Theology and Diakonia
Faith in Action

Edited by
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Preface

This third volume in the One World Theology edition examines the importance of diakonia for Christian theology. In keeping with the overall objective of the edition its purpose is to provide a platform for an exchange of views within the universal Church. For that reason theologians from different countries have been invited to investigate the relationship between charity and theology from their specific regional perspectives. On the one hand, the articles are juxtaposed and may be mutually contradictory. On the other hand, they complement each other and encourage readers to compare and contrast their own theological ideas with seemingly alien concepts, thereby offering the prospect of enrichment through engagement with the views of others. What might seem disconcerting at first can thus become a source of increased knowledge and enable theology to develop its catholic breadth.

This volume has five chapters, the first of which is concerned with “Charitable Work as the Discipleship of Jesus Christ.” Mary Sylvia Nwachukwu, addressing the subject from an African viewpoint, examines the extent to which diaconal ministry is at the heart of the discipleship of Jesus Christ. Bridging the gap between soteriology and charity, she demonstrates that charity and mission are inseparably linked. In the following article Francis D’Sa examines the relationship between charity and spirituality, or action and contemplation, from an Indian perspective. He contrasts Christian theology with the tradition of the Bhagavad Gita and formulates the thesis that acts of healing, as seen from a mystical standpoint, are only possible if people are open to a spiritual view of things. The article by Klaus Vellguth entitled “Tracing the Footsteps of Jesus” investigates the extent to which religiously motivated works of charity existed in the ancient civilisations of Egypt, Greece and Rome. It reveals that such works were a manifestation of Judeo-Christian thought, there being an inseparable link between the contemplative and the active spiritual
dimension. Pro-social behaviour and care for the needy without any selfish agenda becomes “a mystical place where a person can meet Christ or God.” In the next article, written from a Latin American perspective and a liberation theology standpoint, Carlos Maria Pagano Fernández presents his thoughts on charity work as the discipleship of Jesus, illustrating the forms that prophetic *diakonia* can take when confronted with neo-liberal economic structures and threats to the environment.

The articles in the second chapter focus on “Charity and the Evangelising Mission of the Church.” David Kaulem considers this issue against the background of a globalising world and the call for a “Theology of the One World”. He examines the tension between contextuality and universality from an African vantage point and establishes that “In this sense, the theology of the one world seems to be ‘deeper social understanding’ that is in fact ahead of its time. It gives us a vision of what the world could be.” In his remarks on the (partly politically influenced) diaconal dimension of Church activities he stresses the importance of subsidiarity, solidarity and good governance, which are the cornerstones of Christian social teaching.

Andrew G. Recepcion deals with the relationship between *diakonia* and mission, which he identifies as key concepts in both the New Testament and the Second Vatican Council. He connects the diaconal with the missionary dimension of the Church and sees compassionate love as one of the main challenges of this mission. Mauricio Urrea Carrillo adopts a contextual approach in setting out his thoughts on *diakonia*, first examining the diaconal dimension in the biblical context and then transferring the diaconal consequences to a specific Latin American context: the suffering endured by people living along the northern Mexican border with the United States. Carrillo illustrates the forces impacting on the lives of people in this region and draws conclusions for diaconal pastoral care with a focus on cultural renewal and education. “The Missionary Dimension of Diaconal Activity” by Klaus Krämer is written from a European perspective. He looks at the connection between mission and social activity against the background, amongst other things, of the work of the relief organisations run by the universal Church. These organisations and the work they do must be measured against the actions of Jesus as the norm to which they should aspire. Diaconal activity is identified as being a place of encounter with God, “if we succeed in discovering its existential
dimension of depth and making contact with the healing reality of God.” Diaconal activity (including that of Church relief organisations) thus becomes witness to the faith and, in view of the current decline in the relevance of ecclesial proclamation, “could once again become one of the decisive criteria for the credibility of Christianity in a secular society.”

The chapter on “Charity Seen through the Eyes of Local Churches” begins with a contribution from Asia. Edmund Kee-Fook Chia deals with the concept of *diakonia* in Catholic Church documents in Asia. Looking at the threefold dialogue with faiths, cultures and the poor defined by the Asian Bishops’ Conference (FABC), Chia shows that the diaconal dimension of the Church determines the way it sees itself and is at the heart of its evangelising mission. “The triple dialogue with the religions, the cultures and the poor is the life and mode of being Christian in Asia. All three components make up the single mission of the Church and constitute its *diakonia* to the wider Asian society.” Socorro Martínez and Pablo Mella from Latin America then add their thoughts, taking as their starting point the pastoral model of the Ecclesial Base Communities (CEBs), whose movement has undergone a pastoral “re-launch”. At the two continental meetings of the CEBs in Bolivia (2008) and Honduras (2012), in particular, the importance of a diaconal commitment was stressed since it enables people to live well. The authors underline the urgent need for CEBs to network with each other so that their commitment to *diakonia* can be transformed into a force for change in society. In his article on “The Programme of Jesus: A heart which sees” Rainer Maria Cardinal Woelki begins with Benedict XVI’s encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, which he describes as “a milestone in the official recognition of charity by the Catholic Church as one of its fundamental principles.” Woelki links the statements made in the papal encyclical with the German bishops’ message “Berufen zur caritas” (Called to Charity) of 2009 in which the bishops coined the term “open-eyed mysticism for the suffering of other people.” He concludes by formulating the consequences for both the Caritas organisation and for the life of individual Christians and Christian congregations. At the end of this chapter Patrick Chibuko connects his thoughts on the Year of Faith and the challenges it poses for the Church in Africa with the social situation on the African continent. Drawing on the thoughts contained in the two post-synodal documents *Ecclesia in Africa und Africae munus*, he
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says that “it belongs to the dynamics of faith to bear fruits especially through sharing (koinonia) and loving selfless service (diakonia).”

The chapter on “Connecting Diakonia with the Liturgy and Catechesis” begins with an article by the Nigerian theologian George Ehusani. He also cites the fundamental encyclical Deus Caritas Est, which says that proclaiming the word of God, celebrating the sacraments and exercising the ministry of charity presuppose each other. He continues by emphasising the social component of the Eucharist: “Eucharistic devotion is complete only when such a devotion expresses itself in the love of neighbour, in the sharing of life and resources with the neighbour, in the readiness to forgive the neighbour, in the willingness to deny oneself of comfort and privileges, and to engage in selfless service for the well-being and salvation of the neighbour.” The next article by Paul Puthanangady advocates a paradigm shift in the liturgical ministry of the Church towards an involvement in the here and now. From this he draws the consequences for ecological liberation and, from the Eucharistic sharing, the consequences for economic liberation. In doing so, he highlights the perspectives that a Eucharistic life has for the social liberation of the faithful. In the light of his experiences in Latin America, Victor Hernández Hernández argues in favour of an inculturated liturgy. Beginning with the feet-washing ceremony described in the Gospel according to Saint John, he sees a close connection between the Eucharist, the liturgy and diakonia. He then looks at the prospects for an inculturated catechesis, which provides scope for personal religious experience: “Catechesis, as a service of the Word and cultures, is first and foremost the start of a personal encounter with Christ in the places where people live.” Taking the situation in Latin America as his starting point, he draws attention to the aspects that must be considered in an inculturated catechesis committed to diakonia. Joachim Cardinal Meisner closes this chapter with his contribution on “Leitourgía: serving God and serving one’s neighbour”, in which he examines the history of liturgy and notes that serving God and serving one’s neighbour were combined right from the start, as Benedict XVI stated in his encyclical Deus Caritas Est.

The fifth chapter on the “Vision of a Diaconal Church” begins again with a contribution from Africa in which Raymond Bernard Goudjo focuses on the origins of diakonia in the Acts of the Apostles.
He shows that in the early Church *diakonia* did not take precedence over catechesis but was closely linked with it. He goes on to show that ecclesial charity must not be content just to remedy social wrongs. “It is indeed crucial to avoid reducing the charitable works of the Church and of our Christian communities to the mere equivalent of social services or charitable organisations.” Goudjo advocates a diaconal Church whose social activities are inspired by faith and give expression to that faith. Judette Gallares also begins with the Acts of the Apostles, although hers is an Asian perspective. She analyses the way in which Stephen, Phoebe and Timothy understood the diaconal ministry, pointing out that it was always closely associated with leadership tasks in the Church and drawing conclusions for a spirituality of the diaconal Church: “It is a spirituality that deems compassion as the heart of mission, calling us to an affective and effective love of neighbor.” A spirituality of this kind changes the face of the Church and gives it a prophetic character. Olga Consuelo Vélez Caro follows up on this point. Beginning with an examination of the origins of the term *diakonia*, she then draws on statements made in *Lumen Gentium* and other seminal ecclesial (not just Catholic) documents to outline an ecclesiological model of service supported, in particular, by statements from the Latin American Bishops’ Conference (and its General Conferences in Medellin and Aparecida). She regards the rediscovery or realisation of a diaconal Church as a major challenge and outstanding opportunity at the outset of the third millennium: “In times when there is an urgent need to forge world peace and to work for social justice, cultural and religious pluralism, new social structures and new gender relationships, a servant Church can act as a powerful image of the Kingdom of God and make a specific contribution to its realisation.”

Finally, Peter Neher analyses the prerequisites for a Church with a future. He pinpoints the challenges for society and the Church and develops theological perspectives for the future viability of the Church. He sees a realignment of the Church towards *diakonia*, which will enable parishes to open up more to people again, as an opportunity to be seized. He expects a significant contribution in this respect from the Caritas organisation working in close cooperation with the parishes and their staff. He regards a stronger emphasis on diaconal service as a chance to reposition the Church as an *ecclesia semper reformanda*. 
The articles in the five chapters have been written by four theologians from Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe respectively. Their views vary and it is only natural that they should conflict in some respects. This makes it all the more interesting to reflect on what they have to say. Like the previous volumes in the One World Theology edition, this third volume should be regarded as an invitation to look beyond the end of one’s own ecclesial nose and draw inspiration from the (theological) breadth of the universal Church.

The different contributions in this book reflect the lively dialogue within the universal Church, for which we owe a debt of gratitude to the authors but also to many others. Our special thanks go to the staff at missio who have helped us in devising this volume: Dr. Hadwig Müller, Dr. Marco Moerschbacher and Prof. DDr. hc. Raul Fornet-Betancourt. We should also like to thank Michael Meyer for the careful compilation of the manuscripts.

Klaus Krämer
Klaus Vellguth
Diakonia as the Discipleship of Jesus
Discipleship as Service
Mary Sylvia Nwachukwu

This essay is an understanding of discipleship as it is presented in the New Testament (NT), and principally, the essential character of discipleship as service. Discipleship is a dominant NT theme. The Gospels show that Jesus not only invited disciples to become active participants with him in his public ministry, but they also report that he provided for the continuation of his mission in the world through his disciples. To this effect, Matt 28:18-20 states unambiguously that during his post-resurrection appearances, Jesus commissioned the eleven disciples: All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. John 20:21 records the same transfer of authority, as Jesus says to his disciples, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you”. Jesus meant that his mission must continue through his disciples. The ability to make others disciples depends largely on this authority. The NT, therefore, is a credible source for the early Church’s understanding of the meaning of discipleship and of the challenges which this ministry brings.

After this introduction, which explains the goal, scope and methodology of the present research, the second part of the paper defines the meaning of discipleship. This is done through a study of the Language and Statements about discipleship in the Gospels. The third part finds in other NT texts the occasion of its particular nature as service. Although many works have been written on the theme of discipleship, which clarify the meaning of the term, a great many and new questions from different lived contexts still remain

to be answered. Therefore, the last part of the paper discusses, in
the light of the NT witness, the questions that discipleship evokes in
contemporary Christianity. The essay may not completely give the
required attention to all pertinent texts and to all exegetical issues.
It aims especially to establish the basis on which discipleship is
understood chiefly as service.

Meaning of Discipleship

The obvious place to begin the research into the meaning of
discipleship is the study of the terminology, which helps to situate
the place of the disciple within the story of Jesus. The idea of a
‘disciple’ was not a novelty to the world of Jesus. This terminology,
which is the English translation of the Greek maqhth/j and Hebrew
talmid, is used in the Greek and Hebrew cultures for the teacher –
disciple relationship. Within the Greek culture, the word maqhth/j
incorporates ideas, denoting both the learning skills of someone
under a teacher (didaskalos) and him as a committed member of a
fraternity, which carefully preserves and transmits the intentions of
the teacher.\(^2\) This meaning of maqhth/j presents the disciple as
a credible representative and transmitter of a received tradition. Below
is a brief study of the terminologies that represent the language of

The Language of Discipleship

The Gospels register an abundant use of the term maqhth/j,
which defines those whom Jesus called, principally, to stay with him
and to participate in his works.\(^3\) Their relationship with Jesus make up
a considerable part of the Gospel story, showing that these disciples
were active participants in the story of Jesus.\(^4\) However, a different
vocabulary indicates the process by which they became disciples.

In Greek and Jewish cultures, the verb that indicates the process
by which one becomes a disciple is manqa,nw (Hebrew- lāmad),
which defines an intellectual learning process. The comparatively

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\(^2\) Cf. K.H. Rengstorf, “manqa,nw ktl” in: Kittel, G., Theological Dictionary of the New

\(^3\) Mark 3:14-15.

\(^4\) The word occurs only in the Gospels (43x in Mark, 76x in Matthew, 37x in Luke, 80x in
John) and in Acts (30x).
minor role that this verb plays in the entire NT shows that Jesus’ concern was neither to impart intellectual knowledge, as the Greeks philosophers did, nor to produce men who were versed in the Law, as the Rabbis did. Rather, the Gospel of Mark shows how Jesus’ teaching differed from that of the Scribes: a teaching with authority, and confirmed by powerful works (Mark 1:21). Jesus’ teaching is not presented as a comprehensive doctrine or system of thought, but as a preaching (καί ὁ λόγος της χριστιανικής ευαγγελίας – Mark 1:38-39), which he proclaimed either in the Synagogue (Mark 1:21,39,62) or to the crowd (Mark 2:13; 3:32; 4:1-2). To his disciples, Jesus gave explanations of the parables (Mark 4:33-34) or what Mark calls ‘the secrets of the Kingdom of God’ (4:11). This shows that the concern of discipleship lies not in the process of indoctrination but elsewhere. A rare verb is found, μακηθεύω, which means ‘to be a disciple’ or ‘to make a disciple’. While the verb occurs only in Matt 28:19 (and 13:52), which is Jesus’ last command to his followers to make disciples of all nations; the other one evidence in Acts 14:21 is a report that Paul and Barnabas made many disciples. Another verbal form, μακηθήζω ποιεύω, is found in John 4:1, which is a report that Jesus made more disciples than John the Baptist. This statistics is very instructive. It informs the reader that Jesus actually made disciples (John 4:1) and that he commanded his disciples to do likewise (Matt 28:19). Since the term appears in the Acts of the Apostles as a self-definition of Christians after the death of Jesus, the reader should rightly infer that the disciples of Jesus carried out this mandate. Moreover, the rarity of the verbal forms in the entire NT, as well as the total absence of the term, μακηθήζω, in the entire Pauline and Catholic Letters might suggest that the terms play a distinctly minor role in the NT description of the fulfilment of this mandate.

Another language comes to the fore when one examines the description in the Gospels of the process by which people became disciples of Jesus. At the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus, first of all, called some people to follow him. The nature of this relationship is indicated by the verb αὐκολούω (to follow). As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea – for they were fishermen. And Jesus

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6 The evidence in Matt 13:52 has no direct bearing on discipleship.
said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” And immediately they left their nets and followed him (Mark 1:16-17).\(^8\)

In the Gospels, therefore, the relationship between Jesus and his disciples is described in terms of following him. Three outstanding meanings derive from the contexts in which this unique term appears:

Firstly, discipleship is a response to a call from Jesus. “Follow me” is an invitation to be a companion of Jesus, who is shown to be on a journey. In about ninety-eight percent of its occurrence in the Gospels, the language of followership is linked to the image of Jesus who is in motion.\(^9\) Expressed in the present tense, the command to follow would imply a life-long commitment to “keep following me”. It is a challenge to exclusive dedication to Jesus as the followers break all other ties and give up their possessions (Mark 1:17-18,20).\(^10\) It is not a matter of personal initiative (Luke 9:57) or a duty accomplished according to one’s own terms (Luke 9:58-62), presenting challenges which all cannot accept, as the rich young man showed (Mark 10:17-22).

Secondly, while Jesus appointed Twelve who were to be with him, to teach and to cast out demons (Mark 3:14-15), many others (great crowds) also followed Jesus. Attracted by the power of his teaching and the marvellous works he did, these came to hear him and especially to have their diseases cured.\(^11\) Among them were the blind who followed him after they were cured,\(^12\) and some women who gave a remarkable model of discipleship because they not only followed him but also served him by providing for his needs.\(^13\) Thirdly, the followers are called to be part of a journey that culminated in Jerusalem. In this regard, Jesus delineated clearly the conditions for walking this way of suffering. All four Gospels have statements about discipleship, but there is one on which they express outstanding agreement. The next paragraph takes a closer look at these statements.

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\(^12\) Mark 10:52; Matt 20:29-34; Luke 18:43.

Statements About Discipleship

The following belong to the different descriptions of the condition of discipleship in the Gospels:

a. Luke emphasizes more than Mark the radical character of the renunciation that discipleship demands: “Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me ...So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions” (Luke 18:22; 14:33).14

b. The Synoptic Gospels agree that discipleship creates a new situation and a commitment to Christ: “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26).15

c. A third condition of discipleship exists which all four Gospels place within the Passion Prediction context.

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me (Mark 8:34).

The passion prediction explains that as the Messiah, it was necessary that Jesus undergoes suffering, persecution and death in order to save others. Therefore, the true mark of discipleship is to follow Jesus in the way of suffering and death. The parallel Gospel texts express this condition alongside the demand to break all ties, and to deprive oneself of possessions.16 These may represent concrete expressions of the essential demand to carry the cross. John expresses this same condition as the love commandment. God’s love for the world, which led Jesus to die, should guide the actions of all disciples of Jesus: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13:35). This love commandment is fulfilled through the laying down of life for others. “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends (John 15:12-14). This is the only condition for bearing much fruit, for in this the Father is glorified (John 15:8).

This basic condition is prescribed not only to the Twelve but also to anyone who wishes to follow Jesus (‘anyone’ who wants to be a disciple of mine). A closer look at the passion prediction texts will highlight other important features of discipleship.

The Gospel of Mark presents three predictions of the passion. The first (Mark 8:31-38) is occasioned by a question on the meaning of Jesus’ identity as the Messiah. The question “Who do people say that I am?” introduces this first prediction, and through it the point is made clearer that knowledge and understanding regarding the person and mission of Jesus is necessary for discipleship. Since it is shown that discipleship finds its definition only in relation to the cross, the problem of misunderstanding, which the text presents, refers to a fundamental challenge. The response of the disciples to the question about the identity of Jesus becomes the yardstick for measuring both the level of their understanding of Jesus’ mission and their ability for discipleship.

In the face of this description of Jesus, the Gospels leave us in no doubt that the disciples would find it difficult, accepting and fulfilling this necessary condition. Their response is significantly expressed in a representative member, Peter, to the effect that Jesus’ rebuke to Peter is turned into a teaching to all the disciples. On the basis of their rejection of the cross and the idea of a suffering Messiah (Mark 8:32), the Gospels highlight the ways in which their ability to follow Jesus diminished significantly. They were overcome by fear as they travelled the road to Jerusalem (Mark 10:32), and as Jesus suffered persecution and trial in the hands of Jews and Romans, they betrayed, denied, fled at his arrest, and followed him only from a distance (Luke 22:54).

The second (Mark 9:30-37) and third (Mark 10:32-45) predictions of the passion are addressed only to the Twelve. According to these texts, misunderstanding of the mission of Jesus leads to equal misconstruction of the aims and goals of discipleship. Even here, the motif of misunderstanding (Mark 9:32) is used as a foil to directing attention to other related problems of the Christian community, that is, the disciples’ quest for power and positions of honour and the resultant quarrel among them. These texts are important because

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they explain that the practical expression of the command to carry the cross is service of others:

He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all (Mark 9:35).

Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant (dia,konoj), and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave (dou/loj) of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mark 10:42-45).

The attitude of service stands against that of power as the Gentiles do (Mark 10:42) and of love for places of honour and self-seeking, as the Pharisees do (Matt 23:11). These two referents may be pointers to influences coming from Gentile and Jewish environments. Instead, the disciple should be like the Master who gave his life by serving others. This image of Jesus as servant (diakonos) justifies the cross motif and provides a concrete expression of discipleship in particular contexts. The next section exposes other NT texts that elaborate this idea of discipleship as service.

Discipleship as Service

This part of the essay determines the occasion for describing discipleship as service. Many words express the idea of service in the NT, but not all are used in relation to discipleship. Of the terms which denote the idea of service, only the term diakoneō and its cognates refer to the idea of a service of love, which Jesus demands from his disciples.19

Discipleship as diakoneō

The word group occurs eighty-eight times in the NT, predominating in Acts and the Pauline Letters.20 In the Gospels, the term appears only within the prediction texts.21 The evidences in Acts and Paul represent the period when Jesus no longer walked the streets of

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19 They are distinguished from other terms: qerapeu,w (to serve with respect and concern), latreu,w (to serve for wages), leitoure,w (official public service to the state) and u`phrete,w (to help another). Cf. Beyer, H.W., “diakone,w ktl” in: Kittel, G., ed., Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, 81.
20 Acts (10x); Pauline Letters (51x = 2 Cor 20x; Rom 9x; 1 Tim 6x; Col 5x; 1 Cor 3x; Eph 3x; Gal 1x; Phil 1x; 1 Tess 1x; 2 Tim 1x; Phlm 1x).
Galilee, calling or drawing people to himself. Therefore the language of *avkolouqe,w* recedes into the background. Another terminology was needed to show how the disciple carries the cross, like the Master, in concrete life situations.

The distribution of the word group in the NT help us to distinguish three dimensions of service that discipleship embraces. It includes *diakonia* as:

a. Waiting at table (Acts 6:1,2)
b. Service of the Word of God as the comprehensive work of Church leaders through prayer, preaching and witness to the Gospel of God's grace.\(^{22}\)
c. Services that believers render to God and to one another through the gifts of the Holy Spirit.\(^{23}\)

Principally, this vocabulary describes the comprehensive work of Paul and his co-workers, while those engaged in this ministry are called *diakonos* (*diakonoi*). Although the vocabulary is poorly represented in the Gospels, it is significant that all four Gospels use the concept within the passion prediction texts, as shown above. John 12:26 equates the two terms when he says, "He who serves me follows me". All also agree that *diakonia* as an act of self-giving for others should be the characteristic mark of every disciple of Jesus.

Paul’s life and apostolate could be cited here as an example of this ministry. In the Miletus Speech in Acts 20:18b-35, Paul presents his ministry as an example for future leaders and as a model of Christian discipleship.\(^{24}\) In presenting himself as model, Paul, first of all, appealed to what the Ephesians have seen and known about him, that is, of himself as a humble servant of the Lord.

You yourselves know how I lived among you the entire time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears, enduring the trials that came to me through the plots of the Jews.

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\(^{22}\) Acts 1:17, 25; 6:4; 12:25; 20:24; 21:19; Rom 11:13; 12:7; 15:25,31; 1 Cor 16:15,16; 2 Cor 3:6,7,8,9; 4:1; 5:18; 6:3; 8:4,19,20; 9:1,12,13; 11:8; 1 Tim 1:12; 4:6; 2 Tim 4:5,11.

\(^{23}\) Cf. 1 Cor 12:5; Eph 4:12; Col 4:17; 1 Pet 4:10,11.

Paul describes his entire apostolate as service of the Lord. He says this with three qualifiers – ‘with humility, with tears, and enduring trials’ – which describe how he shares in the passion of Christ.

Paul calls his ministry a *diakonia*, a ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18; 3:4-6) and not a matter of standing above others as leader. In many of these texts, the service required of *diakonia* is complemented by another word *douleuō*, which denotes servanthood. The relationship between the two words merits attention at this point.

**Meaning of *diakoneō* as *douleuō***

Another self-concept for God’s servants is *doulos*. Mary is designated as the slave girl (*dou,lh*) of the Lord (Luke 1:38,48). The NT meaning of this word would be appreciated from knowledge of its meaning in the dominant Greek language and culture.

In the Greek world, *douleuō* was considered as the most repudiated kind of service because such service was a perversion of human nature; expressing lack of autonomy and personal choice. In agreement with Greek thought, the LXX uses words of the *douleuō* group to translate the Hebrew ‘*ebed*, when the reference is to any restrictive service which a subordinate renders at the whim of a master. This meaning came to be adopted into the language of worship, *douleuein*, understood as total commitment to God as Lord. In the NT also, the term describes the exclusiveness of a relationship to a master or lord and a master’s claim to the subordination and services of his dependent. According to Paul, one of the benefits of the Christ-event is that it makes believers slaves of righteousness, releasing them from bondage to sin, to the law, to passions and pleasures, and to the elemental spirits of the world. Believers have become slaves of Christ, who is the Lord and Master of life.

25 2 Cor 1:24.
26 Rom 1:1; Gal 1:10; Tit 1:1; Phil 1:1; 2 Pet 1:1; Jam 1:1; Jude 1:1; Acts 4:29; Col 1:7; 4:7,12.
29 Cf. Rom 6:6-22; 7:6,25; Gal 4:3,7,8,9; Tit 3:3.
30 Rom 12:11; 14:18; Eph 6:6; 1 Thess 1:9; 1 Pet 2:16.
Though regarded as disparaging, the slave institution gave Christianity the language to describe the kind of total dedication, lowly service and self-annihilation which discipleship demanded of a true follower of Jesus Christ. This idea of discipleship is taken from the model of Christ’s total obedience to the will of his Father. Jesus emptied himself, and taking the form of a slave, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death (Phil 2:7-8). Paul claims that for the sake of the Gospel, he became a slave of all so that he might win some of them for Christ (1 Cor 9:19-23), and believers fulfil the love command through becoming slaves of one another (Gal 5:13-15).

**Evaluation and Conclusion**

The essay unfolds the following essential aspects. Christian discipleship is a Gospel imperative by which Christ determined how his mission would continue in the world after his ascension. The primary assignment of a disciple is to have a direct and personal bond with Jesus, completely obedient to the call and teachings of Christ, and to follow him through a journey of forgiveness, of compassion for the poor, and of self-giving. John 15 describes this bond with the image of the Vine and the Branches. “Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me” (15:4). Since discipleship is described as participation in the cross of Christ, the addressee of Jesus’ call is the post-resurrection Church, and by extension, present day disciples. The truth is made clear that without a dedicated focus on Jesus as the one who goes before us on the road that demands self-sacrifice, the aim of Christian discipleship is impossible to realize.

The statements about discipleship enfold the challenges which the early Christians encountered in their Gentile and Jewish environments (Mark 10:42; Matt 23:11). The call to follow Christ set the early Christians in the middle of a hostile arena, where they suffered persecution and were humiliated by internal disunity caused by attraction to worldly values, like positions of power and honour. The remedy is the essential requirement to know and understand the person and mission of Jesus as the Messiah, who exercised authority by serving others and by dying for them. The command to carry the cross is expressed practically through humble service of one another.
I present this study as a contribution to the wider discernment process which is the world’s concern and need for authentic witness to Christian discipleship. In our world today, the need for Christian discipleship is becoming increasingly more urgent. This need is occasioned by factors external and internal to the Church. Today, many non-Christian religions and sects are winning more and more members to their fold by means of established political and vicious strategies. The human community is threatened both by religious groups that operate according to absolutist principles, and by a general human selfish attitude that expresses itself differently in different cultures. Around Africa, some non-Christian groups send professional care-givers to the door-post of their converts, as they also entice them with gifts and positions that lead to affluence.

While the Christian Church has made significant effort, through her missionary endeavours, to fulfil the mandate given to her to “make disciples of all nations”, she must bear in mind that many Christians around the world are in their attitudes like seeds that fell on paths, rocky grounds and among thorns, who become easy victims of predators and who lose their faith to the troubles and the cares of this world (Matt 13:18-22). Like the great crowds that followed Jesus, many Christians come to Jesus in order to have a better life or to have some personal needs met. Some others so deeply misunderstand the identity of the Master that their efforts to serve Christ are directed mainly to mistaken goals.

Therefore, today, evangelisation faces challenges that supersede simply converting more people to the Christian religion or ensuring large membership to a particular Christian denomination. A spirituality is spreading widely across Africa, promoted by some Gospel preachers who assure people that suffering is a curse, which those in communion with God cannot experience. To be ashamed of the cross is to despise and reject the kind of Lord that Jesus is, one who gives his life for others. If the Gospel does not encourage people to deny themselves in order to live for others, the human community may not soon experience the peace and wellbeing it longs for. Moreover, in the face of internal disunity that characterizes many Christian communities, caused by domineering and self-seeking attitudes, the Church should be steadfast in teaching and bearing witness to the inescapable truth about the image of Christ, who came to serve and not to be served. The image of a disciple as servant
slave stands in opposition to power and attitudes of domination. A ministry undertaken for the sake of the Kingdom of God is redemptive to the extent to which it is done with total dedication, in lowly service and self-sacrifice.

Something must also be said about the contribution of women to Christian discipleship. Statistical data on the language of discipleship reveals that among those who followed Jesus were some women who ministered to him by providing for his needs. This is the only group, among all followers of Jesus, who followed him to the cross and who took care of his dead body. This information should not surprise us because in various cultures, especially in Africa, women are more naturally gifted and capable of the deep commitment and self-sacrifice which discipleship requires. In fact, the symbol of ‘woman and child-bearing’ is an incarnation of that divine self-giving that gave life to the world. Women should, therefore, use their God-given gifts and energy to fulfill the command of the Lord, rather than allow themselves to be distracted by questions that dismember the body of Christ. Authentic leadership subsists in service.

Finally, it must be pointed out that the language of baptism (Matt 28:19), of followership (Mark 1:17) and of service (Mark 10:43-44), all point to a continuity in the reality they express. They communicate Christ’s gracious invitation to us, to deep union with him and participation in his death and resurrection.

