschaften in Deutschland e.V., *Bildungswege im Diakonat*, 2004.

¹⁴ Modules may be booked separately.

¹⁵ See summary of the curriculum below.

Participants

Participants who want to become a deacon in the Westfalian Church must be a member of the Protestant Church in Germany. Participants who only book the courses on the “green level” (Basic Course Diaconia, Extension Course Diaconicum) are mostly members of a Protestant Church or the Roman-Catholic Church. Many participants may also be of other faiths or identify as atheists. Learning groups on both green levels are therefore intercultural and often interreligious.

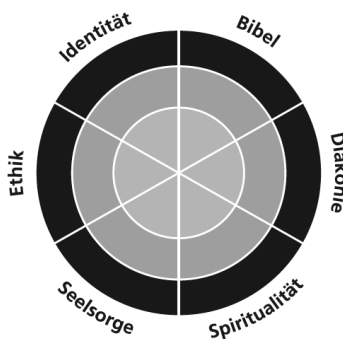
Participants are trained to discuss diaconic issues from an interdisciplinary and multirational perspective. They are involved in structural discussions and strategic planning in their respective diaconic organisations. Many “stand for” a church and/or a Christian perspective in their respective environment. They do not only gain knowledge and experience of Christian faith and rituals, but also the ability to reflect and discuss issues on the basis of Christian understanding and in relation to other professional rationalities, be it within the diaconic context or in a wider society.¹⁶

Diaconia is church, therefore it is the task and the chance of diaconia to proclaim the gospel in a “multidimensional” way. In diaconia, where work and life comes together organically, participants understand in the course of the training, that the proclamation of the gospel “by deed” happens in diaconic contexts by all members of staff, who contribute in fulfilling the Church’s commission¹⁷ and they recognise their work as part of the communication of the gospel even if they are not Christians.

Teaching Staff

Teachers in the Ev. Bildungsstätte are qualified academically. However, diaconic education/training must also meet the methodological requirements of adult education. Participants are autonomous adults who want to learn, but also have great knowledge and experience to offer in the learning process. Teachers are understood as partners in discussion rather than being only transmitters of knowledge. To support a diaconic understanding of reality and a diaconic attitude, teachers need to be role models, authentic and experienced in diaconic processes. They must be ready to relate their teaching to current diaconic challenges and to critically and credibly reflect their professional praxis and assist the participants to develop their own critical perspective.

The Curriculum Design of Three Interrelated Courses on Diaconia



¹⁶ Jutta Belderman, “Diakonische Qualität kirchlichen Handelns”, in: Thomas Zippert, Jutta Beldermann and Bernd Heide (eds), *Brücken zwischen sozialer Arbeit und diakonischer Theologie* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2016), p. 21.

¹⁷ Richtlinie des Rates der EKD über kirchliche Anforderungen der beruflichen Mitarbeit in der EKD und ihrer Diakonie vom 9. Dezember 2016, §2 Abs. 1.

The Basic-Course on Diaconia (inner circle/light green) consists of 6 two-day-modules. It offers basic knowledge of the principles of diaconia in correspondence to the professional fields of work of the participants. (1 cp/module)

The Extension Course “Diaconicum” (middle circle/darker green) offers 6 modules, each of 4 days. It concentrates on a theory-praxis-transfer: 2 days of theory are followed by approximately 6 to 8 weeks of praxis and following 2 days for reflection. Participants receive a qualified certificate “Diaconikum”. (3 cp/module)

Advanced Course (outer circle/blue): To reach the formal examination for deacons in the Ev. Church of Westfalia the certificates of the first two non-formal courses are recognised. After the advanced course (6 modules of 10-15 days, 40cp) and exams, participants may be ordained as Deacons of the Ev. Church of Westfalia. The modules used in these courses are the following:

Bible and Theology

Basic/extended level: Participants gain an overview of the Bible and the main issues of Christian faith. They are introduced to exemplary theological questions and understand the main biblical and theological foundations of diaconia. They gain experience in theological discourses in the multirational perspectives of diaconia.

Advanced level: Participants obtain profound knowledge of the biblical tradition and its development. They learn to work with biblical texts (hermeneutics) and understand the dogmatic principles of Christian faith more deeply. They are capable of discussing issues of faith and action in their respective diaconic contexts. The modules set the theological basis to take responsibility for the diaconic commission within their social profession (double qualification).

Diaconia/Church and Society

Basis/extended level: Participants reflect on the current challenges of diaconia. They understand exemplary aspects of legal and economic structures of diaconia as well as cultural and religious plurality.

Advanced level: Participants have the knowledge to understand diaconia and church on a theological and historical basis and are able to reflect on their own work in the socio-economic and legal context of diaconic organisations. They know to include central aspects of diaconic science in their work and are able to manage multicultural and multireligious settings and dialogue.

Spirituality and Preaching

Basic/extended level: Participants become familiar with diverse aspects of Christian spirituality and worship in the field of diaconia and find and/or widen their spiritual approach.

Advanced level: Participants are able to conduct worship services in diaconia and the church as well as settings of Christian education. They understand the theoretical and methodological foundation of Christian spirituality and communication of the Gospel in Christian and multicultural/multireligious settings.

Care and Counselling

Basic/extended level: Participants learn the principles and basic methods of care and counselling and develop their own tools to handle situations in which counselling is required.

Advanced level: Participants are able to accompany persons in existential situations and are capable of reflecting on their own person and professional work.

Ethics and Responsibility

Basic/extended level: Participants know the principles of ethical decision-making and develop skills to discuss ethical questions and challenges in their fields of work.

Advanced level: Participants are able to take active part or lead ethical discussions in their respective fields. They are able to reflect on their actions on the basis of ethical positions and understand the theological reasoning of ethical solutions.

Diaconic Identity and Community

Basic/extended level: Participants share views of their diaconic work in the light of diaconic science and are able to discuss issues professionally, including a biblical/theological point of view. They reflect their role in their respective diaconic organisation.

Advanced level: Participants develop their position, role and identity as “double qualified” deacons. They are able to reflect on diaconic concepts and actions from different perspectives and rationalities.

Conclusion

If the profession of a deacon (male/female) had not already been a tradition in German diaconia/churches, a tradition which dates back more than 150 years, it would have to be invented now. It is of great value for diaconic institutions and churches to employ a member of staff who is “double-qualified”, i.e. well-trained in social work or education as well as theologically. In their hands, minds and hearts, diaconic work is performed and reflected on in an interdisciplinary and multirational way. Training centres for diaconic education are therefore not only an important place for personal but also of organisational development of diaconic institutions and churches.

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104. LIST OF SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHICAL RESOURCES FOR CONTEXTUAL DIACONAL STUDIES: TEXTBOOKS, ARTICLES, WEBSITES

Godwin Ampony and Félicité Ngingtedem

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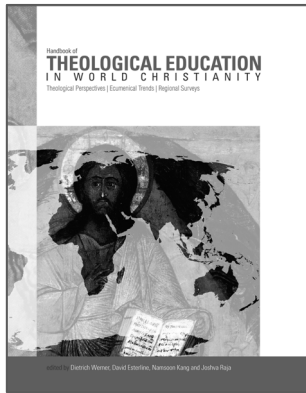
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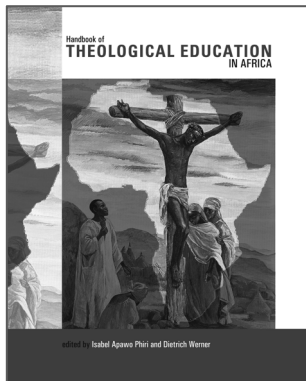
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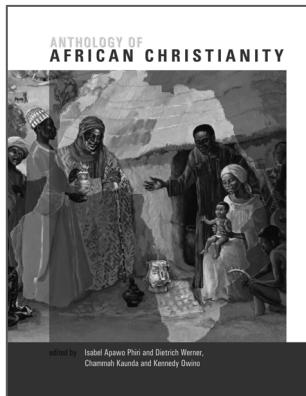
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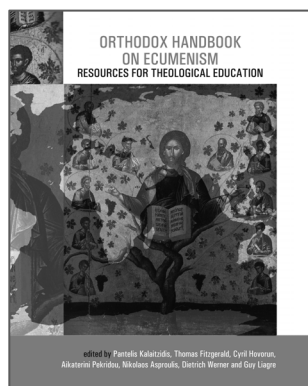


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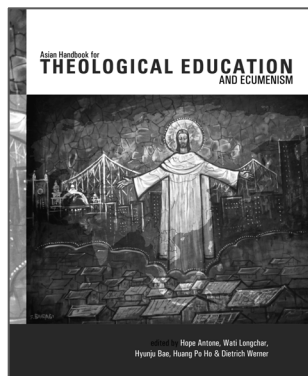
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