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31 See footnote 13.
**Do Whatever He Tells You**  
Selfless Action in the Bhagavad Gita and Christian Charity

Francis X. D'Sa

As a body without a spirit is dead, so is faith without deeds.\(^{32}\) Therefore remember me at all times and keep fighting.\(^{33}\)

It is a truism that action without contemplation leads to activism and that contemplation without action leads nowhere at all. This is because action on its own is abstract and has no inner strength. There is no inner dynamic and no real vision. The same is true of contemplation. Just by itself it has no substance and no form, and it does not bridge the gap to reality. Fundamental human phenomena such as action and contemplation are holistic. Without their holistic character they become one-sided and, in the long run, ineffective. This article is an attempt to outline a more comprehensive concept of action and contemplation and of the close relationship between them.

For the purpose of our discussion I would like to refer to the Bhagavad Gita, as it deals with both acts that are beneficial, i.e. acts of salvation, and acts of calamity. Blinded by an excessive sense of love for his family, the hero, Arjuna, is completely at a loss when faced with his caste duties in the Fratricidal War. What is at stake is his commitment to a “just” war – justified by the fulfilment of his duty to the warriors’ caste. The Gita leaves no doubt that a warrior must be a Yogi who acts correctly (Karma Yogi). Such a Yogi lives continually in the presence of God. His heart and mind are filled with God’s presence to such an extent that he harbours no selfish interests whatever. His sole motivation is the benefit of all beings.

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\(^{32}\) James 2:26.

\(^{33}\) Bhagavad Gita 8.7.
There are instances in which other traditions can complement, enrich and even challenge our own. Hinduism, for instance, is based on a different cosmic vision than that of Christianity. This is why its understanding of “God, the world and man” is so totally different. Yet anything or anyone that is alien can be perceived by many of us as intimidating. After all, it exposes our fear of otherness. It can have the effect of either opening or closing our mind. When we close ourselves off to something alien, our hearts become increasingly hardened towards things that are foreign to us. On the other hand, if we open ourselves, it is possible for us to come into contact with a foreign culture, to establish links with it or even to enter into it. Such a proactive encounter can help us achieve a broader understanding of action and contemplation.

**Action and contemplation**

Raimon Panikkar describes the concepts of “action” and “contemplation” as categories of religious understanding. He sees them as absolutes in religious thought. Action is largely material, external, “realistic” and historical. It relates to a specific time. Contemplation, on the other hand, is mainly spiritual, internal, “idealistic”, archetypal and timeless. Action is more pragmatic and measures ideas against their outcome. Being in action mode means verifying, intervening, experimenting, reflecting and exploring. By contrast, a contemplative mode means perceiving, seeing, experiencing and gaining an intuitive understanding. It usually remains on a theoretical level, accepting a thought on the strength of its glamour and charisma. What makes the active element so essential is that it involves conquering the truth by creating it. The contemplative element, on the other hand, is essential because it discovers the truth. Historically, says Panikkar, contemplation has always ranked higher than action, even though it has almost never played any significant role in the dialogue between religions.

Panikkar sees today’s world as being predominantly action-focused. Our historical situation, which is largely impacted and dominated by science and technology, prioritises action and physical


35 op. cit., 17.
involvement. Everywhere in the world – even in Gandhi’s non-violent India – we can see an increase in armies and in the production of arms. Even more alarming, however, is the widespread attitude – indeed, the firm conviction – that violence can only be overcome by even greater violence or power.

Moreover, the main role models of our time appear to be “action protagonists”. What we lack are prominent “contemplation protagonists”. At least, they are not very conspicuous. Of course action is not just important, it is indispensable. But action must never be left all on its own without being grounded in contemplative vision. Action must always be nourished by something – preferably by a holistic vision and by the network of reality. This cannot be achieved merely through reasoning. There is also a need for contemplation, in particular. Reason is a vital tool, but if it is used on its own, it leads no further than the threshold of the house and does not take us into the living room of reality as a whole. What is needed, therefore, is greater depth or, to put it differently, a higher level of consciousness. Action without contemplation is a building without a foundation. Conversely, contemplation without action is merely a foundation without a building.

Nevertheless, the main thrust of action in itself is a movement towards dialogue, and no dialogue can ever take place without such movement. This centrifugal movement is preceded by a good deal of inquisitiveness, wonder and amazement. It is an outward movement which shows that the person seeking dialogue is in need of complementation. Dialogue is a process of mutual complementation.

Contemplation is a centripetal force. It is clearly something that happens “within”, where reason does not penetrate – quite simply because it is incapable of doing so. Reason is very active within the sphere of action. Without reason action would be futile and aimless. Contemplation, on the other hand, is a matter of neither reason nor willpower. It has intrinsic value and needs no justification. Used in its wider sense, contemplation is mainly a matter of consciousness and of expanding and deepening that consciousness.

Panikkar, R., Action and Contemplation as Categories of Religious Understanding, 22: “Contemplation is an end in itself – that superior life of the spirit which certainly does not ignore or despise the life of matter, of the senses and of reason for it is based upon them, but which transcends them.”
Panikkar is right in saying: “Contemplation is an ontological category.”37 I would add: Contemplation is both ontological and a matter of consciousness. Existence and consciousness form a continuum. Contemplation cannot be turned into anything objective. It has nothing to do with expectations emanating from space and time. The dynamics of contemplation transcend the spatio-temporal. Contemplation has to do with hope.38 The deeper the contemplation, the greater the hope.

Our age emphasises the spatio-temporal and tends to neglect anything that goes beyond this sphere. The spirit of our time has problems with anything that transcends reason. Not surprisingly, therefore, areas such as the inner self have no space in its cosmic vision. After all, reason is goal-focused and ensures that everything is justified in rational terms. This is necessary and important of course. Equally necessary and important, however, is the ontological level where we can be “hearers of the unspoken eternal Word”.39 At this level reason is likely to be more of a hindrance than a help.

Contemplation does not involve any form of activity. The inner self fills everything. However, it must not be understood in a topographical sense, but as a spiritual element that has its place at the level of consciousness, although it cannot be objectified. The stillness of the heart, where the light of consciousness shines, is the innermost place and indeed the very tenor of contemplation. Yet this is only the condition, not the content of contemplation. Contemplation does not have any content as such; it exists within time, but it is not part of time.

Panikkar says that it is an intrinsic feature of action that words retain their meanings. Understandably, there can be no such thing as unity at the level of meaning. But when someone says something, they do not want their listener to stop at that point. Rather, they want to draw attention to the reality of their message. Nobody wants to equate their words with reality itself. All messages point towards reality. Contemplation focuses on this wordless direction, on something that every speaker has experienced. The focus is not on identification,

37 Panikkar, R. “Action and Contemplation as Categories of Religious Understanding”, 22.
38 Rom. 8:24-25.
but on identity. This identity is the actual place of contemplation. Identification belongs to the level of language, but identity does not. It means encountering reality and thus the things that have their effect in reality. As we said, contemplation is ontological.

In an environment in which silence, stillness of the heart, the inner self, the light of consciousness, etc. are alien concepts, contemplation tends to be a foreign language for most of us. However, those who are interested must keep alive their interest in contemplation and must even deepen and expand this interest. Contemplation is both an event and an attitude with an authentic and unceasing quest for that place of the stillness of the heart. Contemplation cannot be conjured up. But a desire for contemplation is a good preparation for it.

If contemplation and action are both authentic, they form a continuum, like a funny story and laughter. If the story fails to lead to laughter, it usually means that the joke was rather poor. Laughter is not a matter of willpower. Laughter comes, as it were, spontaneously through an understanding of the joke. Authentic action is similar: just like a funny story, it comes about spontaneously and not as a deliberate decision.

Most of our actions are the result of our will. Such actions are calculated. However, although calculation can be part of pragmatic life, it can never form part of an understanding that is beneficial and therefore brings salvation. Take, for example, the chains of events which have led to wars and calamities in the history of humankind.

Only authentic action can be beneficial and bring salvation. There are two sides to authenticity: unselfishness and the welfare of all beings. Selflessness belongs in the realm of spontaneity. Understood in the fullest sense of the word, it is a process which is endless, like a bottomless pit. Taken to its logical conclusion, the goal of this process can only ever be the welfare of all beings.

40 Panikkar, R., “Action and Contemplation as Categories of Religious Understanding”, 25: “The contemplative approach will not minimize these problems, but will stress another starting point: not the identification of what Jesus did or is but the identity of who he is. Now the who of Jesus may or may not be separable from his what, but it is certainly not identifiable with it. The who of Jesus is only disclosed in the personal encounter of faith, in the interpersonal relationship of finding a thou answering to the call (prayer) of the I: it will be found when the metanoia, the change of perspective and roles, takes place so that Jesus becomes the I and the seeker the thou, so that the Master’s ‘I am’ becomes something more than a metaphysical or psychological statement. Then the Christian will utter: ‘I live no more but Christ lives in me.’”
Action in the Bhagavad Gita

The Bhagavad Gita (about 200 BC), India’s most popular scripture, is a dialogue between the Supreme Lord Krishna and his admirer Arjuna. It is set within the Fratricidal War in which the hero, Arjuna – the bravest of all warriors – panics at the last minute and refuses to fight. For Arjuna, as a member of the warriors’ caste, this is a terrible disgrace, because he has refused to perform his caste duty. Krishna tries to persuade Arjuna to fulfil his duty. Most of the poem is about the essence of action as such, including its impact, whether it is beneficial, bringing with it salvation, or whether it wreaks havoc. The first chapter ends with Arjuna’s words: “I will not fight”; the last chapter, however, does not end with the words: “I will fight”, but with a surprising and completely unexpected, “I will follow your word”.41

The first two chapters are about war and acts of war. The main emphasis is on the “how” of all action. And this “how” points towards equanimity. What matters in any action is a motive that seeks to be beneficial, bringing salvation, as this is something that transcends good and evil. What brings salvation is equanimity in respect of the outcome of one’s actions.

“Abandon your attachment and perform your works, grounded in Yoga. Maintain equanimity towards success and failure. Equanimity is called Yoga.” (2:48)

“He who has harnessed his mind (to the divine) will let go of both: good and evil. You must therefore diligently study Yoga. Yoga is skill in action.” (2:50)

Arjuna’s crisis can be summed up as follows: His caste duty demands that even his family and teachers must be removed if they have done something wrong or if they are obstructing the law. Arjuna is torn between his caste duty and love of his family. Ultimately he refuses to fight against his family and teachers.

Krishna shows him the way of dharma between the Scylla of his caste duty and the Charybdis of loving his family. No one must ever relinquish their caste duty. At the same time, however, one must never equate love of one’s family with love of one’s neighbour. The

41 Even better: Radhakrishnan/Lienhard: “I will act according to your word.”
latter is universal, while the former is limited and limiting. For the Gita, a warrior can only handle this balancing act if he is a perfect Yogi.

“Therefore remember me at all times and keep fighting. It is with a mind and spirit immersed in me that you will reach me without fail.” (4:7)

At this point we must remember that Arjuna has been taught equanimity (2:48 and 50) by way of an example that is extremely relevant to him.

“A Brahman equipped with knowledge and discipline, a cow, an elephant, a dog (śuna) and even a dog-eater (śuni caiva śvapāke) are (all) seen as equal by the wise.” (5:18)

Seen against this background, the highest Yogis are said to “delight in the benefit (or salvation) of all beings” (5:25). The Sanskrit expression sarvabhūtahite ratāḥ is very promising. Note the constant emphasis on “all beings” and “anything”.

“Yogis who work towards the benefit (salvation) of all beings have the highest [sexual] ecstasy.” (5:24)

“I will not be lost to him who sees me everywhere and who sees everything in me; neither will he be lost to me.” (6:30)

“The Yogi who is established in unity and who venerates me as dwelling in all beings lives in me regardless of the way in which he acts.” (6:31)

This emphasis on “all beings” can be found throughout the Gita. The same phrase also forms part of the proclamation of salvation in the Gita, and this is why the priority Arjuna gives to love of his family is so fatal. Without equanimity it is impossible to receive the message of salvation, nor is it possible to practice it. Moreover, when we read that “Yoga is skill in action” (2:50), this skill in action refers to equanimity. The foundation of Yoga in the Gita is equanimity (samātva).

However, “equanimity” is neither indifference nor stoicism. Equanimity, as Panikkar puts it, is “ontological openness”. It is an openness that is active and committed. The universal view of everything,

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of all beings, everywhere, at all times, etc. is exactly what this “ontological openness” is all about.

Let us now take another look at verse 8:7 which, in fact, summarises the position of the Gita on action in general and on acts of war in particular. The Gita takes the view that action is a requirement for the “man-in-the-world”. A human being can survive without taking action. Refraining from action would not move anyone any closer to salvation. Yet what brings a person benefit (and thus salvation) is not action, but the motivation behind it. Motivation is the path that leads either to benefit (salvation) or to calamity. Anyone seeking salvation must seek to gain spiritual discernment. This means taking a close look at the motivation behind one’s actions.

Let us examine Arjuna’s motivation. He is aware of his caste duty as a warrior. On the other hand, he feels overwhelmed by love of his family. Although he is torn hither and thither by the two opposites, he suddenly decides in favour of his family and says: “I will not fight.” (2:9)

What prompts him to make this decision is a look at his family and teachers who would need to be killed. He understands that killing them all would mean destroying the caste system. Seeing the two armies must have been overwhelming, even for brave Arjuna. He finds the consequences deeply distressing. However large the number of warriors may have been, thinking of the number of widows was clearly no less disturbing. A large number of widows (i.e. women in the warriors’ caste) would have made it highly realistic that members of the various castes would intermarry. In such a case the caste system would have been doomed. This would have put an end to all clan and caste laws (1:40-44). The decision was therefore very clear for Arjuna. “I will not fight.” (2:9) Arjuna was primarily concerned about his family and teachers (1:25-37), although his line of argument was also about the future of the caste system (1:38-44). However, both areas are closely connected.

The essence of this epic poem is a new (and perhaps more original) understanding of the caste system. What determines someone’s skills is not their birth into a caste and thus their membership within

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44 Indian scholars estimate that the Mahābhārata War involved some astronomical figures. The most modest figure is 3,936,600 years.
it, but their character (i.e. predisposition, nature, temperament, etc.). Their skills become evident through their actions. An intellectual need not necessarily be the child of a Brahman family, and an artist does not have to be the daughter of an artist’s family. A soldier is not necessarily the child of a soldier’s family. A worker need not be born into a worker’s family. It is therefore possible for children from the same family to become members of different castes simply because they have different skills or talents. In its reply to the caste issue, the Gita refers to the type of actions that people perform. If they conduct themselves like a priest, soldier, businessman or labourer, then this is an indication of the caste to which they belong. One totally new element on which the Gita comments concerns the warriors’ caste. To fulfil their caste duty without violating the general duty of dharma, all warriors must meet one particular condition: they must always – i.e. at all times! – remember the Supreme Lord Karma. “Remember me” does not just mean the moment before the fight. Rather, it should be a continuous and unceasingly process of calling to mind the Supreme Lord. In other words, when a warrior makes his decision – that is, the decision to fight – he does so in the presence of the Supreme Lord. Calling to mind the Supreme Lord is a process that can be described as follows: A person’s thoughts (manas) and their intellect (buddhi) must be continually focused on the Supreme Lord. The required equanimity is not indifference but openness towards all beings. There are two aspects: (a) positive: The welfare of all beings must be prioritised at all times, as it should be the main purpose of all human endeavours; (b) negative: No restrictions must be applied to this goal.

We can conclude that to fulfil his warrior’s duties blamelessly and in fulfilment of his caste duty, a warrior (Arjuna) must be a Yogi first and foremost. This means cultivating equanimity and working for the common good. If he kills people in a war (whether family or teachers), he must do so with equanimity, i.e. for the benefit of all beings and without hatred. The end result of this process is the promise of the Sublime Lord: “You will reach me without fail.” This promise is

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45 See 18:40-48, which is about the works of the castes that determine caste membership and which come from nature (karma svabhāvajam).
46 In the Christian tradition this is known as “living in the presence of God”.
47 However, the question of women in castes remains unanswered. Like almost everywhere, women’s affairs are not regarded as important enough to merit interest. Or were there perhaps some totally different reasons?
repeated almost verbatim at the end of the poem: “Fix your mind on me, be lovingly devoted to me, sacrifice to me and honour me. This is how you must come to me – I promise you truly, because you are dear to me.” (18:65)

**Do whatever he tells you**

These are the well-known words spoken by Jesus’ mother to the servants at the wedding feast. When she says, “They have no more wine,” Jesus gives a rather puzzling answer, and she may well have been the only person to understand Jesus. Hence her instructions to the servants: “Do whatever he tells you.” (John 2:5)

The very first dialogue with Jesus in John’s gospel, chapter 1, demonstrates this hermeneutical principle:48 “Rabbi, where are you staying?” (...) ‘Come,’ he replied, ‘and you will see.’ So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him (...)

Jesus’ mother had lived with him for many years, and so she was probably very familiar with this principle of interpretation. His words and wisdom were not alien to her.

Two things are involved in following Jesus: abiding with him and, while at his side, learning to do what he says. When Jesus speaks, he instructs. Hearing his word and obeying him entails being at this side.

In Christian traditions the Word of Life – i.e. the word that gives meaning and direction to life – is something that comes from “above” or “from heaven”. When Jesus’ mother gave instructions to the servants at the wedding feast, she did so in an awareness that her child was the Son of the Most High. The words he spoke were words of eternal life.49 His Word was not a purely man-made word. A human word that leads to action functions at the pragmatic level, where it involves earthly interests and expectations. These are not interests that come from heaven. The heavenly Word, however, is one that comes down from heaven.50 It is the Word of salvation, the Word that motivates and inspires people, and the Word that gives meaning to life.

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50 John 6:58.
Charity today

In looking at action and contemplation, we have bridged a wide philosophical gap between Christian and Hindu thought concerning acts of benefit (salvation) and acts of calamity. We now need to look at the relevance of all this in relation to charity.

Charity in the sense of diakonia is clearly a matter of serving. In a Protestant context charity has nuances which arose from a certain historical development. This development comes from a – praiseworthy – interpretation of diakonia that has its home in the Protestant world of faith. Without diminishing this, we must expand the scope of charity – not arbitrarily but based on Matthew 25:31-46 (the Day of Judgement).51 As a background to this discussion, I will refer to the Gita with its aim of ensuring the welfare of all beings.

What strikes us is that “the least” are identified by their needs.52 We can divide them into two groups: The first group lacks the absolute necessities of life – food, drink and clothing – and the second group consists of strangers, the sick and those in prison. All of them are, as it were, victims of a deficient social order. This is tantamount to a severe critique of society for allowing such groups to arise in the first place.53

The “least”, therefore, are those who are hungry, thirsty, naked, foreign, sick or in prison, many of whom even live in the so-called “First World”. However, they are symptoms of an unjust and unloving social order. Injustice is a symbol of a lack of love, and where there is

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51 We are talking here about expanding, not relinquishing the tradition of charity.

52 For a good overview see Pinto, C., Encountering Christ in the Suffering Humanity (Mt. 25:31-46). Christological Contributions of Samuel Rayan and Raimon Panikkar and the Significance of Suffering of the Battered Women of Maher from a Christian and Hindu Perspective, Zurich 2011.

Pinto, Encountering Christ in the Suffering Humanity, 65-82.

53 Pinto distinguishes between three interpretative approaches: (a) The passage is about followers of Jesus (i.e. Christians), whereas those who come under judgement are non-Christians. (b) The “least” are the followers of Jesus, i.e. Christians. Christians, too, are subject to judgement concerning the way they have acted towards their brothers and sisters in Christ. (c) The passage is about everyone who suffers, and everyone comes under judgement. The universal interpretation, says Pinto, has always existed but is increasing in our time. We probably owe this increase to a “global” mindset which clearly favours “universal” movements such as Greenpeace and Amnesty International. This is also the spirit in which a universal interpretation of Matthew 25:31-46 is presented. Moreover, hermeneuticists emphasise that our reading must be based on a production, not a reproduction. Cf. Croatto, S., Biblical Hermeneutics. Toward a Theory of Reading as the Production of Meaning, New York 1987.
no love, there is injustice. In a world dominated by economics, where the main victims are justice and love, it is appropriate to read Matthew 25:31-46 against this background. In other words, today’s “least” are mainly victims of our economic injustice – throughout the world.54

Christian charity is faced with a twofold task: on the one hand, we must give up our ownership mentality and, on the other, we must work towards greater social, political and economic justice in society. The first task is a matter of spirituality, while the second one falls within the scope of academic endeavours. These are two sides of the same coin which we might call “living in the world”.

From a Christian perspective, people need grace to act for the benefit of others – and thus in a way that brings salvation – regardless of whether they are aware of it or not. From a Hindu perspective, any such action is impossible if a person is spiritually blind. Lack of the right perception makes a person and their world both blind to salvation and mute to communicate salvation. Here, too, grace is required.55 In both traditions a beneficial act is one that is capable of bringing salvation. To put it in Christian terms, charity derives its inspiration and enablement from above. To put it in Hindu terms, a deed is capable of bringing about benefit (salvation) if it is without any selfish limitations and if it aims to achieve and promote the welfare of all beings. Ultimately, what matters is whether we are on the right wavelength and thus able to receive the Word of inspiration.

54 This is borne out by unemployment statistics: “Eurostat estimates that 25,254 million men and women in the EU 27, of whom 18,002 million were in the euro area (EA 17), were unemployed in July 2012. Compared with June 2012, the number of persons unemployed increased by 43,000 in the EU 27 and by 88,000 in the euro area. Compared with July 2011, unemployment rose by 2,104,000 in the EU 27 and by 2,051,000 in the euro area.”

http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics. (28 Sept. 2012). Neither is there any good news on the issue of “refugees”: “In 2011, there were 15.2 million refugees around the world, including 4.8 million Palestinian refugees, and it is estimated that 80 percent of refugees are women and children. According to the UN Refugee Agency, the leading countries of origin for refugees in 2011 were: Afghanistan: 2.7 million, Iraq: 1.4 million, Somalia: 1.1 million, Sudan: 500,000, DRC: 491,000.” http://refugeesinternational.org/get-involved/helpful-facts-%2526-figures (28.09.12). Not to mention environmental damage.

55 On self-realised salvation see Bhagavad Gita 18:62: “Surrender your entire being to him. By his grace you will attain the highest peace and the eternal abode.”
Tracing the Footsteps of Jesus
The origins of religiously motivated charity and an experience of encountering Christ

Klaus Vellguth

“I would prefer the very worst of a Christian world to the best of a pagan world, because a Christian world accommodates those for whom there was never any room in a pagan world: the crippled, the sick, the aged and the weak. What is more, there has always been love for those who have appeared – and continue to appear – useless within a pagan and godless world.”

Despite his critical attitude towards the Church, Heinrich Böll, who had won a Nobel Prize for Literature, understood that Christians, and hence a society with a Christian focus, are imbued with a spirit of charitable service. It is, of course, true that Christian charity is one of the basic functions of the Church and that a spirit of charitable service forms part of its Christian identity. It can take the form of either spontaneous or organised charity, and it can be practised just as much through a permanent institution as through the provision of help in different, specific situations. It can be carried out professionally or on a voluntary basis, at the macro level or at the micro level, within or outside the Church and consciously or unconsciously. The emphasis can be on the individual or on the wider community, and its Christian motivation may be either overt or anonymous.

Yet although charity is undoubtedly part of Christianity, it would be wrong to hypothesise that religiously motivated good deeds only came into existence through Christianity. In this article we would like to start by showing that religiously motivated works of charity were already very much part of the Egyptian tradition, while they were of no significance in

pre-Christian Hellenistic culture or indeed in pre-Christian Jewish culture. Next, we will show to what extent we can talk about religiously motivated charity in Jewish antiquity, which had a major impact on the life, mentality and work of Jesus the Jew, and to what extent charity in the spirit of Jesus can become a point of encounter with Christ and with God, as Benedict XVI recently explained in his encyclical letter *Deus Caritas Est*.

**Charity in ancient Egyptian culture**

Religiously motivated pro-social behaviour was already practised in ancient Egypt. Instructions for Ma’at can be found on an epitaph, giving details of virtues which are equally central to Christian ethics: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, helping the shipwrecked, burying the dead (without relatives), giving a ship to the shipless (so that they can reach fertile fields), speaking favourably of people, listening impartially to all parties when enacting the law, and defending the lowly against the mighty. These virtues of charitable service – as a specific feature of the culture of the Nile – are also treated as part of a wider, religious context. This social ethos is associated with a religious conviction that all things and events are caused by a divine power. We would run into problems, however, if we tried to locate the origins of any pro-social, charitable activities in ancient Egypt, as is the case with Heinz Vonhoff, for example: “The history of compassion does, indeed, start in the land on the Nile.” Nevertheless, this is probably the first written record in which helping the needy is placed in a religious framework, i.e. where it is motivated by religion, which leads Jan Assmann to conclude that Ma’at is “an eminently religious idea”. One specific feature of this religious concept is that pro-social or charitable activities are viewed against an eschatological background. The link between a belief in an afterlife and a sense of

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64 Assmann, J., Ma’at – Gerechtigkeit und Unsterblichkeit im Alten Ägypten, Munich 2006, 92.
justice or the anticipation of compensation led to an expectation that works of charity would be rewarded in the hereafter. "Positive acts towards people have the obvious purpose of avoiding accusations – e.g. in the court of judgement in the afterlife – and of leading a peaceful existence after one’s death."65 This is where we can clearly find the concept of do ut des, i.e. justification by works, the idea of a reward combined with reverence for the divine.66 For instance, we find the following teachings in the Insinger Papyrus: "If a person gives food to the poor, God will count this as a million sacrifices. Alms are a [greater] delight to the heart of God (than) to the heart of the recipient."67 The concept of compensatory justice for pro-social action in respect of the needy is combined with the concept of a divinity that is also a rewarder, advocate and protector of the poor and someone who will give them a better destiny in the hereafter than he does to the rich.68

Charity in pre-Christian Hellenistic culture

Hendrik Bolkestein, whose analysis of charity and relief for the poor in pre-Christian antiquity remains definitive up to the present day, found that classical Greece (up to the first century BC at least) contrasted starkly with Egypt69 in terms of its clear appreciation of works of charity. This was reflected in its language, as it did not have a term for a propensity towards doing good, as expressed, for instance, by the German word Wohltätigkeit (acts of charity).70 Neither the word ἐλεημοσύνη nor indeed εὐεργετεία, ἔργον καλόν or ἔργον ἀγαθόν were used to describe acts of kindness to the poor.71 This semantic analysis

is matched by the fact that almsgiving was not expressly considered worthy of encouragement in the society of Greek antiquity.\textsuperscript{72} It is, of course, true that there was a tradition of begging and that there were a large number of terms to describe a beggar: πτωχός, δέκτης, προσάιτης, μεταίτης, ἐπαιτής, πτώσειν and αἰτεῖν. However, the giving of arms was not really regarded as a personal merit or virtue on the part of the giver.\textsuperscript{73} This is borne out by a comment we find in Seneca’s writings: “Beneficium est opera utilis, sed non omnis opera utilis beneficium est; quaedam enim tam exigua sunt, ut beneficii nomen non occupent. […] Quis beneficium dixit quadram panis aut stipem aeris abiecti aut ignis accendendi factam potestatem?”\textsuperscript{74} Roman Heiligenhaus points out that Greek culture saw support for the poor as too insignificant to be classified as an act of virtue. He explains this by reference to the Greek attitude that “whenever an act of kindness is received, it must be reciprocated. As there was generally no expectation of a rewarding divinity or of any reward for good deeds in the afterlife, we can assume that classical Hellenism […] did not have any utilitarian reasons or motives for acts of charity either.”\textsuperscript{75}

Classical Greek morality did not specify a social obligation towards the poor. Social morality was reduced to responsibility for one’s immediate social environment, i.e. parents, relations, friends, fellow-citizens, visiting strangers, fellow humans, the elderly, victims of injustice and the unfortunate.\textsuperscript{76} Recipients of good deeds were usually fellow citizens, friends and relations. Bolkestein emphasises that social responsibility in Greek antiquity never referred to the economically poor in general.\textsuperscript{77} Instead of a responsibility for the poor in the community and acts of charity on their behalf, there was the concept of good deeds within one’s own social context.


One virtue that played a significant role in the Greek moral code was justice. Δικαίοσύνη in the sense of integrity in the individual and/ or justice within the community was seen as a supreme virtue and it included one’s duty to fellow humans, especially one’s own people, but not a specific attitude towards the poor. The same connotation was absent from the term φιλανθρωπία. Bolkestein emphasises that it meant helping fellow humans but not looking after the poor. “Where Greek social morality specifies rules for interaction between people, it generally only focuses on people’s behaviour towards those around them; there is a natural feeling of goodwill between people, and this is the meaning of φιλανθρωπία. It is not about relationships between the rich and the powerful, on the one hand, and the poor and lowly, on the other. In particular, the rich are not duty bound to help the poor, and neither are the poor expected to behave submissively towards the rich.” Anyone who must be treated with an attitude of φιλανθρωπία or in the spirit of the δικαίοσύνη is always seen as a fellow human, although differences in social or economic positions between two individuals are not accorded any significance in the development of moral precepts.

Hendrik Bolkestein then explores in detail what might have prompted ancient Greeks to “do good” despite the lack of moral standards on this issue. He mentions the joy of giving, the desire for honour and prestige, the expectation of a reward and political fear.

**Charity in pre-Christian Roman culture**

(Religiously motivated) acts of charity were equally unappreciated in pre-Christian Roman antiquity. The concept of almsgiving is not in

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Diakonia as the Discipleship of Jesus
evidence during the time of the Roman Republic.\textsuperscript{84} It was only after the collapse of the Republic that the word “stips” – which originally meant “loose change” – acquired the meaning of “alms”.\textsuperscript{85} Whereas, in Greek culture, any analysis of the significance of almsgiving would centre around the key concepts of ἐλεημοσύνη, εὐεργεσία, ἔργον καλὸν and ἔργον ἀγαθόν, the special terms that must be looked at in Roman culture are benefacare, beneficium and beneficialia. Such good deeds, however, were not associated with the social concept of acts of charity to the poor but with the maxim of helping one’s fellow humans. This meant, in particular, friends and relations and also the state. Charitable acts were thought to include both practical personal help and financial support. Whether or not somebody should be a recipient of good deeds was “apparently not decided by any social criterion, but on moral grounds; there was no encouragement to do good to the poor, but to do good to the good: \textit{bonus bonis benefecerit}”.\textsuperscript{86}

Cicero gave a whole catalogue of criteria specifying the conditions for \textit{beneficenta}.\textsuperscript{87} On the one hand, a \textit{beneficenta} must not be of detriment to the recipient, as the benefactor would then no longer be a \textit{beneficus} or \textit{liberalis}, but a \textit{perniciosus adsentator}. On the other hand, the benefactor’s own benevolent behaviour must not exceed his own potential. The reason given by Cicero is that any behaviour that goes beyond one’s own potential would lead to a situation in which future heirs are put at a disadvantage and the impoverished giver might be tempted to use illegitimate means to obtain the necessary commodities for his own living.

In his third criterion Cicero looks at the recipient of a good deed. He attaches no importance to the social or economic situation in which the potential recipient of an act of charity finds himself. Rather, what is decisive is the recipient’s level of morality, his attitude towards the benefactor, the level of relationship between the benefactor and the recipient and the acts of kindness which the potential recipient has


\textsuperscript{85} Cf. Müller, O., Vom Almosen zum Spendenmarkt – Sozialethische Aspekte christlicher Spendenkultur, Freiburg 2005, 47.

\textsuperscript{86} Bolkestein, H., Wohltätigkeit und Armenpflege im vorchristlichen Altertum, Utrecht 1939, 289.

\textsuperscript{87} Cf. Cicero, De off. I 42ff.
rendered to the benefactor in the past. The underlying understanding is apparently that of an exchange or counter trade, based on a *do ut des* mentality. Bolkestein summarises this by saying: “Good deeds are primarily required as rewards for good deeds already received.”

The Roman understanding of a good deed was thus clearly different from the Christian understanding, as Christianity always primarily focuses on the needs of the recipient as the highest criterion.

In Roman society the phenomenon of poverty was not considered under socio-political aspects, but exclusively in terms of individual ethics. This is also why there was no awareness of the structural or social causes of poverty. Neither did Roman culture see a connection between everyday religiosity and altruistic acts of charity to the socially vulnerable. There were no religiously motivated social standards that might have encouraged good deeds of the wealthy to the poor in the community.

Nevertheless Roman society, too, had the concept of charitable acts to the poor. However, it is questionable whether such acts can be described as “good deeds”. Ultimately, the purpose of such gifts was twofold. On the one hand, the wealthy classes wanted to protect themselves against crime. On the other hand, gifts were also a socially accepted method to consolidate one’s own political power. Gifts were not primarily aimed at the poor, but at citizens and therefore voters. Regardless of a person’s financial situation, the Roman emperor therefore granted so-called *coniarges*. The recipients of such imperial acts of charity included both the rich and the poor strata of society. *Coniarges* made a considerable contribution to the lives of the poor (*pauperes* or *egentes*) in Rome. Yet such financial acts of charity were not an expression of social ethics in Roman culture but merely a sociopolitical tool to maintain one’s own power.

Charity in pre-Christian Judaism

Unlike ancient Egypt, pre-Christian Hellenistic culture had no concept of acts of charity, which were not seen as being worthy of encouragement within the community. Instead, the main emphasis was on justice. Social morality in pre-Christian Hellenistic culture related exclusively to one’s immediate social environment. Pre-Christian Roman culture did not encourage almsgiving on a wider community scale either. Instead of almsgiving to the socially vulnerable, there was an emphasis on good deeds. However, the recipients of good deeds were not the poor, but the “good”. Whenever charitable gifts were given to the poor in pre-Christian Roman culture, this was not done out of altruism. Rather, its purpose was to protect the wealthy against crime and to stabilise political power relations.

Jewish culture was greatly influenced by the Hellenistic world view and by its economic, cultural and social values. This is all the more remarkable because Judaism also sought to maintain its political and religious independence as far as possible. In the Jewish worldview wealth was originally seen as a desirable goal and as a gift of God to the faithful (Deut. 8:13f and 17f, Zach. 14:14), while poverty was regarded as an evil. The family was primarily seen as a social association in which members supported one another and kept each other from poverty. However, as tribal structures gradually lost their significance during the times of the Jewish kings and in subsequent periods, a growing social gap emerged between the rich and the poor. This led to growing impoverishment among broad sections of the population and at the same time to the distinct formation of a wealthy upper class.

This, again, was a development the prophets highlighted in their social critique (especially Isaiah, Micah and Amos) and in their condemnation of injustice and exploitation, which partly also focused on the practice of loans, interest and pledged chattels. In

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93 Lohmeyer sees this as a “duality of commercial adaptability and religious and national exclusiveness”. Cf. Lohmeyer, E., Soziale Fragen im Urchristentum, Leipzig 1921, 21.
the course of history – particularly under the influence of the Old Testament prophets – the values of wealth and poverty in Judaism began to change: poverty came to be seen as a sign of God’s grace and wealth as an indication of God’s distance and alienation from God. Care for the poor was regarded as a godly task (Ps 9:13-19, 12:6, 14:6, 22:25-27 and 35:10). This is reflected in late Old Testament writings where money is described in rather more hostile terms than in earlier scriptures (Coh. 5:9-11 and 10:19, Sir. 5:1-3, 11:10 and 31:8-11, Amos 2.6, Micah 3:11f, Zeph. 1.9). The shift in values, which Friedrich Nietzsche later described as the “slave revolt in morality”, was particularly in evidence during the post-exilic period. Historically, this was probably due to the prevailing circumstances, as the Jews who were powerful and wealthy decided to stay in Babylon, whereas the Jewish middle and lower classes were determined to leave their Babylonian exile and move back to their own home country, where they could often do no more than eke out a meagre existence for themselves. During this period at least some sections of the Jewish population saw the rich as God’s enemies and the poor as God’s friends. Among the poorer classes this view was reinforced above all by pressure from the ruling Roman and Hellenistic classes.

Judaism had a range of different measures to break the cycle of progressive impoverishment among sections of the less well-off and those in financial distress. First of all, there was the ban on interest. Jews were not permitted to charge other Jews interest on loans. Richer people were under a duty to help the poor among their compatriots through interest-free loans – a custom which arose at a time when loans were only granted to the poor to ensure their food supply. Interest would have meant an abuse of this loan system, as it would have increased the dependence of the poor even further. Loans were seen as a mandatory form of assistance to fellow Jews, and it was believed that a loan provider would receive special blessings from the God of Israel as the God of justice. Different rules were applied outside these ethnic boundaries. It was perfectly legitimate to charge interest to foreigners (e.g. Phoenicians, Syrians, Philistines and Canaanites) (Deut. 23:31), partly also because

97 In the New Testament Jesus reiterated the demand to support the poor willingly through loans (Mt. 5:42 and Lk. 6:35).
they, too, charged interest to Jews.\textsuperscript{98} Giving a loan was seen as a blessing (Deut. 15:6-8f, Deut. 28:12, Ps. 37:26, Ps. 112:5), and being compelled to borrow from foreigners was regarded as a misfortune (Deut. 28:44, Ps. 37:21).\textsuperscript{99}

Moreover, there was the tradition of the Sabbatical Year. Remembering the time of Jewish slavery in Egypt, any slaves in Israel had to be released from their servitude every seven years and given back their freedom (Ex. 21:2 and Deut. 15:7-12). Also, every 50 years, creditors were expected to waive whatever repayments they were owed by fellow-Jews. The reasoning behind this Year of Jubilee was cultic, and the release from debt was practised in honour of Yahweh. The purpose of the custom was to break through the inexorable process of impoverishment among the poorest classes in society and to work towards an ideal community onto which Yahweh would pour out His full blessings. What we do not know is the extent to which the Year of Jubilee was actually kept and whether it had any practical impact on social developments.

A third major pillar in protecting and supporting impoverished sections of the community was the tradition of almsgiving. Whereas alms were not associated with any moral component in Roman or Hellenistic culture, the Old Testament and Jewish tradition taught that it had an eschatological dimension, as it would be rewarded in the afterlife (Tob. 4:9, Sir. 3:31 and 29:12, Ps. 9.5)\textsuperscript{100}. This religious/moral side was emphasized strongly particularly in wisdom literature where almsgiving had a function of penance (Prov. 11:4, Dan. 4:24). It had the same status as a regular sacrifice and could “compensate” for wrongdoing.\textsuperscript{101}


\textsuperscript{99} As interest rates were extremely high in antiquity, we can easily understand how distressful it was if anyone had to borrow from a non-Jew. For instance, there is documentary evidence that outside of Israel, in the Jewish garrison of Elephantine (5th century BC), the interest rate was 60 per cent. It was found that loan agreements at that time included provisions on compound interest, pledged chattels and penalty clauses. Cf. Bogaert, R., Geld (Geldwirtschaft), in: Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum (vol. 9), edited by Theodor Klauser, Stuttgart 1976, columns 807f.


penance, the idea arose that there was a “heavenly book of life” with a list of good and evil deeds, so that a person’s life would eventually be subject to a general performance assessment. This view of almsgiving as a sacrifice did, of course, signal an essential theological development, as it meant that a sacrifice was not simply seen as a cultic or ritual act, but that it also had an interpersonal and, particular, a social dimension. This was expressly formulated in the book of Tobit, in which we read that the giving of alms saves a person from death and cleanses him from all sins (Tob. 12:9). As well as carrying a metaphysical and eschatological component, salvation from death also meant that a person was saved from an early, untimely death, which was seen as divine punishment in biblical times. The cause-and-effect connection between almsgiving and the forgiveness of sins is also reflected in the book of Daniel, where King Nebuchadnezzar is advised: “[…] by upright actions break with your sins, break with your crimes by showing mercy to the poor, and so live long and peacefully” (Dan. 4:24).

Earlier writings, too, saw care for the poor in more than purely social and ethical terms, connecting it with theological reflections. Such care was defined quite widely and included feeding the poor, giving financial support to widows and orphans, ensuring that burials were funded by the community, paying ransoms for Jewish prisoners, redeeming Jewish slaves, housing the poor, providing clothes and a dowry for orphans wanting to marry, providing loans and granting debt relief. Judaism saw acts of charity to the poor as the people’s mandatory response to Yahweh’s covenant promises and expected their response to produce blessings both for the giver and for the community (Deut. 15:6). This religious and soteriological understanding explains why the duty of giving alms was not limited to

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103 What may have contributed to this shift, after the destruction of the Temple, may have been the impossibility of maintaining the cultic practice of sacrifices in the Diaspora.
105 Klaus Berger points out that, in the Septuagint, penance for sins through almsgiving was accompanied by a (seven-day) period of repentance, with prayers requesting forgiveness. Both were seen as ways in which the pagan king could obtain reconciliation with God. Cf. Berger, K., Almosen für Israel, in: NTS 23 (1976/77), 188.
the wealthy in Judaism but also included those of limited means. In addition to this theological/soteriological aspect of almsgiving in Judaism, however, alms are also mentioned in the Old Testament without any reference to the soteriological dimension. This shows that the theological background of almsgiving gradually faded and that increasing significance attached to its social dimension, which was regarded as a separate issue.

It is worth noting that alms in Judaism were largely given to Jews, i.e. “the people of Israel”. As the soteriological dimension became less prominent, the giving of alms to one’s fellow countrymen gained in importance. Alms were by no means distributed to the poor in random fashion, but only to one’s own countrymen. We read in Sir. 7:4, Tob. 1:3 and Tob. 4:7 that alms were only to be given to the “devout” or the “righteous”. Pagan authors mentioned that beggars were typically found around and within the synagogue, which clearly reflects the theological and social dimensions of almsgiving. After all, this is where Jews could expect to meet other Jews who, by giving alms, wished to express their shared ethnicity. Yet even though the practice of almsgiving was only applied to one’s fellow countrymen, the enormous value that was attached to this devout practice in Judaism can be seen as the foundation from which the Early Church later derived its own endeavours to resolve social injustices.

Christian charity

These detailed comments on the development of charity in antiquity are necessary for an understanding of the context in which Christians developed their idea of charity. After all, there is the temptation to look back and see deeds of charity as a purely Christian invention, as if the appearance of Jesus were a “zero hour” that heralded the arrival of religiously motivated Christian charity. However, there are two reasons why this is not possible. First of all,

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110 This distinction between Jews and non-Jews in almsgiving was matched by the distinction between fellow-countrymen and foreigners in the Jewish ban on interest.
112 Cf. Dibelius, M., Der Hirt des Hermas, HNT Ergänzungsband IV, Tübingen 1923, 556.
as we saw, religiously motivated pro-social behaviour was already very much part of (ancient Egypt and) Judaism. Secondly, people’s charitable mindset at the time of Jesus can only be regarded as manifesting Christian charity to a limited extent. This is because “the Jesus movement was an ‘internal Jewish renewal movement’; neither its social and socio-critical place nor its commitment to the needy can be firmly established as the initial starting point of Christian charity”\textsuperscript{113}. Rather, as Herbert Haslinger points out, Christian charity is a phenomenon that occurred after Jesus and developed after Easter, when Christianity came into existence as a historical phenomenon.\textsuperscript{114}

In fact, pro-social charitable behaviour was initially applied within the community, i.e. to members of the Christian church(es), thus clearly showing its roots in Jewish culture. Justin wrote, for instance: “We, however, help anyone who is in want and whenever we are able to, and we keep together. […] On the day that is referred to as Sunday there is a meeting of everyone who lives in the town or in the country; […] and when we have finished praying, bread, wine and water are fetched, the church leader prays and gives thanks with all his might, and the people agree by saying Amen. This is followed by a distribution in which everybody receives their share of the consecrated [bread and wine], and those who are absent receive the same through the deacons. Those who have the resources and the goodwill give at their discretion whatever they want to give, and the resulting offerings are then deposited with the church leader; he then uses these gifts to help widows and orphans, those who are in need due to sickness or any other reason, prisoners and strangers who are present among the church – in other words, he looks after everyone who is in town.”\textsuperscript{115}

\textbf{Charity in the teachings of Jesus}

From a New Testament perspective, charity is a – or perhaps even the – \textit{nota ecclesiae}\textsuperscript{116}, says Ulrich Luz in his comments on the biblical foundations of charity. Theologically, the focus on charity within Christianity was born out of an awareness that helping the

\textsuperscript{113} Cf. Haslinger, H., Diakonie – Grundlagen für die soziale Arbeit, Paderborn 2009, 44.


\textsuperscript{115} Justin, Erste Apologie, chapter 67, quoted from Krimm, H., ed., Quellen zur Geschichte der Diakonie – I Altturm und Mittelalter, Stuttgart 1960, 45f.

poor is a service to Christ who meets people through the poor. And although it is problematic to ascribe the birth of charity – whether in theory or in practice – to Jesus Christ himself or to the Jewish Jesus movement, it is nevertheless possible to establish a connection between a charitable awareness in (early) Christianity, on the one hand, and the teachings and activities of Jesus as received through literature, on the other. This is also borne out by other articles in this volume.

What should be mentioned here as the foundation of an ethical system of charity is, first of all, the command to love one’s neighbour (Mt. 22:34-40, Mk. 12:28-34, Lk. 10:25-28), a command that is so fundamental and so very clearly at the heart of Christianity that it is often regarded, and justifiably so, as the central doctrine or command of Jesus’s teachings. “Moreover, love of one’s neighbour has come to be regarded as synonymous with Christian charity, and there is a popular perception that acts of charity are largely the same as showing practical love to one’s neighbour.” What we can see here is the Jewish understanding that love of God implicitly involves keeping His commands and doing His will. Loving God is not exclusively an emotional dimension, but it also includes an action-focused, ethical dimension. Any attempts to separate the love of God and the love of one’s neighbour therefore run contrary to the thoughts presented in the New Testament. We can see this in Mark’s Gospel and even more clearly in Matthew’s Gospel. The Gospel authors see this double command as summing up the teachings of Jesus, whose message on the Kingdom of God implies charitably loving one’s fellow-humans in a way that is radical, liberating and brings healing.

Another New Testament passage which is both central and fundamental to Jesus’s understanding of acts of charity is the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:30b-35), which initially formed a heritage of its own. It probably dates back to Jesus’s teachings and was then combined by Luke, the Gospel writer, with the dual command to love God and one’s neighbour. What is so essential in this passage is the person who serves as the object of this act of charity, as it reveals the Christian understanding of charity very clearly: It is obviously

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117 Haslinger, H., Diakonie – Grundlagen für die soziale Arbeit, Paderborn 2009, 238.
not limited to one’s own countrymen but transcends regional, ethnic, religious and denominational borders – so much so, in fact, that we are even encouraged, quite universally, to perform acts of charity towards an opponent or an enemy. This idea is also expressed in the encyclical letter Deus Caritas Est: “Until that time, the concept of ‘neighbour’ was understood as referring essentially to one’s countrymen and to foreigners who had settled in the land of Israel; in other words, to the closely-knit community of a single country or people. This limit is now abolished. Anyone who needs me, and whom I can help, is my neighbour.” This universalisation implies, firstly, that there is actually an encounter with a stranger and, secondly, that this encounter has a missionary quality and also a dimension of charity. What prompts such an act of charity is neither rational calculation nor any eschatologically motivated justification by works, but a strong emotional and existential involvement and compassion. This Greek concept can be aptly translated by the rather crass image “gut-wrenching”: the Samaritan was emotionally so deeply touched by the situation in which he found himself that it affected him at a “gut” level: it turned his guts, as it were. Where Christian charitable work is concerned, this implies first of all that the love of God can be realised and specifically experienced through charitably helping and caring for one’s neighbour and, furthermore, that we must never lose sight of the individual misfortunes of men, women and children in need. This is particularly important where Christian charity is placed on a professional footing.

The third passage, mentioned by Herbert Haslinger as central to a New Testament understanding of charity, concerns Jesus’s teachings about the Day of Judgement: “Like the Parable of the Good Samaritan, the third passage that is relevant in this context – Jesus’s

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120 Benedict XVI, Deus Caritas Est, No. 15.
teachings about the Day of Judgement (Mt. 25:31-46) – developed into a theological classic on charity in the course of church history.”

Exegetically, the origin and tradition of this passage are highly controversial, and it is questionable whether the speech originated from Jesus himself or from an author within his environment. However, what matters here for our theology of charity is that the passage focuses on people’s specific existential distress and that the Greek text – unlike many current translations – uses the word διακόνεω for help, thus emphasising that serving (i.e. charity) is at the very heart of the entire passage. What is so specifically Christian about this pericope about the Day of Judgement is not the connection between charitable behaviour in the here-and-now and a compensatory award in the hereafter. This should have become sufficiently clear when we looked at the tradition of religiously motivated virtues of charity and pro-social action in ancient Egypt. Rather, under a theology of charity, the interesting aspect of this passage is the projection whereby Christ Himself should meet the helper through a person in need. “Jesus identifies with the needy, i.e. the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and those in prison. ‘...in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me’ (Mt. 25:40). Love of God and love of one’s neighbour are merged into one. In the least of the brethren we find Jesus himself, and in Jesus we find God.” It is a specific feature – perhaps even the specific feature – of Christian charity that pro-social behaviour and care for the needy without any selfish agenda thus becomes a mystical place where a person can meet Christ or God.

126 Benedict XVI, Deus Caritas Est, No. 15.
Diakonia as the Discipleship of Jesus
Thoughts on interculturalism and liberation in the neo-colonial context of Abya Yala\textsuperscript{127}

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It should be stated at the outset that these are the thoughts of a lay Catholic, for want of a better term. Jesus himself – and the movement he started – was radically different from the other priests; his way of life stood in stark contrast to that customary among the priesthood.\textsuperscript{128} His movement of itinerant lay preachers included “certain” women (Luke 8:2) who had exactly the same rights and duties as men – a truly revolutionary development at the time. It was a movement with a host of liberating attributes that continue to shine forth, even though they have yet to be fully absorbed by our Catholic communities. It is said that, when Jesus and his followers travelled around, these women “provided for them (διηκόνουν – diekόnun) out of their own resources” (Luke 8:3).\textsuperscript{129} They could justifiably be regarded as the first diaconal disciples of Jesus. Their service was preceded by that of Mary, who accepted the prophetic Annunciation (Luke 1:38, 2:48), and of the upright Joseph, one which extended beyond the unfathomable mystery of his calling (Matthew 1:19 ff.).

What I shall attempt to do here is to investigate the radically different nature of this movement from the point of view of a “lay person” who does not exercise any religious profession and has no “specialist” interest in theology. My activity consists rather in the per-

\textsuperscript{127} We use Abya Yala as the “proper name” of the land which was later “to be called America”: the whole continent. See Fornet-Betancourt, R., ed., Crítica intercultural de la filosofía latinoamericana actual, Madrid 2004, 41, no. 59.


formance of lay service or diakonia of a philosophical kind, if you like. The observations I shall make, therefore, are those of an itinerant servant, whose point of departure is an intercultural quest for “life in all its many facets”\(^{130}\). It is a journey that involves learning in solidarity in the company of men and women, groups and peoples who live and fight for their right to a pluralist world. In such a world there is a willingness to engage in dialogue and to accept the plurality of time and space. It is a world in which people move in accordance with the rhythm of their lives and in a manner appropriate to their geographical and cultural surroundings\(^{131}\), as was once the case with our indigenous inhabitants. My thoughts should, therefore, be read not only against the backdrop of an intercultural transformation of philosophy,\(^{132}\) but also – since I cannot keep off theology – of the transformation of theology in two respects. The first of these concerns the relationship between theology and philosophy, the purpose here being to eliminate the differences\(^{133}\) that separate them by means of rational, interdisciplinary\(^{134}\) solutions. The second has to do with the relationship between theology, cultures and religions in our Abya Yala context. My particular interest here is in the extent to which this relationship depends not so much on complicating external factors as on our own responsibility a) to change the manner in which cultures and religions are practised and b) to learn how to overcome the uncultured missionary, dogmatic and doctrinal inflexibility we encounter so that “all the theological sounds produced by the cultures of Latin America” can be put on an equal footing.\(^{135}\) In the hope that I have made my position adequately clear,\(^{136}\) I shall

\(^{130}\) Ellacuría, I., La superación del reduccionismo idealista en Zuviri, Estudios Centro-americanos, no.43, 633.

\(^{131}\) Kusch, R., Geocultura del hombre americano, Bs. As., 1976.

\(^{132}\) See, for example, among others, Fornet-Betancort, R., Transformación intercultural de la filosofía. Ejercicios teóricos y prácticos de filosofía intercultural desde Latinoamérica en el contexto de la globalización, Bilbao, 2001; Filosofar para nuestro tiempo en clave intercultural, Aachen, 2004; La interculturalidad a prueba, Aachen, 2006; Tareas y propuestas de la filosofía intercultural, Aachen, 2009, 95-122.


\(^{135}\) Fornet-Betancort, R., La interculturalidad a prueba, op. cit., 117-120.

\(^{136}\) I wish to acknowledge the contribution of my friend Pedro Reginaldo Lira, the 98-year-old Patriarch and Salta-born Bishop Emeritus of San Francisco de Córdoba, Argentina, to
now go on to investigate the relationship between Jesus’ disciples and diakonia.

**Diakonia: serving at tables**

It goes without saying that Jesus himself was a model for his disciples. Being Jesus’ disciple means knowing him as a person, embracing his knowledge and its practical application, which can only be construed as service, as diakonia. It is a question of understanding his purpose: “the Son of man himself came not to be served (διακονηθήναι, diakonezénaí) but to serve (διακονήσαι, diakonéssai)” (Mark 10:45). All Christology is, therefore, diaconology. To be more precise, all of Christianity or quite simply all Christian faith is diaconal or it is not faith at all. There is no alternative to the service that was the hallmark of the disciples of Jesus, for this is what the Lord demonstrated in his words and deeds.

At this point it should be made clear that Jesus did not demonstrate self-renunciation or kenosis, including “serving at tables” (the original meaning of diakonía), so that people should bow to traditional hierarchical or patriarchal structures in the church or society and continue to accept them. On the contrary, his purpose was to show how those in power in the church and society can be converted by the Lord’s example as a kind of “equality from below” and so come to exercise solidarity with those who fight for life, love and justice in constant mutual service.

Along with witness (martyria), worship (liturgia) and fellowship (koinonia), diakonia (service) is of crucial importance for the disciple – for all disciples – and the church – for every church – and it correlates and interacts with them. Without this dynamic interrelationship...
none of these dimensions could be true to the Jesus of the Gospels nor receive nourishment from him.

Therefore, to understand the servant disciples or the service performed by the disciples of Jesus we have to go back to the origins of the servant function, to which the Spirit gave rise in the first community “when the number of disciples was increasing.” An incident that took place at an early stage had to do with a dispute in the community. The Hellenists made a complaint against the Hebrews because “in the daily distribution their own widows were being overlooked” (Acts 6:1). The response of the Apostles was to accord the daily distribution separate status, provided those given responsibility for handling it belonged to the community of the disciples (the New Testament extends this description, applying it to all Christians) and were “of good reputation, filled with the Spirit and with wisdom” (Acts 6:3). The Apostles then add: “We ourselves will continue to devote ourselves to prayer and to the service of the word” (διακονία τοῦ λόγου, Acts 6:4). The formulation in the Greek indicates that diakonia also encompasses the religious and spiritual content of life within the community.\(^{143}\)

The close ties that existed between these two aspects of the diakonia performed by the disciples must be emphasised. It is the only explanation for the remarkable spread of the Church, which was directly attributable to the good deeds of Jesus’ disciples (Acts 6:7). The vitality of the Church depended directly on the care and welfare they provided, services from which women were no longer excluded – in contrast to the early days when women played a subordinate role\(^{144}\) and the “spirituality” of diakonia was abused to the detriment of women and in contradiction of the demands made by Jesus, the itinerant layman.

One commandment for the servant disciples, albeit not the only one, was to fight, within the Catholic Church in particular, for equal rights for women in the apostolic leadership of the communities and to pave the way (everywhere) for their full ministerial ordination.

The Catholic Church has been diagnosed as “terminally ill”\(^{145}\), but one way it can overcome its present difficulties is to support, strengthen and revitalise diaconal service – an area in which it has

\(^{143}\) Mette, N., Diakonia, op. cit., 185.

\(^{144}\) Mette, N., Diakonia, op. cit., 185.

extensive knowledge and wide-ranging experience at the community level. Those responsible for the provision of this service need to recognise the urgent problems facing communities and provide practical assistance in helping to resolve them. They should feel encouraged at all times and never allow themselves to be manipulated by a hierarchy – a word that does not occur in the New Testament – or to curry favour with those in power who have inflicted so much harm on people in the world today. That would undermine the subversive prophetic character of their work.

I cannot go into an analysis of terms associated with diakonia, such as deacon\textsuperscript{146} and the diaconal works of the various Christian churches\textsuperscript{147}, whose development has to do with the original meaning of service as practised by the disciples of Jesus, but which has acquired its own distinctive profile over the course of time. Nonetheless, I should point out that, in view of the specific tasks associated with diakonia, it has proved necessary to renew the connections between its two dimensions – deacons serving as ordained “ministers” and \textbf{Diakonie} and \textbf{Caritas} run as relief organisations by Protestants and Catholics. The purpose has been to ensure that the considerable bureaucracy involved in running the relief organisations, on the one hand, and the strong tendency to sacramentalise the diaconate and ignore the spirit of practical relief work, on the other, do not lead to both sides losing sight of their common source of inspiration.\textsuperscript{148}

Before I come to the second part of this article I would like to state once again that there are very many places in which diaconal service is rooted in the discipleship of Jesus and his teachings, which is good news for the poor, in particular.\textsuperscript{149} Hence there is every justification for saying that the two are inseparably linked and that diakonia can be considered an essential element of Christian identity. Every service performed in the name of Jesus is diakonia and signals the presence of his disciples.

\textsuperscript{146} Weiser, A., \textit{Diakon}, LThK, T. 3, op. cit., 178f.
\textsuperscript{148} Mette, N., \textit{Solidaridad con los más pequeños. Comunidad y servicio}, Concilium, no. 218 (E), Madrid, 1988, 100-109.
Urgent issues in Abya Yala for diakonia as the discipleship of Jesus

Reviving the meaning of diakonia

In our Abya Yala it is essential that the disciples use the power of the Spirit to re-inject meaning into the provision of diaconal service. This is a task that needs urgent resolution in order to prevent pastoral care and Church activity in general from degenerating into “a small-scale system for the dissemination of religious ideology,”150 which would condemn churches to a ghetto-like existence. It is a task underlined by very many Christians committed to human rights and the rights of nature, illustrated by martyrs such as bishops Enrique Angelelli, Oscar A. Romero, P. Mujica, Ignacio Ellacuria and their companions along with the “deaconesses” Elba Julia Ramos and her daughter Celina, who served at table during the night of their martyrdom. The most recent examples are the Guatemalan Bishop Juan José Gerardi Conedera and countless other martyrs who have given their lives for diakonia as a source of liberation.

This is not to say that those who regard themselves as disciples of Jesus in Abya Yala have no understanding of diakonia. On the contrary, the number of Christians – religious or otherwise – along with Base Ecclesial Communities and other groups involved in diaconal work is unimaginable and beyond measure. Every day they go about their anonymous work in canteens and rehabilitation centres, looking after groups of disadvantaged and marginalised people and the sick. They are also at the service of those who are involved in teaching, proclaiming the gospel and various other functions. They not infrequently encounter indifference, a lack of understanding and even hostility on the part of many pastors. The greater the devotion and the diaconal service they perform, the more their work is in the spirit of the disciples.

An urgent issue I shall mention only very briefly here is a return to the former language of diaconal service, which must be filled with the original, revolutionary spirit that inspired the early Christian communities.151 One effect this had was that the communities and

150 Degen, J., La diaconía como agencia op. cit., 137.
151 “The word diakonia expresses perhaps the greatest of all the innovations introduced by Christianity in the history of mankind”, see Tamayo-Acosta, J. J., Hacia la comunidad… op. cit., 74
groups of disciples of Jesus avoided terminology and, above all, the underlying mental attitude of the dominant market and power systems. There is a Catholic community I know that uses the term “partners” to describe the “faithful”. They are registered and pay monthly “dues” for the laudable purpose of helping to pay for the expenses of the church and its activities. This is neither the language nor the practice of the diaconal service performed by Jesus’ disciples; it is that of a middle-class club.

It may be only my impression, but it does not appear customary to deal with the relationship between diaconal service and discipleship in the catechesis or during mass. An attitude of intimate spiritualism, in which individuals concentrate on “saving their own souls”, distances communities from their diaconal obligations. This reduces being a Christian to attending mass and believing in the sacraments in order to attain salvation, thus depriving faith of its “Christian character.”

It is, therefore, the responsibility of preachers and pastors to encourage and promote diakonia as a manifestation of the discipleship of Jesus. They need the right conditions and means of development to do so, otherwise the “museum-like quality” of many Church teachings, both “religious” and moral, from the lips of conventional priests and theologians may mean that the “lay people”, who feel and live their diaconal commitment in an awareness of being disciples of the Jesus of the Gospels, attempt to address this challenge without the necessary support from within the community, where it is often said that “they are talking about things they do not understand.” This is to completely overlook the vital issues facing society and the world, which call for an awareness of the need for diaconal service.

These largely anonymous disciples, who are eyed with uneasy suspicion by some Church bodies, may well get a better response from non-Christian groups when it comes to diaconal duties performed in the interests of justice and to meet the needs of those who suffer most from market forces and systems of exploitation. In this context the question arises from whether there are not disciples in these groups whose actions are more in the spirit of Christ, as the Lord

himself said, even though they may not be aware of the fact (Matthew 25:40).

“Prophetic diakonia”

Defined as “the service called for by God that is in keeping with the times,”¹⁵⁴ it is possible to talk of both diakonia ad intra and diakonia ad extra. While I shall refer here only to the latter by way of an example, I should point out nonetheless that, as regards the former, the diaconal service now required from the disciples of Jesus – in my view – is that they should use their creativity to complete the urgent process of ecclesiastical reform. This is an issue close to the heart of people in various sectors who suffer because of the stubbornness of the Church, which is in complete contradiction of the Gospel and alien to the Holy Spirit that filled the early Christian communities.

I must add, too, that many statements about the need for reform made by a large number of pastors and theologians have been declared taboo. Some of them have been veiled in silence, for instance the Church 2011 Memorandum. The Need for a New Beginning, signed by 311 Catholic university professors from German-speaking countries (4 February 2011). As far as I can see, the vast majority of loyal Catholics has no knowledge of this memorandum, at least not in our part of the world. There are no discussions of it, no statements have been made about it and there are apparently no lessons that can be drawn from it. In short, it is as if the diakonia of the disciples, as embraced by the theologians, has absolutely nothing to say to the Church.

The same is true of the Austrian Parish Priest Initiative. Is it of no interest whatsoever to communities on our continent? The general circumstances are not identical, of course, but the initiative is surely worth examining because there are clearly certain parallels. It could well be that these movements have something to say to the churches of Abya Yala.

But coming to the question of diakonia ad extra, let me mention the example of those who, as the disciples of the “prophet who is not accepted in his own country” (Luke 4:21-30) call for a “prophetic

¹⁵⁴ Beto, F., Diaconía profética. Aportación a la construcción del futuro del hombre, in: Concilium no. 218 (E), Madrid 1988, 79-87; here 79.
diakonia”. I refer here to the environment, which is in a state of crisis with unpredictable negative consequences for all areas of life. This again can be characterised as intercultural and inter-religious “prophetic diakonia” on the part of the followers of Jesus and as a call for justice for the religions of our Afro-American and indigenous peoples. Hence it is possible to talk of a “genuine diakonia of the followers” that, in part, accompanies their struggles.

An over 80-year-old woman living in El Cajón in the mountain chain whose foothills extend to the valley of Santa María de Catamarca in Argentina “went down” with her family to Cerro Pintao to attend a meeting of the Diaguitas and Calchaquíes Youth Workshop at the end of July 2012. In response to my question about life in the mountains she shook her head and indicated with a gesture of her hands that there was no longer the abundance of pastures, animals or Andean potatoes that had existed just a few years ago. To emphasise what had happened she added some words that came from deep inside and were accompanied by a look of suffering and yet dignity on her face, like the fruit of the carob tree that gave us shade:

– “The water! It isn’t the same any more …”

I let her words sink in and after a while ventured to ask the reason why, to which she answered:

– “Since the mine’s been here …”

She broke off and a long silence ensued, as long as the almost seventy kilometres that separate the mountains where she lives from the area of desecration caused by open pit mining, an act of savage mutilation attributable to the Bajo La Alumbrera mine. No further explanation is needed; no “environmental study” is required; there is no need to announce for all to hear that this is “sustainable mining”, that the province is “suited for mining”, that “progress” is only possible through investment that no “locals” can afford but only “people from outside” – plus a whole host of other superficial and meaningless platitudes. Life is shrinking and dying away in the highest of the valleys beyond the Cerro Pintao mountains …

For a public holiday in 2011 this mega mine took up the whole back page of the Tucumán city newspaper with a photomontage of the national flag, a view of the monument of the hero of the day and an excerpt from the national anthem “Crowned with Glory.”
“Glory” is for those who pay for publicity, i.e. the mine, which stands accused of polluting the environment and smuggling minerals. It has been the subject of legal action for thirteen years and uses money made from pollution, death and smuggling to openly and unashamedly buy off judges, high-ranking politicians, pastors, intellectuals, professionals and academics.

Argentina’s Minister of Mining said in Salta that “mining has come to stay in our country.”155 With the brazenness of a power-conscious politician, he had the effrontery to specify “areas that were to be sacrificed”156 to the false god of capital (Colossians 3:5). The mountains where the 80-year-old woman from El Cajón lives form part of this “zone”, the “Emperor’s Map” (Hinkelammert). She, her family and local communities are being mistreated with absolute impunity by a national minister who claims to defend human rights.

This high-ranking politician “contradicts” what the opponents of the mega mine have to say, accusing them of “protesting from their comfortable chairs in the federal capital” (see footnote 28). Together with those responsible for national and provincial mining policy he has turned the grandmother from the mountains, the local communities and, by extension, all the people living in the countryside into the disappeared of the twenty-first century. Can it be that these new disappeared “are not completely innocent” and so have brought this fate upon themselves, as was asserted in respect of those who disappeared during the military dictatorship? Such a claim is nothing but a smokescreen to conceal racist attitudes, a mono-cultural mindset and a greed for annexation.

Do these people count? They exist, they live, they survive in these desert-like areas for reasons that have more to do with ideology than hydrology or cosmology.157 The 80-year-old grandmother from El Cajón is a symbol of our peoples’ age-old capacity of living well


(Suma/Kawsay).\textsuperscript{158} It is said of these peoples – and here traditional racist attitudes come into play which, consciously or subconsciously are once again coming to the surface\textsuperscript{159} – that they are primitive, barbarian and in league with the devil. They have been enslaved, marginalised and forgotten; subjected to depopulation, creolisation and syncretisation. They are seen as a “problem”, as uncultured, illiterate, evangelised, needy and co-opted.

In view of all this, one question automatically springs to mind: where is the diakonia of the discipleship of Jesus? Let us content ourselves by saying that the diakonia of Christian communities can only be “prophetic diakonia.” Indeed, the ability to engage in self-criticism, which is essential for intercultural conversion (metanoia), must be subjected to review as a conditio sine qua non in order “to worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:22-24).\textsuperscript{160}

The parish priest in La Rioja, Argentina, who opposed a foreign mega mining project because of the neo-colonial pillaging it involved, stood up on behalf of his community in opposition to the rich investors. His bishop did not support him because, in his own words, he “could not detect” any potential damage to the environment. The question here is who is acting in keeping with the diakonia: the priest performing his diaconal service in support of life or the bishop with his “diplomatic appeasement” in the light of a systematic government plan, which is synonymous with a crime against human rights and the rights of nature in a neo-colonial scenario of eco-genocide and epistemicide.\textsuperscript{161}


\textsuperscript{160} See Fornet-Betancourt, R., Interculturalidad y religión. Para una lectura intercultural de la crisis actual del cristianismo, Quito, 2007, 161.

\textsuperscript{161} For information on the extent of this neo-colonisation see Flores, O. T., ¡Cuidado!: Canadá con 1.246 proyectos mineros activos en Latinoamérica!, at http://www.noalamina.org/mineria-latinoamerica/mineria-general/icuidado-canada-con-1246-proyecto-mineros-activos-en-latinoamerica, 28 September 2012.
In 2011, the Transnational Court of Ethics in Tucumán in north-west Argentina\(^{162}\) came to the conclusion that not only companies, but also political decision-makers at the national, provincial and local level shared moral responsibility for the violations of the law that had taken place. The charge of infringements of human rights and the rights of nature was levelled at other accomplices: scientists, academics, intellectuals and journalists as well as pastors, bishops and priests who, by keeping silent and turning a blind eye, had betrayed entire defenceless communities.

I come back once again to the question of the disciples of Jesus and their importance for the diakonia. What we are dealing with here is a complex and yet very clear sign of the times, which makes it apparent that Christians must not feign ignorance on the grounds of political vanity, economic convenience or any other fine-sounding excuses.

In view of the violent government repression of the peoples fighting in the Andean foothills in Argentina in February 2012, the members of the Courts of Ethics in north-west Argentina (Tucumán, 2011), of which I am a member, urged the Bishops’ Meeting in Santa María, Catamarca, in March 2012 to vigorously defend the lives of these peoples against the aforementioned systematic plan.\(^{163}\) The bishops expressed their views in very general terms and with a sleek and smooth detachment, being neither cool nor warm in their responses (Rev. 7:15).\(^{164}\) This stands in stark contrast to the clear, explicit “prophetic diakonia” of their fellow bishops in Patagonia: “closeness and communion with brothers and sisters who express their concern in many different ways through legal action in the courts, participation in marches, demonstrations, petitions and prayers”. They deplore repression and impunity and defend cultural diversity,


\(^{163}\) Carta Abierta a los Obispos del NOA-Tribunal del Juicio Ético Popular a las Transnacionales http://colectiveopprosario.blogspot.com.ar/2012/02/carta-abierta-los-obispos-del-noa.html, 30 September 2012, which includes the bishops’ documentation.

especially of the indigenous inhabitants and peasants, while warning of the destruction of the sources of life caused by mining.\footnote{Declaración de los obispos de la Patagonia-Comahue sobre la minería a cielo abierto http://www.san-pablo.com.ar/vidapastoral/index.php?seccion=articulos&id=615, 30 December 2012.}

The task of a disciple is to be like a teacher (Luke 6:40). The diakonia of Jesus will manifest itself in those baptised to become his disciples; they will not be able to do otherwise than to bear the burden of those treading the path to their liberation.
Diakonia and the Mission of the Church
The Paradox of the Church as Political and Universal:
Challenges to the Theology of the One World

David Kaulem

The Church, like other global institutions such as the United Nations, present themselves as universal. If they truly are universal, then they must have all human beings and all creation in their view as they work in the world. The church, like Christ can never allow itself to leave out some people of its aspirations and concerns. Being universal in this comprehensive sense is almost an impossible task that only God can achieve. God does not seem to have a just war theory for God takes care of even those who fight God. Only those beings who are incapable of guaranteeing the realisation of a peaceful one world are forced to develop a just war theory. God does not need it. But when the church takes up the work of God on earth, it has no choice but to strive towards God’s view of the world. Even as it works in a particular space and time, it must always have a universal view that is at once sociologically and anthropologically universal as it is historically and environmentally so.

Universality here is taken to mean the inclusion of all. In logic, “all” means “all” and not “some”. History has shown us that when human beings take up God’s universal project of salvation, humanity has a tendency of showing its limitations as the universal is often turned into the particular. “All” is turned into “some”. For example the universal historical projects of civilization, enlightenment, education, human rights and the search for freedom, prosperity and growth have turned out, in history, to be at the expense of some people who became discriminated against, marginalised and impoverished

166 Cornel West incisively demonstrates the ambiguity of the liberal democratic tradition. While it made possible the treatment of each and every human being as unique, equal and with sanctity, the historical development of this experiment shows how at different points it did not apply to white men with no property, to women, slaves, and people of African decent.
To be political seems to stand in the way of universality. This is the challenge of the theology of the one world. People who have deep experience of marginalisation seem to understand this insight more clearly than those who view themselves as representing the values of universality.

Africa and Universality

For Africa, slave trade, slavery, colonialism and imperialism came in the name of wonderful universal projects of freedom, civilization, prosperity and growth. Powerful members of the church, including some popes, cardinals, bishops and priests were sometimes found to be embedded in their respective historical particularities to the extent of undermining the universality of the church’s universal message. It is the same with the champions of human rights and universal justice. While the great American constitution recognised right from the start the fundamental human rights of all people, it took ages for its leaders to get rid of their slaves and for people of African decent, women and many others to enjoy those rights. It is therefore not surprising that the United Nations is not yet united and that the United Nations Security Council is sometimes a threat to human security. It is therefore not surprising that people of African decent, among others, are suspicious of the concepts and political projects that claim to include all and to be aimed at the common good. For it was in the name of humanity that Africans were sold into slavery, in the name of civilization that they were colonised and dominated and in the name of progress, justice and the rule of law that their lands were taken away from them. Today, as the concepts of development, global governance and even theology of the one world [are propagated], what should be going on in the minds of those who have been imbued by history with a sense of suspicion?

But the logic of this paradox which seems to emanate from the limits of humanity also works within African societies themselves. It is not only non-Africans whose humanity has undermined universality and the idea of the one world. In Africa, it is almost a universal truth that the champions of the liberation of Africans from colonialism became themselves abrogators of the rights and freedoms of Africans. African history is littered with victims of African experiments with universal values. Many liberation movements that have fought for social justice, liberation, human rights and peace have themselves been guilty of perpetrating injustices against others.
There is something about humanity that seems to make the attempt to achieve universality turn into its opposite. The fight for freedom by some has tended to lead into the oppression of others. Is the global project of realising good governance in Africa and elsewhere such an attempt with similar results? The good governance project could, after all, turn out to be a project of subjugation and injustice. Can the church, which sees itself as a universal agent of values be the fomentor of agents of good governance? Or is the church too much embedded in its own particularity to be a universal agent of good governance? To what extent can the church preach the theology of the one world and succeed to bring all people together to work for the truly common good? Or is the common good a concept used (and abused?) by the clever to recruit others to a sectarian project. These are some of the questions that have been raised given some African experiences of the projects that have been initiated in the name of universalist projects.

Is One World Possible?

Philosophers and theologians have debated the question of whether we all live in one world or as Leibnitz argued, we all live in our own separate worlds which hardly communicate with each other. If Leibnitz is right then only God and not humans is capable of achieving what he called the pre-established harmony. For him, only God is able to organise the journey beyond human division, alienation, and violent opposition. A theology of the one world suggests that we are all equal and because we live in the one world, we must be judged by the same values and principles. In this view, standards of justice must be the same for all of us. Modern technology seems to convince us more and more that we live in the same world. With cell phones, televisions and the Internet, the world seems capable of attending the same events at the same time. Both the wedding and death of Princess Diana seem to be global events. Almost every human being seems to remember where they were when the Twin Towers were razed to the ground. Global economic, natural, political and health systems seem to have demonstrated clearly how interconnected life now is. They seem to confirm the view of the theology of the one world. Economic poverty in one part of the world will surely affect other parts. HIV, Asian flu, and other diseases have demonstrated how important it is for all people to collaborate. Global climatic
changes also demonstrate the same point that separate development or Apartheid of any form has come to the end of the road. Jeffrey Sachs makes this point very clearly when he writes,

> The defining challenge of the twenty-first century will be to face the reality that humanity shares a common fate on a crowded planet. That common fate will require new forms of global cooperation, a fundamental point of blinding simplicity that many world leaders have yet to understand or embrace. For the past two hundred years, technology and demography have consistently run ahead of deeper social understanding. Industrialization and science have created a pace of change unprecedented in human history. Philosophers, politicians, artists, and economists must scramble constantly to catch up with contemporaneous social conditions. Our social philosophies, as a result, consistently lag behind present realities.\(^{167}\)

The political visions and cultural practices that we have inherited in the world lag behind present realities and lack any “deeper social understanding”; sometimes [they] actually fight actively against such understanding. Yet the realities of the world seem to push us more and more into realising that we live in just one world.

In this sense, the theology of the one world seems to be “a deeper social understanding” that is in fact ahead of its time. It gives us a vision of what the world could be. It gives us a sense that another world is possible. Every now and then, we experience a taste of what the world could be if it were guided by the principles of the theology of the one world when, for example the world positively and unreservedly responds to the suffering of fellow humans as when a tsunami happens in Asia, a super storm in the east coast of the USA, or famine in Ethiopia. Opongo and Orobator explain that ideals and principles are prophetic in so far as they help to give us visions of what things could be like. Theology of the one world is prophetic thought. Through principles, values and visions, prophetic thought helps us to go beyond how things are, as a matter of fact, especially if the present is full of injustice and evil. Opongo and Orobator explain the role of ideals and principles in the following words:

> Ideals represent something we strive for. They enable us to envisage possibilities (the way things can be) and alternatives, that

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is, a new way of constructing and organizing reality (be it social, economic, cultural or political). Principles, for their part, offer us some guidelines and framework in view of attaining some practical goals and objectives. Together, principles and ideals give us a vision of how our world could be and ought to be. In other words, they indicate some values that we can apply to the construction and transformation of the reality that confronts us.\textsuperscript{168}

Theology of the just one world is prophetic in so far as it goes beyond what is in order to suggest and inspire people to transform what is into what ought to be. In social and political philosophy it is usually referred to as ‘ideal’ justice or ‘prosthetic’ justice\textsuperscript{169}. In Christian language, prophetic thought facilitates the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth ‘as it is in heaven’. It points us to transcendence. In prophetic thought, the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth is linked to the real needs and aspirations of people of flesh and blood and yet leads beyond flesh and blood. The Catholic Bishops meeting as the Second Vatican Council were confident that prophetic thought inspired by transcendence would lead to “the renewal of the temporal order”. What they meant by temporal order is the physical world which we live “in space and time” i.e. our world of flesh and blood where we are concerned about our social welfare. Thus they explained this transformation of the temporal order as follows:

That human beings, working in harmony, should renew the temporal order and make it increasingly more perfect: such is God’s design for the world.\textsuperscript{170}

But above all, the theology of the one world expresses a strong desire to go beyond the divisions found in the broken and unjust world. It tries to breakdown the binary oppositions that are preached by racism, tribalism, ideologies, sexism, class divisions and many others. These divisions give some, especially the marginalised, exploited, oppressed and discriminated against, reason to be sceptical of the theology of the one world. For many in Africa, there are enough negative experiences to question whether the one world theology will ever be realised. While the grounding of the Twin Towers seems to be


\textsuperscript{169} Miller, D., Social Justice, Oxford 1976, 26.

a universal and global event, the Rwandan genocide, AIDS in Africa, the dumping of toxic waste in Côte d’Ivoire and the tragedies of absolute poverty in Africa seem to be side events not worthy of being given the status of global events demanding universal attention. They are novelties but not global events. In this context, the common good, universal justice, human rights, the Universal Church, the United Nations and the Theology of the One World are all put into question. When the United Nations Peace Keeping Force is overrun by a group of rebel soldiers in Goma, then there is a question of how much hope is to be placed in universal human rights. If the D.R. Congo had been a country in Europe, would its troubles have continued for as long as they have?

**Church as a Universal Political Agent**

This question can best be looked at in the context of the church’s role in attempting to take up a universal role to achieve transcendence and encourage the common good. In contemporary society there is a fixation on good governance and the rule of law. The church seems to have committed itself to this goal – the realisation of good governance in the world. I want to talk about the church’s political project that is over and above its day-to-day activities, work and practices. I would like us to discuss the church as a political agent. But I am not suggesting that the church is merely or solely a political agent. It is a lot more than that. I assume, for example, that in its everyday activities, the church is involved in liturgy, baptism, confirmations, and many other activities often associated with it. Yet every now and then, the church is called upon to respond to special needs, challenges and requests. This response comes in the form of special projects. The church’s response to the political challenges in Africa is one such project. In fact it is a series of many political projects. By its nature, a project has specific goals to be achieved. It uses strategies and gathers resources to achieve those goals. At the end of a project, something new is brought into being and it becomes part and parcel of the normal establishment; new projects are identified and followed through. To say this is not in any way to suggest that special projects do not need sustained political action. Church leaders make a big mistake to think that African political projects will be solved by *ad hoc* committees and temporary political alliances unsupported by resources and professional expertise and strategies. When the church
preaches the need to have good governance in the world, but fails to organise for it, it demonstrates its lack of commitment to such values. In effect, it stands for the status quo.

Politics as a Vocation for Social Justice

The Church, like Christ, announces the ‘good news’ and denounces injustice. Working for good governance to push towards a just social and political order is, in a wide sense of the term, a political project which the church has already embarked on in Africa and in the rest of the world. Summarising this project in *Ecclesia in Africa*, Pope John II wrote about how the church fathers grappled with this project in Africa at the First Special Synod of Bishops in 1993:

During their discussions the Synod Fathers, fully aware that they were expressing the expectations not only of African Catholics but also those of all the men and women of the Continent, squarely faced the many evils which oppress Africa today. The Fathers explored at length and in all its complexity what the Church is called to do in order to bring about the desired changes, but they did so with an attitude free from pessimism or despair. Despite the mainly negative picture which today characterizes numerous parts of Africa, and despite the sad situations being experienced in many countries, the Church has the duty to affirm vigorously that these difficulties can be overcome. She must strengthen in all Africans hope of genuine liberation. (*Ecclesia in Africa*, # 14)

The church fathers tried to make African events global ones deserving of worldwide attention. The political move towards good governance and just social order must be a journey, or more accurately, a series of journeys towards “genuine liberation”, not only of Africans but of human beings in general. And yet there is also a principle of subsidiarity which the church also wanted to respect. In respecting this principle, the church was saying, “we are not really African so we wait to hear what the Africans think”. In one sense, it was respect for the Africans and yet in another sense, it was an abdication from full moral responsibility. It was admission that we are not really in the one world. Was it?

One World, One Love

Pope Benedict XVI cautions that the church carries out this political project not only in the spirit of hope, as indicated in *Ecclesia*
in Africa, but also in the spirit of charity and love. He points out that, “Love – caritas – is an extraordinary force which leads people to opt for courageous and generous engagement in the field of justice and peace”. (Caritas in Veritate, #1) The political project is the one which people embark on when they are inspired to act courageously and generously in the world because of love. Love is often directed to people and objects in the same world as the one who loves. To love is to desire to draw near physically, spiritually and culturally. The theology of the one world is clearly a theology of love that tries to go beyond human divisions and separations. The theology of the one world is political because it involves fighting for (reconciliation, justice, peace, good governance, solidarity, the common good etc) and fighting against (poverty, injustice, oppression, exploitation, greed, hateful conflict etc). It is a project because it requires special attention over and above the every day life of the church and the lives of its members. It is not surprising, therefore that the challenges of Africa have called upon the church to organise special assemblies of bishops to meet in Rome in 1993 and 2009 followed by many other meetings of church groups and institutions as special responses to these challenges. Of course the church’s response is not merely political yet there is no doubt that the church feels that a political response is required.

Church as Political Leader

The church is a genuine political leader but it does not take part in party politics or vy for political power in government. And yet the church affects politics and it has to do so. The church provides leadership in politics in that it has values and visions for how society ought to function. It provides leadership if it succeeds in being “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” (Mt 5:13-14).

There is no doubt that the activities that the church is called upon to do are part of a political project for it involves engaging and combating negative social values, engaging national constitutions, governments and political movements. All these are part of a wide political project to encourage society to work towards a just social order in which life is protected, human dignity is enhanced and the rest of creation is respected. While the church itself does not take part in political contestations for power in government, it however tries to influence the various political forces that are engaged in this process.
through education, lobbying and advocating for certain values, behaviours, cultures and social arrangements:

“There is no doubt that the building of a just social order is part of the competence of the political sphere. Yet one of the tasks of the Church in Africa consists in forming upright consciences receptive to the demands of justice, so as to produce men and women willing and able to build this just social order by their responsible conduct.” (Africae Munus, # 22)

Politics in this wider sense is not partisan but is inspired by universal principles and a sense of the common good. It is politics in the sense of pushing for a certain way of looking at things and gathering resources, skills, power, and capabilities in order to realise this preferred way of looking at reality. It is politics in the sense that it involves fighting against certain ways of looking at reality and certain ways of organising social reality. It is politics in the sense that it is organised since “Organized programs are necessary for ‘directing, stimulating, coordinating, supplying and integrating’ the work of individuals and intermediary organizations” (Ecclesia in Africa, #33).

But this attempt by the church to be non-partisan and to take up a universalist position and yet “pushing for a certain way of looking at things” and “fighting against certain ways of looking at reality” has sometimes proved, in the eyes of many, that the church could be more particularist than universalist. This is a real challenge in places where the church does not represent the views of the majority. And yet, of course the universalist position is not necessarily the popular position. In fact in a world characterised by racism, tribalism, sexism, ageism, and sectarianism, universalism seems attractive only to a few. The theology of the one world is not a popular position. Many may appear to consent to the theology of the one world and yet their practice betrays them. Those in power always find it difficult to give up their positions even in the interest of the justice that they believe in. This is why the United Nations is still not united and human rights are still more for some than for others.

Making the first steps

The church preaches the values and the principles of the one world. It understands that all human beings were not created to suffer but to be free and happy through being fulfilled physically,
emotionally, intellectually, socially, culturally and spiritually. God gives all humans varied talents and capabilities so that they can create the social, cultural, political, and economic environment in which they can all flourish and be happy. We therefore, have responsibilities to contribute to the creation of conditions that can make everyone flourish. The conditions of injustice must be confronted.

Thus, we need a basic spiritual and ethical perspective which is inspired by the common good as our goal. It is this morality and spirituality which becomes the cement of our local, national, regional and global political universe. But to recognise it as our goal is to admit that there is always going to be a gap between reality and our ideals. To fight for the common good and to be inspired by it is far from acting as if we already possess the common good. This is what Cornel West calls ‘tracking hypocrisy’. Tracking hypocrisy, for West is “accepting boldly the gap between principles and practice, between promise and performance”\textsuperscript{171}. He insists that we have to have courage to point out human hypocrisy while at the same time remaining open to having others point out that of our own. This is why he understands tracking hypocrisy as self-critical. Often, we are complicit with the very thing we criticize. Tracking hypocrisy is a form of intellectual and moral humility. And yet it does not mean that we should not take a moral stand on issues. Humility is a value that not only individuals but also institutions and organisation should strive to have. Even as the church fights for a certain way of looking at and organising things, it should always recognise the reality of different opinions living in this one world. The spirituality of the theology of the one world is a spirituality of humility and respect.

In witnessing to the values of its social teachings, the church ought to reflect upon the values it wishes to teach and witness to. It must reflect the values of good governance and social justice. The church cannot contribute to the transition towards good governance without being imbued with the principles of good governance, reconciliation and justice in its own structures, procedures and processes. The church that understands its role in society is a prophetic church which is also humble; it is a church that not only understands its social context and discerns its historical role but also recognises its historical limitations. A prophetic church is one that teaches the value

of human solidarity – the value that says that human beings must never lose sight of the humanity of others. Neither should they lose sight of the value of the rest of creation. Solidarity is the principle of gravitating towards universality and recognition of the one world theology. It means, whatever our disagreements, human beings should never alienate each other by demonising each other – and neither should they disrespect the rest of creation. A church which teaches solidarity should be able to teach social humility. No one and no one group of people has all the solutions to life. Strong and healthy societies are those that are capable of self-criticism and capable of handling external criticism.

Political Participation and Solidarity

The challenge of good governance is the challenge of encouraging participation of all and the creation, deepening and widening solidarity among peoples. If we are to create a just world order, we must recognise that many people are prevented from participating in politics because of poverty, violence, alienated political processes, and just simple apathy. The racism, tribalism and sexism that exists in our hearts, in our institutions and cultures divide us and become the bases for excluding others from participating in development. We must recognise that political participation is essential for universal growth and integral human development. It is not a luxury. What we call the “option for the poor and marginalised” is an effort to maintain political participation by correcting weaknesses in our political systems. It is a sign of our solidarity with the marginalised – our attempt to break down the social, cultural, economic divisions between us – our desire to transcendence. It is our way of building a theology of the one world and to convince those who feel estranged that they are part of the one world. And yet our humanity is always our challenge.
Diakonia: The Main Mission of the Church

Andrew G. Recepcion

Scanning the Horizon of Mission and Diakonia in the Church

The mission history of the Church can be read from the optic of diakonia. More than the common meaning given to diakonia as service, one can find wider ecclesiological and missiological perspectives that come out of the experience of diakonia in the life of the Church.

Diakonia in the Church brings to mind three key words: being, community, and mandate. The evolution of the theory and praxis of diakonia can be gleaned from the different turning points in the life of the Church that brought about a qualitative leap in the experience of being (way of life) and being sent (mission) in the Church.

This initial review of the relationship of diakonia and mission in the Church is an attempt to understand how mission and diakonia are not two separate realities in the Church. In actual ecclesial praxis, diakonia and mission are related in the constant dynamism of faith in practice and in context.

Our intention in this missiological exploration is to understand that diakonia is central to the mission of the Church. There are some difficulties, however, in delineating a common ground for understanding the meaning of diakonia in the total mission of the Church because the ministry in the Church has assumed varied forms from the time of the second century Christianity to the present.

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173 The work of Fabio Ciardi on the role of charismatic gifts at the service of the Church is helpful. See: Ciardi, F., Carismi: Vangelo che si Storia, Rome 2011, 5-95.

174 These three key words correspond to Mystery, Communion and Mission. This framework is operative in the documents of the Second Vatican Council.

time; and also the crises of faith, hope and charity in the experience of being Church today have contributed to the reduction of diakonia to a specific service in the hierarchy vis-a-vis the mission of the Church. From the history of ministry in the Church, one can say that “diakonia is historically and theologically previous to the office of deacon and has primacy over it.”

Let us look into the faith-ing experience of men and women today. We can say that today more than ever before, mission is in crisis. When the understanding of mission in the church is in crisis, diakonia is also affected in a manner that can undermine the proclamation of the Gospel today in word and witness.

The normal state of mission is crisis. David Bosch has honestly pointed out that we are not always conscious that crises have accompanied the life and work of the Church through the centuries. It is in the crises, however, that a new life of faith and passion for mission comes out that responds to the needs or situations of the times with new charisms enriching the mission work of the Church.

The crisis in the mission of the Church mainly comes from identifying mission with works and activities carried out by missionaries. Thus, it is necessary once again to affirm the primacy of being in the meaning of mission from the optic of diakonia that encompasses both being and doing in the dynamism of love rooted in Jesus Christ who emptied himself and took the form of a slave in order that we might become free children of God (cf. Philippians 2: 6-8).

Let us try to understand the relationship of mission and diakonia through the witness of Scriptures and the living Tradition of the Church.


Diakonia in the Witness of Scriptures

In the Old Testament, it is God who is the missionary. He sends mediators in order to bring to people’s awareness his nearness and the constancy of his relationship in the context of the covenant (Gen. 9: 11-15; Ex. 19:1-6; Jer. 31:31-34). We find the life of the mediator as both an instrument of God’s presence and a manifestation of God’s fidelity in spite of human frailty. Mission in the Old Testament affirms that a mission word (Ex 7, 16; 4, 12-13, Dt 5,5) is always accompanied by a mission sign (Ex 4, 28; 4,17; 7, 16ff) in the sense that word and sign are entwined in the life of a mediator who gives witness to the truth that he brings from God. Moses, for example, proclaims the Word of God and confirms it by signs, and thus realizes the salvation and the creation of the New People. Prophets are friends of God, called and sent by God to transmit his message that called for conversion (present) and messianic expectation (future). Thus, God sends prophets to bring his message and call people back to the path of righteousness.\(^{180}\)

Though there is no clear indication that diakonia is related explicitly to mission in the Old Testament, there is a horizon for affirming, however, that God’s mediators are servants because mission requires the one sent to obey and to serve. A missionary brings in him the presence of the Missionary himself who is God made known through word and sign.\(^{181}\)

The witness of the New Testament with regard to the relationship between mission and diakonia is not easily pointed out due to the nuances of diakonia. There are more than thirty word-usages of \textit{diakonia} in the New Testament\(^{182}\) that can refer to the following meanings, namely: service, ministering, especially of those who execute the commands of others; of those who by the command of God proclaim and promote religion among men.\(^{183}\)


\(^{182}\) The usages: Ministries 1, ministry 19, mission 1, preparations 1, relief 1, serve 1, service 7, serving 2, support 1.

Aside from the problem of finding a single definition of diakonia, the other difficulty comes from the correct interpretation of some key texts and their lexical significance towards a definition of diakonia as service in the Church. A concise review of the problem is presented by Karl Paul Donfried who illustrates that “several key passages of the NT can be used to illustrate the problem of defining diakonia (Mk 10: 42-45; Luke 22:25-30; Ephesians 4:11-12).” The asymmetry of meaning can marshall different perspectives that can correct the traditional identification of diakonia with menial work at the service of the needy.

Dieter Giorgi, though his insights are largely unheeded by scholars, opines that diakonia “almost never envoys an act of charity.” In fact, the diakonos “would better be understood as “God’s plenipotentiary envoy.” Furthermore, John N. Collins “vastly expands, deepens, corrects, and modifies Giorgi’s essentially correct insight” in which he agrees that the work of deacons was not essentially “works of mercy.” On the contrary, he “demonstrates that the notion of “mission” is more correct than “assistance.” Thus, “few places would remain in the New Testament where the words might unequivocally express the idea of the service of the needy.”

It is important to highlight that at the heart of the search for a definition of diakonia in the New Testament is the affirmation that service is a constitutive element in the experience of discipleship. Discipleship can be described as servant-hood in mission.

Diakonia in Non-Christian Sources

The meaning of Diakonia in the New Testament from the optic of mission is made clearer by knowing the different nuances attached to the word-group in non-Christian sources. Donfried uses the research of Collins in the manner that diakonia is used in its profane sense:

The word-group includes reference to the work of a courier or go-between.” There is an interesting relationship here between diakonos

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184 Donfried, K.P., “Rethinking the Term Diakonia.” in Concordia Theological Quarterly, Volume 56/1, January 1992, 4-5.
187 Ibid.
188 Karl Paul Donfried, 7.
and the verb *dioko*, from which one can more clearly understand the work of a “runner” as an essential component of *diakonos*. There is a sense of delivering something from God. The church, from this viewpoint, is seen as God’s delivery-service, a people on a godly mission.\(^{189}\)

There is also an emphasis on deed in the word group. The reference is to carrying out a task or effecting things for others, without any connotation of acting slavishly. A good example of this usage is found in Romans 15:25, where Paul is going to Jerusalem “on an errand to the saints rather than with aid [diakonon] for the saints.” Frequently this “acting for someone” or “effecting things for others” is done as the agent of a deity. Josephus, for example, defines the *diakonos* as the “duly sanctioned representative” of the Jewish God. Collins summarizes this aspect of his study with these words: “The functions that we have seen designated by words of the diakon-group are hugely varied, yet none, so far, have been of a menial nature. The words have been designating actions of an in-between kind or people who operate in an in-between capacity, especially people (or spirits) who implement the intentions or desires of another.\(^{190}\)

It should be noted that, when the word-group is used in connection with house and table, it generally refers to a public, official, or religious occasion. There are few examples of the application of the word-group to domestic service, and those which do occur most frequently refer to a ceremonial waiter! A fact not unimportant to the understanding of Luke 22:27.\(^{191}\)

The non-Christian sources do indicate that the word-group of *diakonia* is primarily about being a channel, an instrument, and a mediator. In other words, *diakonia* is not concerned with slaves or servants per se who do menial tasks but it is about missioning, acting for someone, and celebrating a community event.\(^{192}\)

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\(^{189}\) Collins, 107.

\(^{190}\) Ibid., 148.

\(^{191}\) Donfried, 7.

\(^{192}\) Donfried, 7.
Diakonia in Pauline Horizon vis-a-vis Mark 10: 4s; Luke 22:27; Ephesians 4:11-12

The Pauline texts (e.g. 1 Cor. 3:5; 2 Cor. 3:6; 6:4; 11:23) that refer to diakonia either as service or servants are “not talking in some imprecise way about “servants”. In other words, a closer look at the Pauline texts vis-a-vis Mark 10: 4s, Luke 22:27, and also Ephesians 4:11-12 show that diakonia does not mean “service to brethren in daily life, a Christian philanthropy.” The idea of diakonia in Paul can designate “specific types of undertaking in the areas of message, agency, attendance, and teaching.” Thus, diakonia is a constitutive element in the mission of Paul who gave primacy to Christian life and witness.

The Pauline notion of “diakonia is a collective notion for many kinds of activities, services, and actions. For our theme it is important to note that along with many other notions the word diakonia means the preaching of the gospel (cf. Eph. 5:6-7), as well as the service of the apostles in general (cf. 1 Cor. 3:5) and in particular the raising of funds for the Palestinian, especially Jerusalem community (cf. 2 Cor. 8:4).”

The necessity to affirm the nature of diakonia “justifies the opinion that diakonia is inseparable from the integral life of the Church. Diakonia is an essential element of the Church.” Thus, the very nature of the Church is diakonia and the Church’s diakonia is actually mission at the service of the Kingdom.

Diakonia in the Second Vatican Council

Mary Louise Norpel opines that the Second Vatican Council has helped the Church understand its identity from the experience of diakonia:

193 Ibid., 8-10.
194 Ibid., 7-8.
195 Ibid.
196 Ibid., 9-10.
If Vatican II has helped Christians to rediscover the real meaning of the Church, it has done so chiefly by attempting to restore the Church’s self-understanding as servant. The Church, the *ecclesia*, is called to speak Christ to the nations. The Church exists for the speaking of the word of God that the kingdom may come. This is her primary service, her diakonia, and by this mission her vocation is defined. Unless the Church is servant, she has no justification for her existence. She is nothing without diakonia, her mission.\(^{199}\)

Norpel argues that “the basic reason for the existence of the Church is formulated in the decree on the Apostolate of the Laity.”\(^{200}\)

For this was the reason the Church was founded: that by spreading the kingdom of Christ everywhere for the glory of God the Father, she might bring all men to share in Christ’s saving redemption; and that through them the whole world might in actual fact be brought into relationship with him.\(^{201}\)

The idea of a servant-Church, though not explicitly discussed by the documents of the Second Vatican Council, is a pervading spirit that comes out in varied expressions that articulate the mission of the Church in the world. Avery Dulles proceeds with caution, however, by pointing out that

as the institutional model of the Church recedes from its primacy, there is a shift from the categories of power to the categories of love and service. But the concept of service must be carefully nuanced so as to keep alive the distinctive mission and identity of the mission.\(^{202}\)

We cannot extrapolate beyond what the text seen its context means. Nevertheless, if we look at the itinerary of Second Vatican Council it gives us an overview that diakonia is located within the integral horizon of mystery, communion, and mission.\(^{203}\)

The different meanings given to Diakonia from our cursory review underscore that diakonia is essentially at the heart of the Church’s mission. Mission more than an activity of the Church, finds its being

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\(^{199}\) Norpel, 01.

\(^{200}\) Ibid.

\(^{201}\) *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 2.


in diakonia in the sense that the Church is always at the service of the Kingdom who is Jesus Christ himself proclaimed in word and witness through the centuries in different forms of service.

From the optic of diakonia as the main mission of the Church, we shall briefly outline in broad strokes some possible contexts for the diakonia in mission of the Church today. It is necessary to highlight that the dynamic tension between the mandate and context impact on the missionary practice today.

Contexts for Diakonia in the life of the Church Today

Inasmuch as faith is always lived in context, we can say that mission is diakonia in context. The different contexts of doing mission today challenge the classical view of mission without cancelling the permanent validity of proclaiming the Gospel and the agency of the Holy Spirit who guides the mission of the Church in the difficult pathways of contemporary global society.

Beyond Geography

In the past and even today, mission has been understood and experienced primarily from the horizon of geography. In other words, mission is leaving one’s place or country in order to be sent to designated territories that are often referred to as missions or mission stations. Though the permanent validity of mission ad gentes, that is, missionaries going to other territories that need the first proclamation of the Gospel cannot be dismissed as outmoded and unnecessary, it remains equally valid that the mission horizon of the Church cannot be confined to geography. There other ways of mission-ing in the changing horizons of our times. In fact, mission has assumed a new stance of embracing humanity’s frontier situations where God is unknown in the consciousness of humanity even in the jungles of global cities where the absence of God is fashionable or where God is a private matter that cannot interfere with other areas of life. Even when it comes to God, it is mind-your-own-business.

Rino Fisichella points out in his recent book on New Evangelization the situation of humanity afflicted with secularism: “Humanity is in crisis… the crisis is cultural as well as anthropological.”

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longer at the center of life for humans have taken the place of God. Fisichella illustrates that secularism has proposed the thesis of living in the world *etsi Deus non daretur*, that is, as if God does not exist. Thus, after having taken away God’s rightful place, humans have also lost themselves.\(^{205}\) Pope Benedict XVI

Mission in our changing world needs to go out from the security of a stable designated territory. It has to enter the disorientation of humanity that is in search of the true face of God. A missioner today needs to give witness to a personal God who makes a difference in one’s entire life. A missioner today needs to be passionate about proclaiming the true face of Jesus Christ who makes a difference in the world today.

**Beyond Maintenance**

Some missioners after having spent more than two years or more of their lives in a particular mission station or area, have become “settled” in the sense of feeling at ease with the people of the place and with the system of mission work. One unconsciously enters the missionary’s comfort zone. The sense of surprise from the God who sends during the first few months of mission work has been replaced by a sense of fulfillment that everything has gone well. The sense of exploration of new avenues for sharing the Gospel has been replaced by the maintenance of structures and systems. Attachment to one’s mission work slowly creeps in and people give the impression that their lives would be different without the contribution of the missionary.

A missioner should not be deceived that mission is his task. In the first place, mission is God’s work and not a human task. Thus, when everything goes well in the missions it is an affirmation that mission is a gift from God who finds in the life of a missioner, in spite of his or her frailty, an adequate instrument to communicate his Divine life by word and witness.

Mission in our changing world needs to go out from the maintenance status of institutionalized mission work to mission in the frontiers after the model of St. Paul who never settled in one place but went where he felt Jesus wanted him to proclaim his message;

\(^{205}\) Ibid., 32.
who was never attached to any of his mission works for the fulfillment of a true missionary is not in one’s work but only in Jesus Christ. Like Paul, missioners today need to find the different frontiers of humanity where there is an urgent need of God’s message. Go when nobody wants to go. Go when you think you are not ready and prepared. Be ready to be ill-at-ease because Jesus Christ is in charge.

Towards a Missionary Spirituality of Diakonia: Mission is Homecoming

In the Old Testament, the People of Israel did not see mission as going out of Israel but rather they were convinced that by their fidelity to the covenant with Yahweh, non-believers will come to Israel to know the true God. In the New Testament, the center is not Israel but Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, racial, geographical, and cultural divides are secondary. The person of Jesus Christ becomes the message, the origin, and the point of arrival of every disciple’s mission work.

It is in this light that no matter how we slalom in our mission work we will always have to find our way back to Jesus who sends us, accompanies us, and welcomes us back.

There is a certain degree of restlessness in the life of missionaries, that is, the temptation to find fulfillment in the end product of mission work. Nevertheless, it is necessary to reiterate that only Jesus Christ is the true measure of success in the life of missionaries. The implications of this affirmation to the life of missionaries are tremendous in the sense that everything becomes secondary and only Jesus and his plan matter most. Only Jesus and his plan in the mission area, remains forever even after the missionaries have left.

Missionaries cannot live without a spirituality that is at home with Jesus present in their lives and in the community that they serve. In fact, only friendship with Christ in the restlessness of daily life can give serenity in the midst of difficulties and in the seemingly insurmountable challenges of mission work.

A missionary cannot compartmentalize mission work into spheres of activity but integrates every aspect of life as a journey from God in oneself to God in the other. It is an unending contemplation of and encounter with God in the routine of the global village: in the daily commute; in the patience needed to go through a traffic jam;
in the experience of forgiving a mistake of a fellow missionary; in
the difficulty of dealing with people in the mission area. Mission is
homecoming to Jesus who makes a missionary’s life a continuous
praise of God’s providence, guidance, and compassionate love.
Diakonia: The Universal Summons to Serve God in the Service of Mankind — Theological reflections in light of the dramatic situation along the border with the USA

Mauricio Urrea Carrillo

“As one who is less than you, I desire to put you on your guard.”
(Saint Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to the Magnesians, 10, 1-15)

According to Saint John (13:1-20), shortly before the Passover of Jesus, the Master (ὁ διδάσκαλος) taught his disciples one final lesson: mutual service. In the cenacle the community of disciples experiences the intimacy of fraternal communion which is characterised by a spirit of humility and the commandment to love one’s neighbour. Jesus had shown himself as Rabbuni (John 20:16) and Master (John 13:13) on innumerable occasions in the past, but he gives the definitive lesson to his disciples at this supper. The divine mission (οφειλετε) of serving others (καταλληλων) establishes the community as a group of disciples, such as a Church of Brothers and Sisters or People of Kings. Pursuing different intentions than the other evangelists (Mark 14:17 and Luke 22:14), Saint John (13:5) states that Jesus washed the feet of the disciples (την μακρον), thus extending the teaching and the mission to the whole ecclesial community. Henceforth, everyone who believes in the revealed Word (John 6:35b) and decides to follow in His footsteps of his own free will also undertake to remain with Jesus (ἐν εμοί μένει), that is, to live in a spirit of humility and fraternal service.

206 I shall expand the topic of diakonia as one of the functions of the universal Church, together with martyria, liturgia and koinonia, and ignore the historical problem of diakonia as a possible source of power and privilege; cf. N. Mette, Diakonia, in: Kasper, W. et al., Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche, Freiburg i. Breisgau, 2006, 3, 184-185.
The gesture of washing feet as a sign of hospitality offered to visitors was described in the Old Testament (Genesis 18:4 and I Samuel 25:41), but Jesus takes up this symbol (Luke 22:24-27) and uses it in a revolutionary way: now, as He Himself says (Mark 10:43), “anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant, (έσται υμιν διάκονος), and anyone who wants to be first among you must be slave to all (ως ο διάκονος).” Elsewhere (Luke 22:27) He, who is Master and the Lord, puts himself in this position: “here am I among you as one who serves”. To reinforce the commandment the Master adds (John 13:15): “I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you.” Hence there is no alternative but to follow Jesus’ example. The hierarchical, charismatic Church is, at the very core of its being and mission, an expression of charity and mutual service.

Mankind in the project of God’s Kingdom: transcendence and dignity

The theology of creation is rooted in two founding theological truths for the human community: God is the absolute creator of everything that exists; and mankind (men and women) has been fashioned in the image and likeness of God, the Creator207. Thus, one of the first main pieces of information from sacred history is that mankind stems from Him, as men and women have been created in His divine image and likeness. This is the origin of the personal transcendence of each individual and the glory208 invested in him/her: “Yet you have made him little less than a god, you have crowned him with glory and beauty” (Psalms 8:5). This is the source of the holy and untouchable qualities of each individual reside and of their other rights and obligations.


The teaching of the Last Supper comes from a profound conviction on the part of Jesus himself. If we wish to know who people are for Jesus, we must look at his life and actions. For Jesus, people are essentially the recipients of the Kingdom, the reason being that Jesus lived at a time of political and economic repression, of pervasive greed, poverty, illness and violence. For Him establishing the Kingdom of God among mankind was an urgent matter, for which he paid with his life; Jesus committed serious “offences” against His own culture and customs in order to defend the dignity of His contemporaries.

We have to look at the actions of Jesus with this in mind. The numerous healings and miracles he performed – the ridding of demons, the forgiving of sins, various *logia* and the founding of the Church – are clear signs that “the kingdom of God has caught you unawares” (Matthew 12:28). In fact, these actions of Jesus are indicators of a life plan that is expressed in sayings such as “nobody should go without bread, everyone should be respectful, everyone should uphold their human dignity, nobody should feel alone. Ultimately, this applies to all the other moral codes which focus on the benefit and happiness of mankind”.

This profound conviction characterises the life and actions of Jesus of Nazareth right to the end. In formal terms it was the last lesson he gave to his disciples (John 13:1-15), one to which he held fast during the temptations in the desert and at Gethsemane (Luke 4:1-13 and 22:39-46) and which was sealed with his own blood (23:44-46). All this explains the conclusion reached by the *kerygmas* of the Apostles concerning their mission: “Jesus went about doing good and curing all who had fallen into the power of the devil” (Acts 10:38).

Taking this into account, we should remember that Christians are bound to Christ through their baptism, transformed into sons and daughters of God and summoned to be an *alter Christus* for their contemporaries. Gathered together in Church, they are inspired by the Spirit of Christ and sent by Him (Matthew 28:19-20) to all nations.

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Their mission entails *diakonia* for all. In this respect, the Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops’ Conferences\(^{211}\) has rightly emphasised a renewal of this universal summons to mission as the basis for all ecclesial tasks of the present. Christians are *summoned* by the Lord and *sent* to serve nations and thus called upon to constantly modernise the most profound dimension of Christian *diakonia*.

**Situation along the border with the U.S.**

Life in societies bordering the U.S. is affected by very aggressive processes of colonisation\(^{212}\) and dehumanisation\(^{213}\). In this situation Christian *diakonia* has no choice but to continue fulfilling the mission of the Lord and Master. Nevertheless, we need to look at some key statements in the Gospels to make it clear who the targets of Jesus’ mission were: “the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28); “so as he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he set himself to teach them at some length” (Mark 6:34); “for he has anointed me to bring the good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free” (Luke 4:18). In the light of the last passage, which began the public ministry of Jesus according to Saint Luke, Christians must ask themselves who for them are now the poor, the captives, the blind and the oppressed who are to be given the good news and receive succour. It will be readily apparent that the *diakonia* must be brought up to date in many areas of social life, especially for those who have fallen into disgrace. In this respect, *diakonia*, as a function of the Church, is a universal summons from God to all Christians to serve Him *for* the service of humankind.

Today, this service for people finds expression in specific areas of everyday life, in particular where human dignity is tarnished and exchanged for something of lesser value, where there is unhappiness and suffering, where human capacities are diminished and exploited

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\(^{211}\) Cf. 5th General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops’ Conferences, *Discípulos y misioneros de Jesucristo para que nuestros pueblos en Él tengan vida*, Aparecida, Brazil, 2007.


for commercial interests. This is where *diakonia* should return to the divine service of promoting and caring for human dignity. In this respect it should be pointed out that life in a border community offers a wide range of opportunities, but it also poses a number of challenges that require urgent resolution. Of course, life in border regions is affected in a general way by the changes that globalisation brings about in society, but it also has certain specific features. In what follows I will deal with a number of factors that are peculiar to border societies in the north of Mexico and focus on the tasks that need to be tackled most urgently.

The first factor is the all-pervasive influence of *American culture*, be it in the form of television programmes, the geographical proximity of people from both sides of the border or the constant interaction between them. There can be no doubt that the values and counter-values of American culture are infiltrating people’s view of the world to an ever increasing extent. Exacerbating the counter-values and the manipulation of the media that exist at the national level, the influence of this liberal Western culture finds expression in the general greed and dishonesty to be found in all sectors of society; in the extreme eroticisation of public spaces; in the disruption of family life; in the proclamation of boundless freedom; in excessive individualism; in ubiquitous everyday violence. If the rapid population growth and the uprooting of people (those who do not like living where they are because they do not come from the area) are added to these seething troubles, the situation along the border becomes even more complicated.

Mention must also be made of the existence of a *secular and secularising culture* that teaches individuals to become radically independent and to emancipate themselves from whatever stands in the way of their freedom. All of this leads to a life without God. Ultimately this new form of irreligiousness plunges people into a life of loneliness, without a community and without close human relationships. The initial impact is felt by married couples and families, who gradually find themselves in a situation in which they start fighting for their independence, waiting for the time when they can lead the individual life of their dreams. In a situation of this kind an entertainment culture\(^\text{214}\) assumes huge importance for those “waiting for” the moment when they can become independent.

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Another factor that comes into play here is the incessant activity fuelled by an international economic system with an aggressive market, which uses politics as a means to its ends. It effectively controls and indoctrinates people, telling them that they should only think about money and treat other aspects of life as less important. The upshot is that party politics and democracy have been transformed into smoke screens clouding business at the municipal, state and federal level. The economic difficulties encountered in regions affected by these factors have led, amongst other things, to social problems such as the “drug war” and “human trafficking” (which also give rise to problems with migrants, refugees and the trafficking of women).

In addition, border societies play a part in the global process of ecological devastation and contamination of the planet that results from a break with nature caused by ignorance, forgetfulness or the repudiation of the most basic creationist ideas, according to which the world is a gift from God with man acting as its responsible guardian. In the face of the toxic waste that finds its way across the border into the region and of the manufacturing industries that pay inhumane wages, people living in border areas in the north of Mexico have what might be called a fleeting vision of life. Many inhabitants have the feeling that they are “just passing through”. This in turn breeds a sense of uprootedness and generates a lack of interest in most activities such as urban planning, building a place to live, enjoying working and loving relationships, and making savings.

In addition an ideology has spread in which sound truths are rejected in favour of statements such as “everyone has an opinion” and “everything is open to opinion”, which has made it more difficult for hearts to reach out and do good. This has produced a relativist and relativising environment which pushes people into an abyss of desperation and despair. While this mentality affects all sectors of society, it has a particularly negative impact on young people as they seek guidance and orientation in their lives. They find it difficult to

216 Cf. Habermas, J. 589 ff.
219 In: Nogales, some manufacturing industries have a 14-hour night shift and the salary is 65 Mexican pesos per day: 5 dollars or 3.9 euros.
discover any meaning because they are not getting the message that there are sound truths to be heeded and good deeds to be done.

**Conclusion: areas in which Christian *diakonia* requires urgent modernisation**

The poor and the oppressed are to be found in fragmented societies in which there are many blind people and captives. People in such societies can end up as victims either because they lack the basic necessities to lead a dignified life (food, housing, health, education) or because, even if these basic requirements are satisfied, they do not look beyond their own lives. Some are victims of the privations they endure, others of what they have come to possess. A *diakonia* of the truth needs to be provided on all fronts under the broad heading of “intellectual charity”\(^\text{220}\), which encompasses truly free moral behaviour appropriate to the Kingdom.

The question is: how can we serve (*διακόνειν*) people living along the border? This entails thinking about processes of social change or transformation; it involves, in short, the difficult issue of the practice of a theory. Here we need to look to Jesus. Political and economic oppression was commonplace in his day and this led to violent revolutionary upheavals that were put down by force. Jesus knew how superficial these attempted violent transformations were and so his option involved people undergoing a thorough mental transformation (*μετάνοια*), a conversion of the heart to the ideals of the Kingdom. Hence a mutual service of charity was held up to the disciples as the safest and surest way of bringing about a genuine transformation of the human community. Jesus was a realist, however. He spoke of the mystery of the Kingdom because he knew that, while this process was slow, it would be long lasting. This is the reason for the many parables explaining the vitality of the Kingdom.

In particular, the parable of the seed that grows by itself (*Mark 4:26-29*) can serve to illustrate the situation we refer to in this article. The disciple of Christ must sow the seed “whether the time is right or not,” leaving God and his Spirit to take care of how and when the seed will germinate in propitious soil. This is how He servesHis contemporaries

– in a small, humble, but profound and long-lasting manner. Here we must recognise that, in global terms, the evangelisation of the Church is eminently suited to communicative social action that aims to bring about non-violent social transformation by teaching the truth and performing good deeds. While the participants involved in such communicative social action must make an effort themselves, it should not be forgotten that God’s grace helps them as Christians in their endeavours to communicate and transform.

A theological vision relating to the status of society at a certain point in history and a specific location in the world cannot end with gloomy defeatism, however. There are always glimmers of hope. While there can be no overlooking the serious burdens that blight people’s lives, mention must also be made of other circumstances in which they are treated as people and their dignity is paramount. I refer here to the ecclesial community with all its successes and shortcomings; to families and profound inter-human relationships (in which the truth is spoken in a spirit of charity); to non-profit-making, charitable centres and institutions such as reception and relief centres for migrants along with medicine and food banks that provide support for people, especially the most needy; to the ordained ministry which, if it functions in accordance with the “science and service” concept\textsuperscript{221}, helps slowly but effectively to illuminate the path to holiness or – which is essentially the same – to develop a new mentality appropriate to the Kingdom. In short, everyone who has a relationship in society, who bears responsibility or performs a specific function should do so in keeping with the obligation that baptism places on all Christians. Teachers, doctors, lawyers, public servants and citizens in general must all transform their activity – and society – from within by means of a new spirit: Christian diakonia.

Strong emphasis therefore needs to be placed on culture and education, an aspect which can only be touched on here and not dealt with in greater detail. There is a need for an intensive campaign to promote honesty and sincerity in all fields; for a renewal of Christian morality, beginning with a clear explanation of what it means in practice; and for a revitalisation of Christian spirituality that encourages effective participation throughout the world. Municipal

\textsuperscript{221} Cf. Amarante, A.V., Dignità e servizio. La formazione morale del sacerdote secondo Alfonso de Liguori, in: \textit{Studia Moralia} 2012, 50/1, 89-113.
pastoral care services can be set up with a clear focus on building communities of brothers and sisters who serve each other in keeping with their dignity as sons and daughters of God. This is the only way to avoid the temptation of operating as an established Church and to regain instead our original identity as a pilgrim Church.\textsuperscript{222}

\textsuperscript{222} Cf. Agamben, G., \textit{The Church and the Kingdom}, Calcutta 2012.
The Missionary Dimension of Diaconal Activity

Klaus Krämer

From the very beginning missionary activity has always had a social dimension. Social sensitivity and active love of one’s neighbour have featured among the outstanding qualities of Christians since the days of the early Church. According to the still definitive studies by Adolph von Harnack the “gospel of love and succour” was one of the main reasons for the notable success of missionaries in making Christianity so attractive in the society of Late Antiquity.223

Missionary and welfare activity

In the missions of the 19th and early 20th centuries the development of pastoral structures went hand in hand with every aspect of development work. Thus the construction of churches and parish centres was always accompanied by the building of schools and kindergartens, hospitals and health centres. Even today welfare-oriented pastoral projects are of great significance for the life of the emerging local churches of the southern hemisphere. The needs of the people there are extremely varied and the various areas of pastoral activity must be equally so. These range from the provision of basic health amenities through care and support for AIDS sufferers to the task of giving disabled people, for whom no one feels responsible, the chance of leading a decent life over which they have independent control. Pastoral care extends to street urchins who have no homes to go to and are in desperate need of sanctuary. It extends to refugees from regions ravaged by crisis and conflict, who not only have to build a new life for themselves, but also, in many cases, have traumatic experiences behind them with which they still have to come to terms. It also protects the interests of prisoners who, forgotten by the outside world, often languish in jails under unimaginable

conditions, and helps them to exercise their basic human and civil rights.

Members of the public who take an interest in the work of church aid organizations hold welfare-oriented pastoral projects in particular esteem, as they are seen to address specific needs and bring about visible improvements in the lives of those affected. On the one hand, therefore, they reflect a growing awareness of the targeted nature of development-related activity by focussing on the effectiveness, professionalism and sustainability of the international projects. On the other hand, pastoral projects have a natural tendency to turn into measures which could be performed just as well – or perhaps more professionally – by secular aid organizations. Wherein lies the specific difference between these two approaches and what particular value does the church have to add in these fields?

The particular esteem in which welfare-oriented pastoral projects are held is frequently due to the fact that they are associated with the names of individuals working in a specific location. This gives a human face and a biographical context to the aid that is provided. Donors can be sure that the aid they are giving will really go where it is needed – in the broadest sense of the word. After all, the person in charge of the project is familiar with the situation on the ground. He or she knows both the circumstances and the people affected. Project leaders make it their business to ensure that the project succeeds. They do not act out of selfish motives, but feel themselves pledged to a higher calling, a broader mission.

**Following the example of Jesus**

If asked about the motivation for their actions, most such benefactors would probably cite the example of Jesus or of someone who has followed in Jesus’ footsteps in an authentic and exemplary manner. Charitable works are thus first and foremost activities based on the example of Jesus.

The gospels – particularly their first chapters – tell us of Jesus’ concern for the poor, the sick and the needy, which brings out very clearly the meaning and importance of Jesus’ mission. In this concern

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man encountered the saving God of Israel, who does not disregard the plight of His people, but hears their plaintive cries and caters to their needs. When the synoptic gospels describe how everyone wanted to bring their sick to Jesus, who tended them like a shepherd would tend the lost sheep returned to his flock, it becomes clear that Jesus’ activities as a healer express YHWH’s will to save the whole of Israel: the compassion shown by Jesus to those who meet him reveals YHWH’s mercy for all of His people.225

Thus, although Jesus’ activities are directed towards the people of Israel as a whole – and ultimately towards all mankind – his immediate concern is always for individuals and the specific circumstances in which they find themselves. Stories of healing are stories of encounter. Jesus hears the cry of a human being and devotes all his attention and sympathy to him and his situation. In all these encounters it soon becomes clear that the external difficulties are not the whole story. The external crisis reflects a deep inner crisis, which ultimately arises out of the individual’s relationship to God, which is impaired and needs to be healed. The healing consists in the total existential submission of the person in question to God, which is made possible by the encounter with Jesus. It is instructive that Jesus always stresses that it is not His miraculous powers, but the faith of the sufferer that rescues the latter from his distress.

The real meaning of the healing episodes only emerges if one takes this deeper existential plane into consideration. The external distress only expresses the real need of a person in an initial and provisional manner. It is not just a question of external well-being in the sense of the absence of symptoms, but of a comprehensive cure that imbues and renews a person in all his relationships – to his fellow men and above all to God. The particular fascination of the healing episodes lies not least in the fact that in his encounters with quite different people Jesus always manages to lay bare this deep existential dimension, thus getting to the root of the problem. Unlike the vocational narratives, the healing episodes show that the initiative does not as a rule come from Jesus, but from the sick and needy who turn to Jesus for help in their hour of need. This basic feature of the healing narratives makes clear that any situation we find ourselves in could become a place of an encounter with God if we

225 Cf. Mark 6:30-44 with reference to the Old Testament motifs (cf. Num 27, 17; Ez 34).
succeed in discovering its existential dimension of depth and making contact with the healing reality of God. In other words, the point of the healing episodes is to draw human attention to a place where the saving reality of God can be directly experienced.

**Charitable work as a way of bearing witness**

Concern for other people can be a form of bearing witness in various situations, especially those in which the message of salvation for all is convincingly conveyed and where this concern is shown to individuals whose dignity and worth have been generally overlooked. Charitable works are directed primarily at those who are on the fringes of society and forgotten by the rest of humanity. It is especially important in this connection that social and humanitarian care should not be limited to members of one’s own denomination, but given to all those who need it. The diaconal activity of the Church lies within the universal horizon of the Kingdom of God that is promised to all men and women in this world. For this reason all aid must be rendered without any preconditions. Only in this way can it be a palpable sign of the reality of the Kingdom of God which has been graciously granted us.

The witness-bearing nature of charitable work thus begins with the choice of specific fields of activity. This will be dictated by Jesus’ commandment to succour the poorest and the least of men. Preferred fields of activity will always be areas where special witness may be borne to the God-given inalienable dignity of every man and woman – above all by showing concern for individuals who in the eyes of society “no longer possess any value”, such as the disabled or incurably sick.

But, in particular, diaconal service becomes a form of bearing witness in cases where the saving love of God and the liberating force of the Gospel are palpably experienced in the individual display of concern. This means that the personal quality of charitable activity takes on key significance. A loving concern which is not limited to a professionally performed service can make the object of concern feel genuinely wanted and accepted. It is particularly important that the existential issues which loom beyond the immediate suffering should be taken seriously and addressed accordingly. In loving

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concern for others their needs and desires in all their complexity are taken seriously and endured. But witness is only borne if the helper succeeds in making clear that the ultimate motive for his actions is the love of God which he himself has experienced.\textsuperscript{227} This witness will generally be an implicit witness of the deed in question. Its credibility must, however, depend on at least a basic willingness and ability on the part of the helper to put – where appropriate – his own actions into words, thus turning them into an explicit form of bearing witness to the faith.

This concern has a deeply dialogical dynamic. In the final analysis it is not just the helper through whom the love of God can be experienced in a caring concern for others. To the extent that the helper succeeds in opening himself to others and their reality the encounter may bring him face to face with God. Thus, active concern for the sick, needy and suffering becomes, on the one hand, an “imitatio Christi”, in which the transcendent reality of the saving love of God for those in need of succour is directly experienced. On the other hand, the helper, perceiving with concern the profound neediness arising out of the given emergency situation, experiences a yearning which associates others, in a wholly original and irreplaceable way, with the ultimate essence of reality itself. In the dialogical mutuality of this occurrence something of the mystery of the cross is experienced, whereby the suffering of men is profoundly associated with the suffering of Christ himself and hence may turn the scene in all its inscrutability into a place where the special closeness of God is felt.\textsuperscript{228} Thus, in the open and unreserved encounter with others the helper may ultimately encounter Christ Himself: “…in so far as you did this to one of these brothers of mine, you did it to me.”\textsuperscript{229}

Given this background, it is surely no coincidence that the witness borne by someone like Mother Teresa of Calcutta possesses a remarkably high degree of credibility for the people of our own day that goes far beyond the ranks of professing Christians. The unconditional concern for the poorest of the poor, for those dying in the streets of Calcutta and for the marginalized in the various regions of India and in many places all over the world, has a character of witness

\textsuperscript{227} Cf. Den Logos zur Sprache bringen, 228.
\textsuperscript{228} Cf. Den Logos zur Sprache bringen, 229.
\textsuperscript{229} Matthew 25, 40.
that speaks for itself, which translates the fine words about love and dignity into explicit acts in concrete situations and encounters, and testifies to the strength of a reality that persists despite the worst that life can bring. The publication of Mother Teresa’s “Life in the Spirit: Reflections, Meditations, Prayers” made clear that the inner source of strength for this outstanding diaconal activity was her deep attachment to the suffering Christ on the cross.\textsuperscript{230} In her report on her second vocation Mother Teresa describes how she was particularly struck by one of the last words of Jesus on the cross: “I am thirsty.”\textsuperscript{231} In a sudden flash of insight she realized “that God did not just love us somehow, but that these words ‘I am thirsty’ were the ultimate and supreme expression of the love of the Lord, indeed of his thirsting after the love of his creatures and the saving of their souls”.\textsuperscript{232} In the end, therefore, her loving concern for the poorest of the poor and her sharing of their life was Mother Teresa’s answer to the love of Christ Crucified for her and for all humanity.

\textbf{Consequences for diaconal pastoral activity}

In our own day diaconal activity has a particular missionary potential, since it can serve as an authentic and credible testimony to our own fundamental attitude and the motivation for our actions. It can be positively prophetic to have the courage to raise social issues that are simply not acknowledged by society, even though what is at stake is the principle that the inalienable dignity of every human being should be taken seriously.

However, social and diaconal activity cannot assume this witness-bearing function just like that. A missionary space only opens up where the existential dimension of the specific living conditions is taken seriously and can be given adequate consideration in human and pastoral terms. For this reason the social and the pastoral dimensions of diaconal activity must be properly combined. On the one hand, it is of course necessary to respond to a specific social and humanitarian challenge in a suitable manner, i.e. in keeping with the relevant professional standards. But if we are to prevent diaconal

\textsuperscript{230} Mother Teresa, Komm, sei mein Licht, ed. With commentary by B. Kolodiejchuk, MC, Munich, 2007.

\textsuperscript{231} John 19,28.

\textsuperscript{232} Maasburg, L., Mutter Teresa. Die wunderbaren Geschichten, Munich 2010, 38.
activity from being reduced simply to the professional performance of a service, the expertise involved must be supplemented by pastoral activity, through which a space for human and spiritual encounters can be opened and met. Pastoral activity, it has to be said, is not just a matter of showing spontaneous human concern. It also requires a pastoral approach appropriate to the relevant challenge. This includes, first of all, an exact analysis of the concrete conditions with their specific challenges. The main pastoral challenge is to present this situation in theological terms in such a way that the message of the faith and the hope that it brings can be perceived from the perspective of the person affected. Ultimately, this can only take place within the framework of a dialogical process, which in turn requires that the person concerned be taken seriously in his subjective perception of his circumstances. This means finding a language – and other appropriate forms of communication – which can express his cares and concerns as well as his yearnings and hopes in such a way that helpful answers may be found within the framework of the faith. Professional help and pastoral support must always go hand in hand. The pastoral support will place the concrete assistance in a context which affords the subject an existential access to a deeper interpretation of his circumstances. This will enable him to switch from a passive to an active role in assessing his current situation and developing perspectives for the future. Pastoral activity also has a due measure of professionalism, which requires that special pastoral concepts be developed for the various areas of activity. Pastoral work necessitates appropriate training and preparation for the tasks it involves. In particular, its practitioners need a degree of support in assessing and learning from their experience. An appropriate system of evaluation of pastoral work in a given area is an important foundation for the further development of pastoral concerns. It will become more and more important to develop a suitable set of criteria for the identification and elimination of undesirable trends.

At a time in which the Church as an institution is being increasingly called into question and many people are finding key tenets of their creed no longer as plausible as they used to, the charitable works performed by the Church and dedicated individual Christians will become increasingly important for the credibility of the Christian message as a whole. Selfless commitment to the welfare of individuals, which takes them seriously in all their attitudes
to life and to existential questions, speaks for itself, demonstrating convincingly how faith gives us the inner strength and capacity for hope in a manner that transcends any given situation. To return to von Harnack’s basic insight: diaconal activity combined with a special social sensitivity could once again become one of the decisive criteria for the credibility of Christianity in a secular society.
Diakonia Seen through the Eyes of Local Churches
Diakonia in the Documents of the Asian Church

Edmund Kee-Fook Chia

Before looking at how the theme of *diakonia* features in the documents of the Asian Church we need to be more specific about who is referred to by the Asian Church as well as what constitutes its documents. Doing so would enable us not only to appreciate the vision and theology of diakonia of the Asian Church but also to evaluate the ecclesial authority of its documents.

The first part of this paper, therefore, will explore how what we know today as the “Asian Church” within Roman Catholic circles came into being. Special attention will be given to its founding and functioning as it will enable us to appreciate its newness as well as connectedness with the Christian tradition. With that as basis the paper will then set forth to discern key orientations and thrusts of the Asian Church in view of appreciating how it conceives of its theology in general and its understandings of diakonia in particular.

The Asian Church

Much has already been written about the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) and especially its theological postulations. The interests stem not only from the fact that the Asian Church has come into conscious awareness of the theological community only in recent decades but also because its theology is generally perceived as avant-garde, at least by the ecclesial standards of the late twentieth century.

As the only Asian-wide institution which can truly claim to be representative of the Roman Catholic Church in Asia, the FABC is

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233 More than three dozen doctoral or master’s theses have focused on one theme or another of the FABC and numerous other books and articles written on FABC’s theology.
about the only forum where the Asian bishops can come together and speak in the name of all the Catholics in Asia. Its foundation actually goes back to the Second Vatican Council as it was during the sessions in Rome that many of the Asian bishops were meeting with one another for the first time. Until then they have had more encounters and relations with bishops from Europe than they had with their fellow bishops from Asia. This, of course, is a natural consequence of the Church in Asia being a child of European colonialism and so it makes sense that the Asian bishops would continue not only to associate with but also be dependent upon European bishops. Anyway, the new relations established in Rome from 1962 to 1965 were nourished upon after the Asian bishops’ return to Asia.

But it was the papal visit of Paul VI to Asia in November 1970 that provided a concrete occasion for 180 bishops from various parts of Asia to come together in Manila. They seized upon the opportunity to have a formal meeting and on the sidelines a task force of key bishops and cardinals met privately to discuss the possibility of establishing a more permanent structure which could afford them greater opportunities for encountering one another more frequently. The significance of this Asian Bishops’ Meeting in Manila cannot be overestimated. Felix Wilfred had this to say: “Never before had Asian bishops come together to exchange experiences and to deliberate jointly on common questions and problems facing the continent. The meeting marked the beginning of a new consciousness of the many traditional links that united the various peoples of this part of the globe.”

After more behind-the-scenes work by some bishops who constituted the taskforce the FABC was eventually established and recognized by the Holy See in November 1972. It held its first plenary assembly in Taipei in 1974.

**FABC Documents**

The FABC plenary assemblies are held once every four or five years. Since its foundation ten have been held, the most recent taking
place at Ho Chi Minh City in December 2012. As the members of these assemblies are bishops elected by their respective episcopal conferences, the FABC can be regarded as truly representing the authentic and legitimate voice of the Church’s pastoral magisterium in Asia. Thus, one place to discern what the Asian Church is saying or teaching is through the final statements of the FABC plenary assemblies. These have been compiled and published in the four volume series *For All the Peoples of Asia.*

In between plenary assemblies the various offices which serve the FABC run seminars, consultations, and institutes to help educate the bishops as well as canvass them on specific concerns. The bishops’ institutes, in particular, are of significance. There are bishops’ institutes for social action (BISA), bishops’ institutes for missionary apostolate (BIMA), bishops’ institutes for interreligious affairs (BIRA), bishops’ institutes for biblical apostolate (BIBA), bishops’ institutes for lay apostolate (BILA) and so on. Most of these are attended by key bishops who serve the particular office along with their consultors, pastoral associates and collaborators. These institutes normally culminate in statements which are also endorsed by the bishops and published in the name of the FABC.

The most significant of the FABC offices is no doubt the Office of Theological Concerns (OTC). It was originally known as the Theological Advisory Commission and, as the name suggests, is responsible for advising the bishops on issues of theology. Aside from five bishops who form the executive committee of the OTC the other members are theologians appointed from each of the episcopal conferences represented in FABC. The OTC meets periodically, at least once every year, to examine critical issues of concern impinging upon the Asian Church. Members are assigned sub-themes to work on and the results of their research and writing are then deliberated and voted upon in plenary sessions. Unlike statements of FABC plenary assemblies (which are brief and basically crafted over a few days during the assembly itself), the documents of the OTC are carefully thought out and debated back and forth before being finalized and

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issued in the name of the FABC. They thus represent the more rigorous ideas of the Asian bishops even as their orientations take as starting point the themes advocated by FABC plenary assembly statements. In fact, the OTC theses often expand and elaborate upon the theologies approved by the plenary assemblies.

Because many of the OTC members are respected theologians in their own right and come from all across Asia we can therefore suggest that the OTC documents are not only the voice of the bishops but that of the best theological minds in Asia as well. They can be said to represent the academic magisterium of the Church in Asia. Hence, FABC theology can be roughly synonymous to the theology of both the pastoral as well as the academic magisteria of the Asian Church. In short, we can refer to it as simply Asian theology. The rest of this paper, therefore, will discuss the Asian Church’s theology with specific focus on the FABC plenary assembly statements and especially the documents of the OTC.

New Way of Being Church in Asia

In investigating the diakonia ministry of the Church in Asia we will be looking at the *missio ad extra* dimensions of ecclesial ministry. To better appreciate what this entails it is necessary that we begin by first reviewing the *Sitz im Leben* in which the Asian Church is located. This is not only important for the purpose of better discerning the Church’s mission, it is also very much the way FABC operates and does its theological reflections. Only after a review of the contextual realities can one postulate an appropriate theological response.

The most important of these is the history and fact of colonialism. At the 1970 Asian Bishops’ Meeting in Manila the bishops had this to say: “With the era of colonialism now a moment of the past, we witness throughout Asia today the emergence within each of our nations, both old and new, of a new consciousness and a new self-understanding” (§9). It is therefore important to begin by noting that even as most countries in Asia have achieved their independence from colonial regimes the local people’s journey in discerning their own self-identity was only just beginning and the task continues even until today. Asian Christians, in particular, are confronted with the challenge of discovering what it means to be truly Asian and at

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236 *For All the Peoples of Asia*, vol.1, 4.
the same time truly Christian. This is no mean task as Christianity has hitherto been identified as a Western import and so the Church is often looked upon as no more than an extension of the imperial regime.

It does not help that the Churches in Asia have been slow in shedding its imperial image. In fact, Christianity continues to be very much regarded as a Western religion despite its five centuries of history in Asia. Its colonial origins and heritage, its continued association with the West, and its dependence upon Western norms, finances and authority are liabilities which give the Church a foreign image. Perceived as a foreign religion the Church remains alien to the people of Asia and has not been accepted as a part of its religio-cultural fabric. Hence, FABC regards the task of developing local Churches as a priority. In the Theses on the Local Church, the OTC insists that “there have to be local Churches as authentic subjects, active agents of evangelization – no longer ‘mere recipients’ of a Western Christendom and/or Christianity in missionary expansion, no longer mere clones of the Church in Europe with its very concrete and historically-conditioned forms, tasks and theologies” (§6).237

To compound the problem of foreignness, the Catholic Church is also a minority religion in most of Asia. Except for the Philippines and East Timor (whose combined Catholic population make up about two-thirds of all Catholics in Asia), the other countries in Asia have a Catholic population which numbers no more than a few percent of the nation’s population. In some countries (e.g., Thailand, Japan, Mongolia, and Cambodia), they are even less than 0.5% of the population. Christians in general are minorities within their own countries and this fact is true across most of Asia. A minority religion comes with the complexes which accompany minority groups. For instance, the smallness of one’s group can be so threatening that out-group members are perceived as competitors, enemies or even potential persecutors.

A Church which suffers from the “minority complex syndrome” also tends towards a maintenance mode. Its primary concern is with survival and most of its energies are directed towards activities which serve to maintain the group and the status quo. Church life has

237 Gnanapiragasam, J./ Wilfred, F., ed., Being Church in Asia, Theological Advisory Commission, Quezon City 1994, 35.
little to do with the society outside the Church walls. It is an inward-looking Church, concentrated on the development and growth of its own members, separate and divorced from the realities of the cultural milieu. There is also a preoccupation with how to increase one’s flock, since membership recruitment is necessary to preserve the group’s existence. Mission, therefore, refers to active evangelization and proclamation in view of converting others to Christianity and baptizing them into the Church. Success in mission is measured in terms of the number of baptisms or the number of churches built.

The FABC, however, saw things quite differently. The Asian Church has to change and renew itself so as to become something totally new and more in touch with the peoples of Asia. It is in this context that at the sixth plenary assembly which coincided with the 25th anniversary of FABC’s foundation the bishops had this to declare: “The overall thrust of activities in recent years has been to motivate the Churches in Asia towards ‘a new way of being Church,’ a Church that is committed to becoming a ‘community of communities’ and a credible sign of salvation and liberation.” Spelling out what this entails the bishops proclaimed that “the Church in Asia must foster a threefold dialogue: with the many different faiths in Asia, with the cultures of Asia, and with the poor multitudes in Asia” (§3).

This threefold or triple dialogue is seen not so much as three distinctive or separate activities which must be engaged in but as three dimensions of the one integral mission of being Church in Asia. Felix Wilfred suggests that “dialogue” can appropriately sum up the whole orientation of the FABC. Throughout the forty years of FABC’s existence this theme kept emerging at practically every assembly and seminar.

The Church and Asia’s Religions

Seen as integral to the Church’s mission in Asia, the dialogue with Asian religions has also to be viewed from the perspective of diakonia. In the Church’s outreach to members of other religions it is witnessing to the importance of building authentic relationships with peoples across faith traditions. This is a significant service which

238 For All the Peoples of Asia, vol.2, 3.
the Church can offer to a society where religion is often viewed as sensitive or problematic and sometimes even as source of hostility and conflict. The Asian bishops, through the OTC’s Thesis on Interreligious Dialogue, caution Christians against becoming “victims either of those who seek to keep [religions] apolitical and private, or those who seek to instrumentalize them for political and communal ends” (§1).240 The former are those who advocate strongly for a separation of “church and state” as it were, a practice totally alien to Asian cultures where religion is integral to every dimension of people’s lives. Religion for most Asians is a way of life, not merely a view of life (a position more characteristic of doctrine-centered religions such as Christianity which is premised on religious beliefs and hence orthodoxy rather than religious actions and hence the emphasis on orthopraxis). The latter is also crucial as religion has often been used and abused by various factions in attempts to fuel conflict for the purpose of destabilizing social and political structures and in the process perpetuate enmity and hatred amongst pluralistic communities.

By calling on Christians to reach out in dialogue with their brothers and sisters of other faith traditions the Asian bishops, at its first plenary assembly, are asserting that “we accept them [the religious traditions of our peoples] as significant and positive elements in the economy of God’s design of salvation” (§14).241 Dialogue, therefore, witnesses to not only having to coexist peacefully with one another but to a positive acceptance of the religious other as co-pilgrims on earth journeying towards God in the heavenly Kingdom. All religions have an integral role to play in the Asian people’s pilgrimage to God and especially in the ushering in of God’s Kingdom. The Church can serve as a pointer or sacrament for this. FABC’s Theses on Interreligious Dialogue clearly articulates this: “Dialogue with other religions … is an integral dimension of the mission of the Church, which is the sacrament of the Kingdom of God proclaimed in Jesus” (§2).242 Thus, interreligious dialogue becomes not only a forum to enhance relationships across faith lines, it is also a ministry and service of the Church in facilitating the building up of God’s Kingdom here on earth, just as in hope we believe it will be in heaven.

240 Being Church in Asia, 10.
241 For All the Peoples of Asia, vol.1, 14.
242 Being Church in Asia, 12.
Besides, fostering dialogue across religious lines is not only an imperative for Christian mission, it can also at times be critical for the very survival of Asian communities. Interreligious relations, as history testifies, have oftentimes been negative or at least not as congenial as it should be. This is where dialogue can make the difference. While it is the responsibility of all peoples to promote dialogue, Christians, on account of their minority status and so having a heightened consciousness of religious discrimination, can show the way and serve as bridge-builders across faith traditions. In the *Thesis on Interreligious Dialogue* the FABC has this to say: “In Asia today, Christians, though they are a ‘little flock’ in many places, animated by the Spirit who is leading all things to unity, are called to play a serving and catalyzing role which facilitates interreligious collaboration”(§2). As a small community and in view of its lack of social and political power this catalyzing role of the Church could sometimes be looked upon as attempts at seeking legitimacy or of ingratiating itself with the majority religious community. But if exercised authentically and purely in the service of unity for the sake of the larger society, then dialogue becomes not only effective and fruitful but also prophetic.

### The Church and Asia’s Poor

The prophetic ministry of the Church is even more crucial and becomes clearly evident in the dialogue with Asia’s poor. This dialogue is in view of facilitating the liberation of the peoples of Asia from the clutches of poverty and suffering on the one hand as well as of oppression and exploitation on the other. The third bishops’ institute for interreligious affairs expresses it this way: “Such dialogue has become urgent in many Asian countries, where, amidst conditions of oppressive poverty and increasing social conflicts, there is a quest for an integral liberation.” The aim of dialogue, therefore, is to facilitate integral liberation, or liberation in all its dimensions, viz. physical, material, social, emotional, political, and so on. In short, the Church’s diakonia ministry in Asia is in the service of the whole of life.

It is no coincidence that the theme of the sixth FABC assembly was “Christian discipleship in Asia today: Service to life.” Its final

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243 Ibid.
244 *For All the Peoples of Asia*, vol.1, 120.
statement committed the bishops to turn their attention to “whatever threatens, weakens, diminishes and destroys the life of individuals, groups or peoples; whatever devalues human beings, conceived, born, infant, old; whatever socio-cultural, religious, political, economic, or environmental factor that threatens or destroys life in our countries” and announced that “as promoters of life, we could only denounce them” (§7). Hence, the Church’s mission in Asia is the alleviation of the suffering of all peoples, but especially the poor. It has to be noted here that the majority of the poor in Asia adhere to religions other than Christianity and that persons who are not Christians are also as concerned about the liberation of the poor and suffering.

That is why, as previously mentioned, the dialogue with the poor cannot be seen as independent of the dialogue with the religions or the dialogue with the cultures. They are all interconnected and interpenetrating. In fact, as FABC’s Thesis on Interreligious Dialogue recounts, the dialogue with the religions can only be happening in so far as the local Church is “fully involved in the life and struggles of the people, especially the poor” (§7). Interreligious dialogue, therefore, is part of the process of establishing the local Church, a task which is also called inculturation in Roman Catholic circles or contextualization amongst Protestant theologians. By the same token, inculturation can only happen when Catholics are in dialogue with their neighbors of other faiths. Furthermore, both inculturation and interreligious dialogue can only take place if the Church is truly immersed with the concerns of the multitude of poor people in Asia. Interreligious dialogue, inculturation, and integral liberation are therefore the three different but mutually involving aspects of the one single mission of the Church in Asia. Together, they constitute the Church’s diakonia to the larger Asian society.

The Church and Asia’s Cultures

Technically, the dialogue with the cultures in Asia is in view of enabling the Church to become more acceptable to the peoples of Asia. Its aim is the construction of a truly local Church with a theology which is more in tune with Asian realities. In the words of the FABC

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245 For All the Peoples of Asia, vol.2, 3.
246 Being Church in Asia, 24.
bishops at their first plenary assembly: “To preach the Gospel in Asia we must make the message and life of Christ truly incarnate in the minds and lives of the peoples. The primary focus of our task of evangelization then, at this time in our history, is the building up of a truly local church” (§9). A common means for doing this is to make the Gospel more understandable and acceptable by translating it to a local language or adapting it to an indigenous world-view with the concomitant local concepts, images, and culturally specific symbols. These efforts, however, represent a very rudimentary first step of inculturation. At most, the external manifestations of being Church are changed or adapted, but with little or no consequence whatsoever to the deeper issues of the Church’s identity.

What is needed of the Church in Asia is an authentic process of inculturation, one which takes seriously the world of Asia. Michael Amaladoss posits that inculturation entails a “transformation of the life of a community of believers from within by which the Good news becomes the principle that animates their attitudes, world-view, value system and action – in short their whole life.” FABC I shares similar sentiments: “The local church is a church incarnate in a people, a church indigenous and inculturated. And this means concretely a church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions – in brief, with all the life-realities of the peoples in whose midst it has sunk its roots deeply and whose history and life it gladly makes its own” (§12).

This, therefore, is the mission and task of the local Church, viz. to be involved with the life-realities of its peoples. It is this which constitutes not only the diakonia aspects of the Church’s mission in Asia but also informs its kerygma and koinonia. Thus, how the Good News is preached and what is being preached takes as starting point the life-realities of the peoples. Likewise, how a local Church establishes its community and what kinds of community it should establish also begins with the life-realities of the peoples. This whole process can therefore be at once called inculturation as well as evangelization. Aloysius Pieris points out that “inculturation is the by-

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247 For All the Peoples of Asia, vol.1, 14.
249 For All the Peoples of Asia, vol.1, 14.
product of an involvement with a people rather than the conscious target of a program of action.”

This is what the Asian bishops at the seventh plenary assembly meant when they used the term “active integral evangelization” to describe the central thrust of the FABC over the years. This is also what the Asian bishops refer to as “dialogue.” They appropriately posit that being engaged in dialogue is being actively involved in evangelization in all its fullness. This, they aver, is the new way of being Church and this also is the new way for doing theology. In short, the triple dialogue with the religions, the cultures and the poor is the life and mode of being Christian in Asia. All three components make up the single mission of the Church and constitute its diakonia to the wider Asian society.

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251 For All the Peoples of Asia, vol.3, 3.
“A Simple Church, the Seed of the Kingdom”: Diakonia in the Re-Launch of the Base Ecclesial Communities in Latin America

Socorro Martinez and Pablo Mella

Despite what many analysts think and many members of the Catholic Church might like to hear, Base Ecclesial Communities (BECs) are alive and well in Latin America and the Caribbean. Admittedly, they do not attract the media attention they did in the 1970s and 80s, but since 2008 they have been undergoing a process of profound renewal which can be expressed in two key words: “re-launch” and “networking.”

The authors of this article, who are members and advisers of the Continental Networking Service of the BECs in Latin America, the Caribbean and North America, regard it as a reflective testimony. Employing the well-known “see, judge and act” approach, its purpose is to share and explain what it means to be part of “the Church born in and from the grassroots.” The article will provide evidence of the capillary action of the Spirit percolating into numerous Small Christian Communities, whose numbers and character cannot be accounted for in the inventory system that is currently in place. Nor can they be evaluated by reference to ecclesiastical law with its essentially mathematical, functional and sociological approach to religion, according to which it is sufficient just to count the number of churches, registered baptisms, people attending mass and communions given.

252 You can visit the website of the BECs’ Continental Networking Service to find out more about its diakonia: http://www.cebcontinental.org.

253 We wish to make it clear from the outset that we will take a critical look at the concern expressed by Joseph Ratzinger (2005) with respect to the use of the term “base” as an expression of an ecclesiological reflection. We will show the extent to which Ratzinger’s observations were influenced by the place they were made.
See: a simple Church, the seed of the Kingdom

Two continental conferences mapped out the path the BECs in Latin America and the Caribbean wish to take in the first part of the 21st century. The first was held in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, from 1 to 5 July 2008 and the second in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, from 16 to 21 June 2012.

At the beginning of these conferences prayers were said and hymns sung in praise of life, and the liturgies, celebrated in an unhurried manner, were full of symbols reflecting the intercultural richness of Latin America. During these celebrations a song was chosen (in a spontaneous participatory process) as the anthem or pilgrim song of the BECs in the new century. Its words help to explain what the renaissance of the Church in many parts of Latin America is all about:

A SIMPLE CHURCH

Just like the most beautiful of flowers growing very slowly in the dark, the Church is being reborn again today, imbued with the spirit of fraternity.

The pain of the oppressed makes its heart bleed; it regains its strength of old to bring about our liberation.


You who come from the slums hold hope in your hands, and in the very near future your voice will be a sign of awakening.

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You are the echo of the prophets, 
you are the reflection of the Saviour; 
you are the tree that blossoms daily, 
for God's offspring grows from you.

We now turn to the main metaphor associated with the concept of the servant Church, the diaconal Church, as represented by the BECs. In the words of their favourite song, the Church model proposed and embodied by the Base Ecclesial Communities is the “seed of the Kingdom.” The BECs are aware of their “germinal existence”, which is like a “life in the humus of the earth,” as Benjamín González-Buelta so succinctly put it. He is one of the authors whose spiritual reflections draw on the divine life manifested in the BECs on the fringes of the globalised world:

“It is surprising how many Christian communities grow in environments considered lost, “abandoned by God” and humanity. These places are home to the lowest of the low, those who have wandered the roads and those who have never left. Having encountered the Word of God, everyone begins to regain their dignity, to feel like human beings again with values, with a place and a mission in this world that no one can take from them. At first the Bible shakes in their rugged, work-worn hands, but then they carry it like a treasure that could slip from their fingers at any moment (……)

When you meet people in their personal surroundings in these communities, you cannot but be impressed by the joy of the Spirit that prevails there despite the harsh living conditions. This is not the light-hearted joy of the naive, but the joy felt by those who are wide awake and in full possession of their faculties, those who have survived at the bottom of the pile for decades and experienced the Spirit. While membership of the Christian community helps people to flourish in society, it can also be an obstacle (…) The “perseverance” Saint Paul spoke of to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 6:4) can be felt in these communities. In these surroundings it means quite literally the ability to survive at the very bottom of the heap, refusing to be submerged or torn apart, but gaining in strength thanks to the Spirit.”

In choosing this term we were inspired by Models of the Church, the classic work by Avery Dulles (1975).

What better description could there be of a “germinal existence” than this ability to “survive at the very bottom of the heap, refusing to be submerged or torn apart” by a life of deprivation and social exclusion? These are the hard facts of life faced by thousands of communities throughout Latin America and the Caribbean which no official statistics can encompass. From the start of the 21st century the BECs’ Continental Networking Service has been there to help these communities. The pastoral ministry provided by their advisers is true diakonia; in contrast to a party political line it does not function from the top down, but serves as an “accompaniment”, keeping a watchful eye on what the Spirit itself generates in the communities thanks to its “logos spermatikos.” This type of pastoral ministry is in keeping with what Avery Dulles many years ago called the “servant church model”. Those who provide such a service do not go to Christian communities with a ready-made package of abstract doctrines in their hands. Instead they accompany, observe and take note of what emerges in these communities as they develop. This pastoral ministry, which can be seen as a form of accompaniment, is contemplative in nature: it is prepared to “be surprised” by the action of the Spirit which can upset the most carefully laid pastoral plans.

The world is surprised by the everyday miracle of Christian communities living on land declared lost or useless, where all hope is deemed futile. Believers familiar with the structural mechanisms that destroy life devote themselves to the alternative offered by the Gospel and thus inject meaning into the course of history.

In a world of globalised markets and communications the Church tries to give solidarity a global dimension by means of networks consisting of a multitude of tiny threads and knots woven together to form an alternative source of communication, information and solidarity.

Judge: changing times and weakened communities

A document produced by the BECs’ Continental Networking Service in 2009 in the run-up to the first continental conferences in

258 A description of the BECs’ Continental Networking Service can be found at http://cebcontinental.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=564&Itemid=112

259 Dulles, A. 98.

260 González-Buelta, 131-132.
Santa Cruz de la Sierra and San Pedro Sula examined the developments that had led to the apparent disappearance of the BECs.

The famous Rockefeller Report prepared for President Nixon in the late 1960s was followed in 1980 by the no less famous Santa Fe Document drawn up for Ronald Regan, which stated that in the pursuit of North American geopolitical interests the Catholic Church in Latin America could no longer be considered trustworthy. These documents provided the justification for a strategy to pursue the BECs, some of which still suffer persecution in areas of conflict where national armies or paramilitary groups exert considerable influence. At our meetings we receive news from members of the BECs who prefer not to reveal their identity to avoid becoming victims of violence.

The Continental Networking Service’s 2009 document stated that criticism of the BECs was being voiced from within the Catholic Church. In contrast to the documents issued by the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM) Conferences in Medellín and Puebla, ambiguous remarks were made about the BECs in some Church teaching documents. As a consequence a number of parish priests and bishops started a campaign to denigrate the BECs. Bishops who stood up for the poor were oppressed and criticism was levelled at seminaries in which advocacy for the poor formed part of the training of future priests. In the new national and diocesan pastoral plans the BECs were put on a par with the new Christian movements in order to weaken their appeal and neutralise their impact on social and pastoral debates in Christian organisations. Referring to the “seed of the Kingdom” metaphor discussed above, the Continental Networking Service’s document stated very clearly that the BECs “to a large extent were reduced to just one more movement at the parish church level; their fragmentation meant that they failed to fully develop an alternative Church model and so the seed met with many difficulties. The Church hierarchy wasted the prophetic opportunity to support Base Ecclesial Communities, whose strong social network could have thwarted the strategy pursued by the religious sects.” (See the BECs’ Continental Networking Service, 2009, p. 8). These developments culminated in the BECs being openly accused of acting as “Marxist cells.”

It should be pointed out, however, that the challenges confronting the BECs in recent years are not only the result of external developments. The communities have also been affected internally
by far-reaching changes and by the fact that they do not fit into the organisational structure laid out in ecclesiastical law, which to all intents and purposes sees parishes as being synonymous with the local churches261 (Rubens, 2008, pp. 73-101). The Continental Networking Service, therefore, concedes that times change and that the BECs must learn to change with them. A new era brings about new developments, which in turn necessitates a re-interpretation of the signs of the times. In many organisational and ideological respects the BECs will have to break with some of the habits that have become entrenched in their pastoral and community life in order to “radically alter” the way in which they function as communities.

In the wake of the changes the BECs have had to address certain things have proved to be “non-negotiable”. These non-negotiable factors have to do with the steadfast loyalty of the Lord manifested in his Spirit, the divine action that continues, driving the People of God, breathing life into them. The principal issue here is the spiritual relationship between the communities and “Jesus Christ the Saviour.” The BECs remain adamant that following Jesus is a seminal feature of Church life. However, they interpret this following in a manner that is more in keeping with the historical significance of Christ the Redeemer. The special spirituality associated with this historical significance makes it possible to identify the characteristic elements of what many BEC supporters call the “Jesus project”. Within this project priority is given to proclamation of the Kingdom of God as good news, bringing liberation to the poor. Secondly, it is confirmed that the project is community-based: following Jesus in isolation is not being faithful to the Holy Spirit. Thirdly, community life must be organised as an expression of the commitment to liberation, so that it effectively heralds the Kingdom of God. In a word, the Church must be the “servant to the Kingdom.” This is what the BECs understand by diakonia. The Church is not concerned primarily with itself, at pains to ensure its absolute purity; it tries to respond to the appeals made by God today, addressing in particular “the new faces of poverty.”

The Conferences in Bolivia (2008) and Honduras (2012) marked the start of a better understanding of the situation facing the BECs in Latin America and the Caribbean. The outcome of the CELAM

Conference in Aparecida, Brazil, meant that it was possible in Bolivia to state exactly what the BECs needed: a “re-launch”. This word encapsulated the two assessments reached during the open discussions among the BEC members. On the one hand, it was acknowledged that the communities had grown weaker; they were like a flock without a shepherd. On the other hand, it was clear that they were still alive. Therefore, it was not necessary to “re-found them” or “replace them with something new”, nor was there any need to “suppress” all traces of them, like excising a cancerous tumour. They needed to be charged with fresh vigour to keep them moving forward, despite being located far away from each other.

The idea of “re-launching the BECs” was welcomed openly and enthusiastically by all those who were contacted in Latin America and the Caribbean. Meetings began to be held; a mobile team was formed to set up BECs in remote regions of Latin America; consideration was given to the provision of training to meet current needs, and a virtual Bible school was set up that can be accessed from all over the continent. To this end two training courses, attended by participants mostly from the Latin American countries, were held in Colombia and a meeting with CELAM organized to discuss the references to the BECs in the Aparecida Document (Nos. 178-180).

The predominant feeling is that now is the time to forge a “Samaritan Church identity”, an example of the servant or diaconal Church inspired by the Bible. The distinguishing traits of this Samaritan Church are compassion, inclusiveness and solidarity. The Church is also missionary in character, but in a manner that is in harmony with its fundamental nature. It needs to address “the new faces of poverty” in Latin America and the Caribbean, the most striking of which is that of migration. Charitable works in keeping with the BEC Church model are performed predominantly in urban districts and the countryside, where they have become a reference point in the struggle for a just and caring society. The BECs do not intend to impose this opening-up process on anyone: they wish to serve. As a result of the service they provide and the close contacts it establishes, new tasks and ministries for the communities arise.

The 9th BEC Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Honduras in June 2012, confirmed and deepened the process launched in Bolivia in July 2008. It noted that the four years which had lapsed since the BECs’ “re-launch” had witnessed a consolidation of
the process. However, it was decided not to continue using this term in order to better articulate the new tasks to be carried out between 2012 and 2016. Further progress was to be made down the road taken in Bolivia but new strategies were to be deployed. The title of one of the plenary meetings at the conference put this new way of being Church in a nutshell: “Networked BECs live well.”

“Living well”\textsuperscript{262} (cf. Walsh, 2010; Tortosa, 2009; Acosta y Martínez (eds.), 2009) is a social management model devised in Latin America as an alternative to “development”. Inspired by the Andean worldview, it is opposed to capitalist globalisation. Its advocates regard it as a “post-development” model (Acosta, 2010), i.e. a social model that renounces modern-day industrial capitalism and the notion of unlimited growth, which destroys the ecosystem and cultural diversity. A political project implemented largely by the governments of Bolivia and Ecuador, it represents a break with the concept of the modern state that emerged from the independence movements led by native elites. Its distinguishing features are interculturalism and a profound respect for “Pacha Mama” (Mother Earth), who is granted a series of rights – in contrast to the “extractivist” economy to be found in other Latin American countries. This economy, best exemplified by huge transnational mining projects, reflects the role assigned to Latin America in the current stage of global capitalism: as a contributor of natural and human “material” for the economic growth of the world’s big economies. Latin America, like Africa and certain regions in Asia, is expected to put up with the ecological destruction that is needed to sustain the increase in wealth of the rich countries, especially the USA and Canada.

The issue of ecology thus plays an important role in establishing a connection between the service provided by the BECs and people’s everyday lives. There is a need to announce the gospel of the Kingdom and to proclaim the sacredness of the earth – a message that will be understood by the marginalised in society and those in favour of change. This is an innovative way of putting the BECs in touch with indigenous communities and people living in the countryside, whose

land is being used for major mining projects. It also enables the Base Ecclesial Communities to make contact with new urban youth movements which are very sensitive to environmental issues and advocate new lifestyles that oppose capitalist competition and consumption.

**Act: Determination to live well**

The BECs in Latin America and the Caribbean have become more enthusiastic and have improved their communication in the four years between 2008 and 2012. The “re-launch” has gone down well and injected new life into many activities that were on the verge of petering out. Above all, it has given people new heart. The main reason for their despondency was the lack of communication. Many BECs thought they were all on their own.

Since 2012, the re-launch process has been given a similarly enthusiastic name that reflects the communication process now under way: “networking”. This is perhaps the best way to translate the traditional koinonia or communion between Churches into the present-day language of the interconnected world. Adopting a more reflective approach, the Church of the BECs has taken on an identity similar to that of the new generation of social movements, working with other people of good will in order to bring about social change from the bottom up.\(^{263}\)

As a result the term “base”, an essential element of the BEC Church model, is also undergoing a change in meaning. For years now, the theologian Joseph Ratzinger has been warning us that, in the light of his experience, the term “base” cannot form part of an ecclesiological construction.\(^{264}\) This is a reasonable argument given his contacts with public figures associated with liberation theology during debates on “grassroots ecumenism”. However, we do not believe that his reservations can be automatically applied to what we are witnessing in the Continental Networking Service in respect of the re-launch of the BECs:

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\(^{264}\) Certeau has voiced similar thoughts, although from a completely different ecclesiological perspective. (Certeau, M. de, *La debilidad de creer*. Buenos Aires, 2006, 274.) He points to the need for a “weak Church” and for a Church life which, in view the Church’s institutional crisis, should “leave its mark” as a strong and ubiquitous organisation on the fringes of society.
In my opinion, the term “base” cannot be applied to the concept of “church” in this manner. The “base” discussions rest on sociological and philosophical constructs, according to which society consists of an “above” and a “below” that oppose each other. “Above” signifies the established and exploitative power, while “below” means the base, the forces that sustain the rest. Only if these latter forces succeed in asserting themselves can progress be made. (……) For the most part it is a question of modifying the notion of community in which only the parish is considered to be Church in the true sense. The major churches constitute an organizational umbrella that can be structured in one way or another\textsuperscript{265}.

Having dealt with this point, Ratzinger goes on to explain two other points that are essential for a correct understanding of the path currently taken by the Latin American and Caribbean BECs. We refer to these points in order to respond to the objections raised by Ratzinger with respect to the use of the term “base” in ecclesiology. In our view, these objections do not apply to the endeavours now being made by the BECS to set up a network across the continent. Ratzinger begins his argument by stating that there are three sources for the growth of the Church in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council: 1) reflection on and study of the Holy Scriptures; 2) insight resulting from spiritual experience; and 3) doctrinal preaching by the bishops. From this he concludes that “in contrast to what is frequently claimed, the Christian tradition knows no monopoly of the Episcopate in matters of doctrine and faith. ‘Insight resulting from spiritual experience’ encompasses everything that makes up the Christian way of life. This entails recognition of the special contribution made by the ‘base’, i.e. by the community of believers, as a ‘locus theologicus’.”\textsuperscript{266}

We would say that the Continental Networking Service also puts “base” in inverted commas just as Ratzinger does in explaining his comments. It is, indeed, a “locus theologicus.” The BECs wish to deepen their spiritual experience and include this experience in discussions on the teaching of the bishops. The response to the Aparecida Document was of crucial significance in this respect. It resulted in a meeting in 2009 between the Continental Networking Service and CELAM, the purpose of which was to engage in


\textsuperscript{266} Ratzinger, 132f.
joint reflection on the enduring meaning of the term “continental mission”, in which the BECs’ “small community” model plays a key role in considerations of pastoral planning and how it can be put into practice.

None of the three points made by Ratzinger in formulating his objection to the use of the term ‘base” for ecclesiological purposes is applicable to the path taken in the second decade of the 21st century by the BECs of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Firstly, in the language currently used by the BECs, the terms “above” and “below” refer to ways of proceeding, not to “places” or “social classes.” It turns out that BECs themselves have employed “top-down models”, which are now under review in the light of the networking project. This is readily apparent in their contacts with the younger generations. BECs wish to acquire this “insight resulting from spiritual experience” that is there for all God’s people, which Ratzinger rightly describes as being in harmony with the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council.

Secondly, the BECs do not want to “impose” anything on anybody, since this would be inconsistent with their democratic character, their work for the poor and their evangelical mission, which is to be “a simple Church, the seed of the Kingdom.” Only those who acquire worldly power wish to “impose.” The concept of “living well”, which was put forward for discussion by the BECs at the Honduras Conference in 2012, comprises a deep respect for cosmic processes, including the profound and unique processes to be found in each and every individual. In this cosmic context the BECs condemn for intercultural reasons the “will to power” in modern-day Europe, which they themselves have emulated on occasions.

Thirdly, the BECs have never entertained the belief that small communities exhaust the mystery of the Church. A proposition of this nature was not even defended in the very controversial book by Leonardo Boff entitled Eclesiogénesis: Las comunidades de base reinventan la Iglesia (1986). On the contrary, Boff begins by expounding the problems posed by the specifically “modern” aspect of the growing community phenomenon in the 1980s. He regarded the community “boom” in the Church as part of the modern quest for community and thought it should be interpreted theologically. In criticising the phenomenon Boff resorts to the typology used by
Ferdinand Tönnies, who treats “community” and “society” as two distinct categories in sociological analysis. Having examined the use of the word “Church” in Pauline language and dealt in detail with the ambiguous response to the receptio of the Second Vatican Council concerning the terms “universal Church”, “particular Church” and “local Church”, Boff states categorically: “Since no one (particular Church) encompasses all the riches of the mystery of redemption, they must all be open to each other and to the glory of the Church. Only then can the Church achieve its full potential.”

For Boff, this ecclesiastical eschatological reality forms part of the Church as “mysterion”. In this eschatological context, “base” means “heart of the people of God”, not a pressure group. This “heart of the People of God on the way” lays the ground for the unending discovery of the source of ecclesiastical renewal: the Holy Spirit. His defence of the BECs notwithstanding, Boff points out that any ecclesiology, including his own, is limited. He regards the presence of the BECs as “a help for the entire Church.”

A look at the ideas voiced recently by Pedro Trigo, which arose from his participation in the Venezuelan Plenary Council, reveals several points of agreement in Latin American ecclesiastical opinions on the BECs. The same can be said of what we are currently experiencing and systematising in the Continental Networking Service.

What emerged in Honduras (2012) as crucial for the development of the BECs can be encapsulated in a single phrase. Voiced in one of the plenary meetings at the 9th conference, it could well serve as a pastoral slogan: “Get out of the Church bubble.” The strategies to “get out of the Church bubble”, which were devised during group work at the conference, may prove a source of assistance to other particular or local churches, especially those in Asia and Africa, which have requested advice from the BEC mobile team set up by José Marins and Teolide Trevisan. This team has visited many parts of the world in the past few years.

268 Boff, 34.
269 Boff, 37.
270 Boff, 38.
271 Boff, 39.
We would like to conclude this article by listing the strategies which have been elaborated to “get out of the Church bubble”. We hope they will provide food for thought about the diaconal work of the Church, which we at the BECs’ Continental Networking Service in Latin America and the Caribbean would like to “re-launch”:

Church communities must demonstrate a comprehensive commitment to the environment. In doing so they should not shun criticism or controversy. This will enable them to consolidate their Eucharistic identity without exception as “communities that share the sources of life.”

Church communities must devote special attention to the issue of migration – a new source of heartbreaking poverty that must be tackled urgently. At the conference in Honduras the work of two BEC-inspired migrant reception centres in the north and south of Mexico was examined and considered to be a good example of a “Samaritan Church.”

In view of the fact that their members are getting older, the Church communities must endeavour to strengthen the inter-generational dialogue and provide special facilities for young people. This will enable them to be integrated into the communities and not left to pursue their own interests with no reference to the Church as a whole.

Communities that serve the common good must devise new forms of pastoral care to meet new demands: new times require new services, new diakonias.

Communities have to give new meaning to the concept of interculturalism, especially in areas where the expansion of mining activities marginalises and oppresses indigenous communities and those of African descent.

The pastoral care provided by BECs must be improved. The need for “pastors of the flock” prophesied by Jesus is particularly acute in the present situation. This is not limited solely to an increase in the number of people working as priests or bishops, even though the service they provide is particularly important in ministerial and sacramental terms (and in some cases is lacking entirely).

As regards the practice and strengthening of the faith, particular importance attaches to the use of symbolism, which is also an appropriate means of communication with those who make up the majority in society.
The BECs need to be present and make their influence felt when Church strategies are being developed, since conservative forces do not shrink from malicious misinformation in their attempts to destroy this way of being Church, even though it was confirmed by the teaching authority of the Latin American bishops in 1968.

New communication technologies are invaluable in building the Church “from the bottom up” and creating “communication networks” that help us to keep in touch with what is going on all over the continent.

The networked Church of the BECs is not alone in wishing to respond to the calls from the Kingdom in the first decades of the 21st century. It would like to participate on an equal footing in the thousands of social movements throughout Latin America that are working to create a just society. Examples of such movements cited at the Honduras Conference included those fighting for 4% of GDP to be spent on education in the Dominican Republic and for solidarity with the student protesters in Chile.

For the first time almost all the continents were represented at the Conference and Assembly of Advisors, which were attended by participants from Asia, Africa and Europe. Meetings of this kind help us as local churches to open our eyes to what is going on elsewhere and to ask ourselves what services we can provide for the Church as a whole. Such a prospect was beyond our wildest dreams when we were still seen through Eurocentric eyes as “young missionary churches.”

A paragraph in the Concluding Statement of the 9th Conference held in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, expresses the spirit that inspires all the strategies brought about by reflecting and praying together with the members of the BECs gathered there. Their service to society, their diakonia, is to be discreet, like the seed of the Kingdom they are part of.

Given the reality of death, we draw hope from a society that defends and promotes a life of dignity, glimpses of which are already apparent in the many small and large links that have been forged. Jesus is the water that becomes a spring within (cf. John 4:14). Base Ecclesial Communities are thus a spring of water within. Like water they give life; they are a source of energy in coping with the difficulties
encountered in fulfilling the task of working to bring God’s Kingdom into this world; like water they are discreet and barely noticeable, but they are present, accumulating strength and purifying.
The Programme of Jesus: A Heart which Sees – Charity in current Church documents

Cardinal Rainer Maria Woelki

For the period between 2011 and 2015 the German Bishops’ Conference has undertaken to bring about clarity and provide confirmation with respect to the witness of the Church in the world and its mission to mankind. This process encompasses the fostering of inner-Church dialogue on the search for God and ways of confession that are important today (martyria), on prayer and the worship of God (liturgia) and on the helpful contribution made by the Church in contemporary society (diakonia). These three dimensions of the Church are commonly called its fundamental principles, which occasionally also includes service to the community (koinonia).

In this contribution the focus will be on the fundamental principle of diakonia, which was the main topic of discussion at the German Bishops’ Conference in 2012. How is charity presented in ecclesiastical documents? What are its principal characteristics? What consequences does it have for Church activities in present-day society? These questions will be examined with respect to the encyclical letter Deus Caritas Est by Pope Benedict XVI (2005) and the bishops’ message Berufen zur caritas ( Called to Charity) issued by the German Bishops in 2009. Finally, the thoughts set out will form the basis for the formulation of a challenge for the future of the Church, which has to do essentially with “a return of the Church to charity” (Alfred Delp).

Charity in Deus Caritas Est: indispensable, spiritual and given selflessly

In his encyclical letter Deus Caritas Est Pope Benedict XVI sets great store by the observation that God’s love of mankind is at the very root of Christian charity. “He has loved us first and he continues
to do so; we too, then, can respond with love.” (No. 17)\(^{273}\) This means that love of God and one’s neighbour is always preceded by God who already acts out of love. According to the encyclical, human love is therefore only possible because God loved us first. Hence the commandment to love God and one’s neighbour is not merely a commandment; it is also, and above all, a response to the gift of being loved that we have received from God.

Bearing this in mind, it is always helpful if the origins, basic motives and objectives of charity are subjected to review. Charity testifies to God’s love of mankind, especially in times of need, distress or exclusion. God’s love, which was revealed in Jesus Christ, urges us to pass it on and, in this spirit, to help others in need. Thus it is God’s love that gives charity its crucial sense of direction. This is also made apparent by a quotation from the First letter to the Corinthians, which the Pope cites elsewhere in the encyclical: “Though I should give away to the poor all that I possess, and even give up my body to be burned – if I am without love, it will do me no good whatever”. (1 Corinthians 13:3)

The term \textit{diakonia} is mentioned only twice in the encyclical \textit{Deus Caritas Est}. Nevertheless, this encyclical can be regarded as a milestone in the official recognition of charity by the Catholic Church as one of its fundamental principles. This is the outcome in particular of two key insights, which are described by the encyclical as follows: “The Church’s deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: proclaiming the word of God (\textit{kerygma-martyria}), celebrating the sacraments (\textit{leitourgia}), and exercising the ministry of charity (\textit{diakonia}). These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable.” And: “For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being.” (No. 25 a)

Never before has the Church’s Magisterium put charity so clearly and unmistakably on a par with proclamation and the liturgy. And never before has a Pope made it so unequivocally clear that charity is indispensable for the Church. This integral understanding of \textit{diakonia} is of such importance to the Pope that he expressly re-emphasised

\(^{273}\) The sources mentioned in the encyclical letter Deus Caritas Est refer to: Encyclical letter Deus Caritas Est of the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI to the bishops, priests and deacons, men and women religious, and all the lay faithful on Christian love (Verlautbarungen des Apostolischen Stuhls 171, Bonn 2005).
it during his address in the Konzerthaus Freiburg in Germany on 25 September 2011. Church without charity is not Church.

In the passage quoted the encyclical makes it clear that the fundamental principles of the Church are mutually dependent and inseparable from each other. This means that Church can only really be Church if all three fundamental principles are fulfilled. Pope Benedict draws attention to this in the first, systematic-theological part of the encyclical: “A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented. Conversely … the “commandment” of love is only possible because it is more than a requirement. Love can be “commanded” because it has first been given.” (No. 14) This contradicts the widespread belief that charity does not really form part of the Church, taking place rather in its anteroom and not at its centre. The encyclical makes it abundantly clear that the centre of Church activity is inconceivable without charity.

This interpretation can serve as an incentive to explore the charitable dimension of the Eucharist and proclamation as well as the spiritual dimension of charity. Many Church services in our parishes give the impression that poverty, need and exclusion play no particular role in our communities. According to the encyclical, however, concern for the weak in society is a primary task of the Church at all levels and cannot be left to the Caritas organisation alone. The restructuring and merging of parishes, a process that has been under way for some years now in the dioceses of Germany, provides an opportunity to place greater emphasis on the social and welfare aspects of pastoral work. On the other hand, the spiritual character of many Catholic hospitals and senior care facilities is not apparent at first glance. The encyclical urges that the implementation of the three fundamental principles that constitute the very essence of the Church should manifest their interdependence.

*Deus Caritas Est* draws attention to four characteristics that are of outstanding importance for Christian charitable service and distinguish it, moreover, from non-Christian welfare activities. They are as follows:

- First of all charity is quite simply the response to immediate needs in a particular situation: “feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for and healing the sick, visiting those in prison, etc.” (No. 31 a) The German Caritas Association has
summarised this work in the formula: “Act when you see others in need”.

– In addition to professional competence, which is an initial fundamental necessity, there is a need for what the Pope calls “heartfelt concern”, because people always need compassion too. Those who work for the Church’s charitable organizations must, therefore, be distinguished by the fact that they “do not merely meet the needs of the moment, but they dedicate themselves to others with heartfelt concern, enabling them to experience the richness of their humanity.” (ibid) Hence professional education must be supplemented and inspired by education of the heart so that love of one’s neighbour becomes tangible as a consequence of faith.

– The third characteristic of charity is its independence of parties and ideologies. Charity is not a means of asserting political or other ideas, but quite simply the manifestation of love. “We contribute to a better world only by personally doing good now, with full commitment and wherever we have the opportunity, independently of partisan strategies and programmes. The Christian’s programme – the programme of the Good Samaritan, the programme of Jesus – is “a heart which sees”. This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly.” (No. 31 b)

– Finally, it is important for Pope Benedict that practical love of one’s neighbour should not be exploited for the purpose of “what is nowadays described as proselytism”. “Love is free.” It is not given to turn people into Christians. Charity reveals itself in acts of service performed selflessly. Moreover, “Those who practise charity in the Church’s name will never seek to impose the Church’s faith upon others. … A Christian knows when it is time to speak of God and when it is better to say nothing and to let love alone speak.” (No. 31 c) Charity is of itself an expression of faith in God, “For this is how God loved the world”. (John 3:16) Hence it is all the happier to talk of its faith and give others the opportunity to experience it.

The distinguishing features of charity mentioned in the encyclical can be seen as constituting the demands made of every form of
charitable work, irrespective of whether it is performed on a voluntary or professional basis. It is inherent in the logic of the encyclical that the four characteristics form an organic whole, thus enabling the specific profile of charitable work to emerge quite clearly.

*Deus Caritas Est* has quickly become a key document as regards the fundamental principle of charity within the Church. It recalls the fact that the Church as God’s family “must be a place where help is given and received, and at the same time, a place where people are also prepared to serve those outside her confines who are in need of help.” (No. 32)

**Charity in *Berufen zur caritas*: place of encounter with God and prayer that leads to action**

*Deus Caritas Est* has been welcomed with great interest and approval in Germany. It was undoubtedly something of a surprise that Pope Benedict XVI’s first programmatic encyclical should have focused on the charity of the Church and acknowledged it in the manner described above. Having gratefully taken up this universal Church document, the German bishops proceeded to relate its content to the situation of the Church in Germany and flesh out the details in their message entitled *Berufen zur caritas* (Called to Charity).

Reflecting their understanding of the fundamental principle of charity, the bishops emphasise that, alongside proclamation and the liturgy, the performance of charitable work can provide the context for an encounter with God. In this connection the bishops’ message describes an “open-eyed mysticism” that makes people more sensitive to encounters with their neighbours, explaining this by reference to a passage in a speech given by Pope Benedict XVI on 9 September 2007 to volunteers in Vienna: “Jesus Christ teaches us not a closed-minded but an open-eyed mysticism and thus the unconditional duty to acknowledge the situation of others, the situation in which people find themselves who, according to the Gospel, are our neighbours”.

(p. 29) Hence the enhancing of sensitivity brought about by encounters with one’s neighbours can make it easier to perceive the traces of God’s presence in our lives and discover that God in Jesus Christ comes back to us time and again to awaken our love. Open-

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274 The sources mentioned in the bishops’ message *Berufen zur caritas* refer to: *Berufen zur caritas* (Die deutschen Bischofe No. 91, Bonn 2009).
eyed mysticism corresponds here unmistakably with the “heart which sees” in *Deus Caritas Est*.

The bishops’ message describes characteristic aspects of charitable work that take up and develop the distinguishing features of charity in the encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*. This includes the demands made on people active in social welfare work, attentiveness to oneself and others as well as spirituality and prayer as an expression of strength and attitude. In this context the bishops’ message describes three levels which together constitute the specific profile of charitable work (see pp. 40-42):

- The first level concerns activities that are methodically correct: “Those working for Caritas are justifiably expected to fulfil their duties in an appropriate professional manner and with the requisite care (cf. *Deus caritas Est* No. 31 a) by applying the relevant techniques, methods and procedures in a proper and responsible manner.” This is a reference to professional competence, which is a necessary prerequisite for any social activity.

- The second level, according to the bishops’ message, describes interpersonal relations: “Moreover, the focus is consistently on encounters with specific individuals in their particular situation (of need). If voluntary and professional helpers really engage with others who are in need they do not remain in the position of uninvolved spectators or administrative executives. In most cases professional and voluntary assistance will inevitably lead to interpersonal relations and communication.” At this stage it is already clear that charitable work, in the understanding of the Church, consists of a meeting between persons in every aspect of their being. Charitable work is, therefore, not the repairing of a defective part of the body, but also always a person-to-person meeting, which is important for the healing process. Charitable work always relates to the whole person, to body, soul and spirit.

- At the third level the emphasis is on the personality of the individual performing the charitable work and his set of values: “In person-to-person encounters the recipients of aid come into more or less intensive contact with the personality of
the helper. They are confronted with his beliefs and values, his image of the world, of people and of God. In short, they are exposed to his attitude, through which he manifests his knowledge and skills to the recipients. On the other hand, encounters with the suffering, with their image of themselves and understanding of the world, with their relationships and responses trigger reactions in the helper that also influence the aid he can offer.” (pp. 40-41). Here the bishops explain why the inner attitude and personal spirituality of those who are actively engaged are so important for charitable work. This level will certainly not be achieved in every instance of charity. However, it is important that the activities undertaken should be motivated by and reflected in an attitude that expresses something of the view of mankind, the world and God that forms part of the Christian faith. For this to be transmitted the helper must his entire personality to bear and not just his professional competence. This also entails people consistently meeting on an equal footing in the context of charitable work, even if one person is the giver and the other the recipient.

Charitable work of this nature reveals an openness in respect of all the three levels referred to above: the right professional conduct, interpersonal relations and the personality of those involved, including all their values, are always very closely interlinked.

It will have become clear from the above that a connection between spirituality and an inner attitude is crucial for charitable service. In this respect Berufen zur caritas presents an understanding of Christian spirituality which is “highly personal and for that very reason able to communicate and ready to inform without in any way imposing itself” (p. 46). This spirituality is the origin of charitable work and the source of its strength. The bishops’ message speaks of “prayer transformed into action and personal development” (p. 47). It is this attitude which constitutes the specific nature of charitable work.

The bishops’ message emphasises that charitable work performed by Christians is not distinguished from non-Christian welfare work by the professional quality of the activities undertaken or, in superficial terms, by frequent use of the word ‘God’. “On the contrary, the crucial difference is whether and how genuinely Christians live their faith, how they see themselves in relation to God and whether they are
gradually so transformed by the Spirit of God that they reflect this in their attitude, encounters and behaviour towards their fellow men – especially the poor and needy.” (p. 49) Here the interdependence of the fundamental principles of the Church is emphasised once again with great clarity: charity only functions if it is placed in the context of proclamation and the liturgy.

Return of the Church to charity

Shortly before his execution Alfred Delp, a Jesuit priest imprisoned by the Nazis, wrote of his conviction that a “return to charity” was crucial to the mission of the Church. As far as charity was concerned, he said, the Church – unlike the priest and the Levite in Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10, 25:37) – should not ignore people lying at the roadside after being robbed and go about its holy business. The consequences would be grim: “Nobody will believe the message of salvation and the Saviour if we have not slaved away in the service of people who are physically, psychologically, socially, economically, morally or otherwise sick. People today are sick.”

Delp therefore insists on a “return of the Church to charity”. He expresses this in compelling words: “We must meet the man in the street on his own ground, in all circumstances, with a view to helping him to master them. That means walking by his side, accompanying him even into the depths of degradation and misery. ‘Go forth’, our Lord said, not ‘sit and wait for someone to come to you’. By that I mean being ready to cooperate in all efforts for the betterment of humankind and human order …. I look on the spiritual encounter as a dialogue, not a monologue or an address, a monotonous drone of words.”

These remarks made by Delp in 1944 constitute an incomparable plea for charity which even now, in 2012, has lost nothing of its emotional and programmatic power. They make it clear that charity is a task for every Christian, for Christian congregations and the entire Church which must be fulfilled at all levels of Church activity.

The Church carries out this task inter alia in the form of the Caritas Association. The encyclical Deus Caritas Est leaves no doubt that

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the Caritas Association is at the very heart of the charitable mission of the Church: “The Church’s charitable organizations … constitute an opus proprium, a task agreeable to her, in which she does not cooperate collaterally, but acts as a subject with direct responsibility, doing what corresponds to her nature.” (No. 29) The German bishops also acknowledge the significance of organised charitable work as a fundamental Church principle: “The social services of the Church are at the core of the Christian message; they are nourished from the heart of the Christian faith with its image of God and mankind and are just as indispensable for the Church as proclamation and the liturgy. Charity is Church.” (p. 15)

In addition to the work performed by the Caritas Association, charitable service is also, and in particular, a duty for individual Christians and the Christian parish. The parishes should not rely too much on the services and facilities of Caritas as an organisation since this might well lead to certain social realities being ignored. Poverty, need and illness, however, are in a certain way constitutive for Christian parishes. Moreover, parishes always have a universal dimension that can find expression in a commitment to the universal Church. Poverty, need and illness do not exist solely in one’s own environment but also – and to a much greater extent – in other regions of the world that have less prosperity or, indeed, none at all. In both instances an answer must be sought in respect of what is immediately required in a specific situation. “Emergencies” for charitable work often arise in everyday practice – whenever people unexpectedly find themselves in alarming situations. Christians initially respond to this without any special training, but with their Christian faith and a corresponding attitude.

In September 2011 during his address to the German parliament, the Bundestag, Pope Benedict XVI recalled the words spoken by the young King Solomon: “So give your servant a heart to understand how to govern your people, how to discern between good and evil, for how could one otherwise govern such a great people as yours?” (1 Kings 3:9) A “heart which listens” is of the essence if the Church is to heed its calling to perform charitable works. It “listens” in two dimensions in this respect: to the word of God and to the needs and concerns of people. These two dimensions are only artificially separated, however. Like listening to God’s word and celebrating the sacraments, the performance of charitable works is a way of
encountering God. Turning away from one’s neighbour, on the other hand, blinds people to God. The bishops’ message Berufen zur caritas reaffirms that people can encounter God when carrying out charitable works. To that end they need “a heart which listens” or, as the bishops message puts it, “open-eyed mysticism” (see above).

The power of charity expressed in activities on behalf of the disadvantaged, the needy and the vulnerable corresponds with an awareness of their embodiment in the Catholic Church. Charity continues to be a basic function of the Catholic Church, which in turn is only fully Church in the comprehensive fulfilment of its three basic functions: proclamation, Church service and charitable works. Charity is the dimension of the Church that carries the message of the Kingdom of God into society, explaining it and giving it a clear profile. It is to the credit of Deus Caritas Est and Berufen zur caritas that they recall this truth and make it unmistakably clear to Christians, Christian communities and the Caritas Association.
Year of Faith: Challenges for the Church in Africa

Patrick C. Chibuko

Christianity from the on-set has remained a religion of personal choice. As a supernatural gift which enables us to believe without doubting what God has revealed, faith is received individually through baptism. Faith in Christ, presupposes thorough deliberation and definitive decision.276 However, faith is not given in isolation. It is given to an individual personally but to be exercised within the community of believers. Faith needs to be nurtured, developed, expressed, professed and experienced within the community of the faithful, namely, the worshipping community; the assembly of believers. Faith in Jesus demands quality followership and not mere gullible, unconvinced and unreliable mob. Jesus never subscribes to majority reports (cf. John 6:67-69, will you also go away?). For Jesus majority does not always carry the vote. Where ever the truth is, there is Jesus even if it is found in the minority.

Faith is given with dynamism in view and not unto dormancy. It is a faith that is challenged by the daily ups and downs of life. It is a faith that needs to be constantly nourished and renewed to bear quality witness in the community and the wider society. This faith blossoms optimally within the Eucharistic community where God the Father is worshipped through Christ in the unity of the Holy Spirit.277 The periodic renewal of faith belongs to the very nature of faith otherwise it degenerates into inertia. No wonder then the timely invitation of Pope Benedict XVI to renew the faith of the Church collectively.

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276 Even in the case of infant baptism, the child is baptized in the faith of the parents, god parents and the Christian community which the child will confirm at the age of reason. He confirms it by continuing the faith formation already started in childhood. On the contrary, he or she discontinues the faith formation given at baptism. The personal choice is always there.

With his Apostolic Letter of October 11, 2011, Porta Fidei, Pope Benedict XVI declared that a “Year of Faith” will begin on October 11, 2012 and conclude on November 24, 2013 being the solemnity of Christ, King of the Universe. October 11, 2012, the first day of the Year of Faith, is the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council and also the twentieth anniversary of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. During the Year of Faith, Catholics are asked to study and reflect on the documents of Second Vatican Council and the Catechism so that they may deepen their knowledge of the faith. The ‘door of faith’ (Acts 14:27) is always open for us, ushering us into the life of communion with God and offering entry into his Church.278

The Year of Faith is closely tied-up with the new era of evangelisation. Jesus sent the Apostles saying: “Go out to the whole world and proclaim the good news” (Mark 16:15). Hence, in every moment and in every place the Church has the obligation to proclaim, with perseverance, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This was also the conviction of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council and, precisely because of this; an evangelising thrust began from the Council. Today, fifty years, later much has changed and it is good to give a new dynamic to this thrust. The Year of Faith, which as the Holy Father affirms, is founded on the Council, intends to serve this request. The appeal to the New Evangelization serves this purpose.279

Evangelisation is not an option for the Church but rather a divine mandate and a clear demonstration of her filial and faithful obedience to the Lord’s command to go out to the whole world and preach the good news. She preaches in and out of season because that is what the Lord demands of her and not just because of contemporary problems of an age like the secularism and relativism of our time. Rather these problems are taken on board within the broader programme of unending evangelisation.

Consequently, within the Year of Faith the Pope summons the entire Church to an authentic and renewed conversion to the Lord,
the one Saviour of the world. He maintains that the revelation of God’s Love for us through the Life, Death and Resurrection of Jesus for our salvation, calls us to conversion through the forgiveness of sins (Acts 5:31). He shows how Saint Paul demonstrates that this Love ushers us into new life (Rom. 6:4) Through Faith this new life transforms human existence according to the radical new reality of the Resurrection.

The journey of Faith is never completely finished in this life, he tells us. As to the extent that he freely co-operates, man’s thoughts and affections, mentality and conduct are slowly purified and transformed. Faith working through love (Gal. 5:6) becomes a new criterion of understanding and action that changes the whole of man’s life. (Rom. 12:2). The call by the Pope remains in my judgment, a bold one that demands all hands on deck to see to its plentiful fruition.

**Contemporary African Continent in Context**

Conflicts, injustice and wanton violation of human rights in the African continent remain serious issues of great concern. This article is not primarily concerned with either short listing who and who to blame or calling names and pointing fingers except where necessary. It is rather more concerned with exposing the plight of the continent and the expectations of the Church in Africa from the forthcoming and eventful celebration of the year of faith with a view to new evangelization. It is no longer a hidden fact that African continent especially in the recent past has had its excessive share of injustice, violence and violation of human rights. The untold hardships resulting from these crises are still evident till today. The world woke up early last year, 2011 for instance with series of politico-socio economic crises that gave rise to irreversible rejection of the ruling powers and calling for a radical change in administration in Algeria, Yemen, Egypt, Libya to mention no others. 280

True and lasting peace which is another name for integral development 281 has regretfully eluded the world in general and African continent in particular. Peace is not merely the absence of

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war; nor can it be reduced solely to the maintenance of a balance of power between enemies; nor is it brought about by dictatorship. Instead, it is rightly and appropriately called an enterprise of justice. Peace results from that order structured into human society by its divine Founder, and actualized by men (and women) as they thirst after ever greater justice.\footnote{Paul VI, Gaudium et Spes, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gs December, 1965, 78.} I will give you peace, the kind of peace which the world cannot give, this is my gift to you (John 14:27), remains an uncontestable saying of Jesus. Peace as a gift of Christ to the world cannot be achieved by arms and ammunitions. The much these could achieve may be only a state of stalemate.

We live today with the folly of the so called world peace forged by world leaders. Very often, peace agreements are signed by heads of governments on neutral grounds agreed upon by the parties involved under the supervision of accredited international bodies on security matters but at the same time various levels of military preparedness are being stepped up and put on the alert by the same parties that have just struck the peace accord. Peace processes have often been derailed out of course through sabotage even before the details of the processes are known and worked out by the parties concerned.\footnote{Chibuko, P.C., Peace is More Than A Word, in: Liturgical Inculturation, An Authentic African Response, Frankfurt 2002, 71-73.}

The African continent that is well endowed with enviable human and natural resources is still crippled by the indiscriminate scramble for Africa that led to the irrational partitioning of the continent on a drawing table in Berlin (1884-1885) and not on the fields of Africa simply to suit the new conquerors.\footnote{Ike, O., The Social, Political and Economic Situation of Nigeria, A Critical Survey, in: Wer befreit ist, kann befreien, Theologisch-Ethische Werkstatt. Kontext Frankfurt, Johannes Hoffmann, Hrsg., Band 5, Frankfurt 1997, 77.} Until this day, the entire continent still suffers the psychological trauma and setbacks, sad effects and confusion, laden injustice and error, which this blunder has caused a continent rightly described by history as the cradle of civilisation and the origin of the scientific human development.\footnote{Ibid.}

Furthermore, the massive Trans-Saharan slave trade and the ongoing colonisation of the same continent through political instability,
ailing economic system, and exploitation of mineral resources and quick erosion of her cultural values leave the continent to be steadily crawling on her knees with a begging cap in hand. The consequence of this deplorable situation is her unimaginable inability to rise up from this man-made and preventable bondage to claim her enviable African personality and pride. A pitiable situation as this, demands not just an apology from the offenders both within and outside, but an adequate redress and compensation. Until the producing countries of Africa for instance are able to determine the price of their products like their western counterparts in the international market and not the buyers, the socio-economic and political poverty of the continent will never end. These issues and their corrosive consequences demand timely attention even as the Church celebrates the year of faith come October 2012.

**Challenges Facing the Church in Africa**

The Year of Faith and New Evangelization challenge the Church in Africa on so many scores. We reckon especially the challenge of Faith to Christians in the face of persecution and conflicts, corruption and injustice, violation of human rights and insecurity with their adverse consequences in the contemporary Africa society. How can the Christian be equipped with the gospel of Jesus Christ to withstand or endure to the end?

Other challenges arise from bringing the Good News to the poor. The Church here in Africa must become genuinely a Church for and with the poor. Furthermore, it must be challenged to reach out to those whose faith-life has been largely eroded and even lost due to the surrounding secularism and confusion, moral relativism, doubt and agnosticism; reaching out to those who have drifted away from the Faith and the Church especially the youth sector groups, and have joined other religious sects.

Who is God for the African remains a serious challenge today. John Elnathan in an international Nigerian daily captures the new

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286 Ibid.

287 These ideas are borrowed from the Philippine Catholic Bishop’s Pastoral Letter on the New Era of Evangelization. “Evangelization Indicates Proclamation, Transmission and Witnessing to the Gospel…” (CBCP) MANILA, Philippines, JULY 12, 2012, (Zenit.org). The letter was delivered by Archbishop Jose S. Palma, President of the CBCP and Archbishop of Cebu. CBCP Pastoral Letter on the Era of New Evangelization, LIVE CHRIST, SHARE CHRIST Go and make disciples… (Mt. 28:19).
prevailing trend of African/Nigerian understanding of God. According to him, “worshipping the Nigerian god has nothing to do with character, good works or righteousness. If you are gathered to discuss how to inflate contracts, rig elections begin with an opening prayer.\(^{288}\) If you diverted funds from public projects and when people say you have a nice car, say, it is God. If someone asks what the secret of all your wealth is, say, God has been good to me.\(^{289}\) The Nigerian god does not tolerate disrespect. If someone insults your religion, you must look for anyone like them and kill them. It does not matter what you use: sticks, machetes, grenades, launchers, AK47s,\(^ {290}\) weapons of mass destruction of all categories (additions and emphasis are mine). The Nigerian god performs signs and wonders. He does everything from cure of HIV/AIDS to High Blood Pressure. But the Nigerian god does not cure corruption.\(^ {291}\) This represents only a little index of a big whole regarding the extent the ‘giant of Africa’, Nigeria has degenerated in religio-socio-economic political score scale. The situation certainly needs an urgent regeneration.

The most striking challenge, however, in my judgment would be the possibility of having a contextual re-reading and re-interpretation of some of the paradoxes arising from the biblical spirituality that guides the Christian attitude particularly in the face of hostility. Christian directive stipulates for instance, total abolition of the Mosaic laws such as retaliation (lex talionis) and insists on non violence, non retaliation, non revenge, dialogue; offering the other cheek, the offender should initiate reconciliation, pray for one’s enemy and so forth.

I consider this biblical re-orientation very crucial especially when one recalls for reference Christ’s own attitude in similar situations as we have them today. For instance, Jesus’ instruction to purchase a sword in Luke 22:35-38 raises one’s curiosity. The amazing fact in that directive is that the scene in question is one that anyone would least expect the presence of a sword. It is obvious what sword is meant and what it stands for metaphorically. Furthermore, the response of the apostles is still more amazing, “Master we have two swords here

\(^{288}\) How to worship the Nigerian god, published by Daily Times Nigerian Newspaper, Thursday, August 30, 2012, blog | July 19, 2012 – 5:53am. The quality of this rare but frank article attracted well over sixty six unanimous positive comments.

\(^{289}\) Ibid.

\(^{290}\) Ibid.

\(^{291}\) Ibid.
already”. And Jesus said, “That is enough”. The apostles were readily and fully armed even at the celebration of the Last Supper. Carrying two swords at a most sublime meal of Jesus’ Last Supper is rather deeply suggestive. The text seems to suggest that for Jesus carrying sword is normal and that the apostles should not presume or take chances. They should be fully armed always even in times and places where one would least expect the use of sword.

Secondly, when Jesus was on trial before Pilate, a soldier slapped him (John 18:22-23). One would have expected Jesus to turn the other cheek (referring to the text of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:39). But he did not. Instead, he asked the most disarming question ever asked in history: why did you slap me? If there is anything wrong in what I said, declare it openly, otherwise why did you slap me? Here again, the text seems to suggest that Jesus would not tolerate any kind of insult or intimidation from anyone for any flimsy reason. Christ would take people on the spot to account for their actions.

Thirdly, the very sword highlighted at the last Supper, was eventually and actually seen to be used in the garden of Gethsemane. When Judas came with the arresters of Jesus and they were about to lay hands on Jesus, Peter used the sword in defense of the Master. Jesus immediately asked him to withdraw the sword. Similarly, the text seems to propose that the apostles have the directive of the Master to carry swords, but they have to be told when to use them. It does not belong to them to determine when to use them. And until the Master indicates, their job is to be fully armed always and at all times. They have to be always on the alert and vigilant; however, they must wait for the Master’s order before they would act. Perhaps at the end of the Year of Faith, a clearer answer or directive would be issued on this matter.

Since the faith we have is a supernatural gift of God, several issues as implications flow from it. In my judgment, a gift from God especially, needs to be received with a great sense of appreciation. It has to be cherished, nurtured, developed, defended in the face of danger and fanned into flame to achieve its desired quality and sustainable fruits by witnessing. Gifts without fruits are useless. No wonder then the Church teaches the gifts of the Holy Spirit as well as the fruits of the Holy Spirit. If someone for instance, is given the gift of wisdom by the Holy Spirit, would not the fruit of that be
smart thoughts? It belongs to the dynamics of faith to bear fruits especially through sharing (koinonia) and loving selfless service (diakonia).

Secondly, faith demands certain degree of alertness and fortification for its preservation and maturity. Whatever one cherishes one normally guards and guides jealously. After all, one of the glowing Christian principles is to be alert and vigilant (1 Pet 5:8-9). One cannot be alert and vigilant empty handedly. However, the timely intervention with the sword will be of the essence. Thirdly, there is a kind of psychology that weakens or strengthens every form of terrorism, namely preparedness or unpreparedness respectively. The quality of either side determines to a great extent the duration and intensity of the crisis. There is every tendency for the enemy to attack and re-attack the victim if the latter has little or no plans on ground. The contrary will be the case if the victim is fully armed to the teeth and ever at alert. An unprotected faith remains ever vulnerable.

Conclusion

The Church as the mystical body of Christ does not exist simply to do ambulance work for the social order, but to regenerate it continuously. The regeneration of true Christian spirit in the Church and larger society demands authentic re-interpretation of the relevant biblical texts. It includes also a consolidated synergy of all the stakeholders both in the universal and local Church in charting the new course for the Christian faith in the new millennium and beyond. The Church remains faithful to the Lord’s command in so far as it is evangelizing and bearing authentic witness through Christian spirit and action. Christ fails in the measure we fail to be Chris-like.

For the Church in Africa facing numerous crises, the Year of Faith implies re-enforcement of the faith. That means to develop one’s own Christian identity, which implies courageous witnessing in an increasingly skeptical, if not outright hostile society in confrontation with Catholic doctrine. It means that the Christian faith becomes a fully integrated way of life that expresses itself clearly and unmitigatedly in every circumstance of life especially in crisis moments.

We speak of an unshakable faith in the true God revealed by Jesus Christ in the unity of the Holy Spirit, unlike the Nigerian god. We insist on unflinching and sustainable faith that believes in the sun
even when it does not shine; a faith that believes in love even when one does not feel it; a faith that believes in God even when He is silent. The Church in Africa is full of high and positive expectations during and after the celebration of the Year of Faith as she launches herself into the new era of evangelisation with the conviction that the continent will never be the same again.
Connecting Diakonia with the Liturgy and Catechesis
The Connection of Diaconia and Liturgy in the Church

George Ehusani

Diakonia is a Greek terminology that in Christian tradition has come to encompass the call to service in the Church, and especially service of the poor. Over the last one hundred years, numerous documents of the magisterium have highlighted the importance of diaconia in the local Churches as well as in the universal Church. In his first encyclical, Pope Benedict XVI emphasised that, “The Church’s deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God, celebrating the sacraments, and exercising the ministry of charity (diakonia). These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable.”

This rich theological undertone notwithstanding, diaconia till today continues to occupy a more or less marginal place in the life of many local Christian communities.

In some recent Church documents, there are even indications of a tendency to exclude diaconia from what some would see as the ‘core-business’ of the church. Such tendency isolates social engagement from the Church’s fundamental commitment to evangelisation. This tendency is linked with a particular understanding of the identity of the Church as liturgy, catechesis, prayer, spirituality – what many understand as the ‘inner’ reality of the Church. From this perspective, diaconia is seen as dealing with the ‘outer’ reality. This ‘inner/outer dichotomy’ often leads to undervaluing diaconia as being merely a practice ad-extra, the fruit of an (already beforehand) internally ascertained spiritual reality and vitality, or the moral consequence of a faith-identity that could be obtained independent of diaconia.

The implied separation of spirituality and social commitment here fails to acknowledge the contribution that diaconia itself can make to the desired faith identity, spiritual vitality and self-realisation of

the Church. Such undervaluing of diaconia today is problematic: it falls into the typically modern dichotomies between the sacred and the secular, salvation and welfare, service to God and service to the world, worship and ethics. It contradicts the acclaimed oneness of martyria-kerygma, leiturgia and diaconia in the very ‘nature’ of the Church.

Liturgy and Diaconia in the early church

In the early Church, there was an unmistakable connection between the celebration of the Eucharistic and the service of the poor. In Acts 2:42, we are told that the early Christians were faithful to the teachings of the Apostles, to the breaking of bread, to the fellowship and to prayers. Those who participated in the Eucharist accepted the commitment that partaking of the Eucharistic meal entailed, namely, the commitment to preserving communion (koinonia) and the commitment to the work of charity (diaconia).

We can refer to the life of the early Christian community for the meaning of these two important words: communion and service. It is important to take note of the four important aspects of the life of the early Church because they form the basis of the development of Christian worship. In Acts 2:44-46, Luke adds, “All who shared the faith owned everything in common; they sold their goods and possessions and distributed the proceeds among themselves according to the needs of each one. Each day, with one heart, they went regularly to the Temple but met in their houses for the breaking of bread; they shared their food gladly and generously; they praised God and were looked up to by everyone.” The Acts of the Apostles makes clear that because of the exemplary life of this early community of Christians, more and more people were converted to the faith (2:47). In other words, because of the qualitative growth in faith, there was a quantitative growth in the number of people converted to the Church. When we go further, Acts 4:32-35 speaks of the whole group of believers as united in heart and soul; everything they owned was held in common. The text says that “No one was ever in want, as all those who owned land or houses would sell them, and bring the money from the sale of them, to present it to the apostles; it was then distributed to anyone who might be in need” (4:35).

This unmistakable connection between liturgical worship and social commitment, between faith and right living was central to the
life of the early Church. There was a real connection between what the early Christians believed and how they lived (believing and living). In the second century, Saint Justin the Martyr († c. 155) wrote to the pagan Emperor Antoninus Pius explaining what Christians did on Sunday. Justin mentioned their charitable activity, linked with the Eucharist as such. Those who were able make offerings, did so in accordance with their means; the Bishop in turn made use of these to support orphans, widows, the sick and those who for other reasons found themselves in need, such as prisoners and foreigners (Cf. *I Apologia*, 67: *PG* 6, 429). In other words, for the early Church, Eucharistic worship necessarily led to service and charity. When at the end of Mass the priest or deacon dismisses the congregation, they say: “The Mass is ended, go in peace to love and serve the Lord.” What they are saying in essence is: ‘You have partaken of the Eucharist; now, go in peace to love and serve the Lord and one another.’

**Liturgy and the Diaconia of Communion**

The Eucharist is the causal principle of the Church’s existence. The Church exists to celebrate the Eucharist. As the Eucharist builds up the Church, so the Church makes the Eucharist (Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritate*, 14). This striking interplay, this causal influence of the Eucharist at the Church’s origins definitively discloses both the chronological and ontological priority of the Church as a sacrament of service. Since the Church’s ability to “make” the Eucharist is completely rooted in Christ’s self-gift to her, the Church is made to give herself to others by sharing with humanity the love of Christ who sacrificed himself for all. Thus, as Christ makes Himself Bread broken for us, so are we expected to make ourselves bread broken for our brothers and sisters.

The Eucharist is constitutive of the Church’s being and activity. It is significant that in the Second Eucharistic Prayer, the Holy Spirit is invoked for the unity of the Church in the following words: “May all of us who share in the body and blood of Christ be brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit.” These words help us to see clearly how the goal of the sacrament of the Eucharist is the unity of the faithful in ecclesial communion. The Eucharist is thus found at the root of the Church as a mystery of communion. (Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritate*, 15). This is the service which the Church owes herself,
namely that only a united Church can truly celebrate the Eucharist. This unity must be constantly built and fostered. It is both a gift and a task.

In Jesus the Word of God took on human flesh and became one of us. He came down to our level and made himself accessible to us. In the Eucharist, Jesus pours himself out, he gives us his body and blood as food and drink so that, we too, transformed by the bread we eat and the wine we drink, can become bread broken for the lives of our brothers and sisters, and wine shared to quench their thirst. The purpose of the Eucharist is the transformation of those who receive it into authentic communion. Christ is truly the one, identical Lord, whom we receive in the Eucharist, or better, the Lord who receives us and assimilates us into himself.

Saint Augustine expresses the communion with Christ and with one another which the Eucharist represents as something received in the form of a vision. In the vision, he heard a voice which said: “Eat the bread of the strong; you will not transform me into yourself, but I will transform you into me.” In other words, when we consume bodily nourishment, it is assimilated by the body, becoming itself a part of ourselves. But this bread is of another type. It is greater and higher than we are. It is not we who assimilate it, but it assimilates us to itself, so that we become in a certain way ‘conformed to Christ’ as Paul says, members of his body, one in him.

Since the Church is in itself a sign and sacrament of communion with God and humanity, it is because of her communion with God that she communes with humanity. This communion which the Church visibly expresses to the world is one that always begins from the Church and in the Church. A fragmented and disunited Church cannot be an instrument of communion with humanity. It is in the celebration of the Eucharist that the Church draws strength for the works of charity. Our celebration of the Eucharist is the most visible manner of expressing the oneness and wholeness of the Church in its diversity of tongues, cultures and languages. Thus, the first and most important effect of our participation in the Eucharist is Communion: Communion with Christ whom we receive, or better still, Christ who receives us and assimilates us into himself; and then, communion with our brothers and sisters with whom we share the one bread and one cup. It is a communion that is established both on the vertical and on the horizontal level. But this communion is also the fruit of holiness.
of life. For it is only in the measure that we possess supernatural grace that we can be channels of grace to others.

**Church, Liturgy and the Diaconia of Truth**

It is in the sacrament of the altar celebrated by the Church that the Lord meets us, men and women created in God’s image and likeness (cf. Genesis 1:27) and becomes our companion along the way. As Benedict XVI says in his Exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, “In this sacrament, the Lord truly becomes food for us, to satisfy our hunger for truth and freedom. Since only the truth can make us free (cf. John 8:32), Christ becomes for us the food of truth” (SC, 2). Every human being has an innate and irrepressible desire for ultimate and definitive truth. With deep human insight, Saint Augustine clearly showed how we are moved spontaneously, and not by constraint, whenever we encounter something attractive and desirable. Asking himself what it is that can move us most deeply, the saintly Bishop went on to say: “What does our soul desire more passionately than truth?”293.

In the Eucharist, the Lord Jesus who is “the way, and the truth, and the life” (Jn. 14:6) speaks to our thirsting, pilgrim hearts, our hearts yearning for the source of life, our hearts longing for truth. Jesus Christ is the Truth in person, drawing the world to himself. Precisely because Christ has become for us the food of truth, the Church has a service of bringing this truth to the men and women of our day and time. The invitation to freely accept God’s gift of truth in Jesus Christ is an innermost aspect of the service of charity which the Church is called to exercise, leading people to the fountain of truth where answers to the genuine human questions that people ask are sought and provided. Since only by adhering to the truth can human beings be set free, the Church presents Jesus Christ in the Eucharist as “the lodestar of human freedom: without him, freedom loses its focus, for without the knowledge of truth, freedom becomes debased, alienated and reduced to empty caprice. With him, freedom finds itself.”294

Liturgy and the Diaconia of Public Welfare

Throughout history, the Church has had a deep concern for the poor, the oppressed and downtrodden people of society. The Church has come to believe that she cannot do otherwise and maintain its faith in the Lord Jesus who came “to preach good news to the poor and set at liberty the oppressed.” (Isaiah 61:1-3; Luke 4:18-19). Yet the plight of the poor is continually deteriorating; the forces of oppression and domination appear to be getting stronger and becoming more entrenched. Some Christians are inclined to give up their efforts out of sheer frustration. In the midst of the injustices that appear overwhelming, many Christians hardly know what to do. Many are confused as to how to manifest their concern for the poor.

This is however not the whole story. In recent years, we have seen a heightened sense of urgency on the part of a number of Church agencies to do what they can do to alleviate the sufferings of the poor and oppressed. Many Churches have expanded their programmes in the field of social development, justice and peace. Many Christians have formed alliances with other people of goodwill to champion the cause of racial justice and the equality of women, among other causes. There is no doubt that such efforts of Church agents have had some positive effect in a number of local situations and in raising public consciousness even on the global level.

More and more individual Christians, especially in countries of the Third World, are deepening their commitment to the struggle of the poor and the oppressed. Their commitment is based on their faith in Christ, their biblical understanding of the poor and the oppressed and their acute sense of the plight of the poor and their perception of history. They believe that the God revealed to our ancestors in the Old Testament is the God of the poor and the oppressed, the one who heard the cry of the enslaved people of Israel, and who liberated them from slavery. (Exodus 3:7-10).

The Eucharistic meal is expressed in giving, sharing and uniting. It also symbolises the hospitality of God who gives himself to us in Jesus Christ. Thus, breaking bread and distributing it, and attending lovingly to those in need, are an intrinsic dimension of the Eucharist. This means that charity is not an additional responsibility of the Christian community alongside worship, but rather something rooted in worship and forms part of it. “The Church’s deepest nature is indeed
expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (kerygma-martyria), celebrating the sacraments (leitourgia), and exercising the ministry of charity (diakonia). These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable. For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being.”

The Eucharist and Social Action

In the Eucharist, we encounter God’s presence in very personal and profound ways. But the Eucharist is also social. This social nature of the Eucharist is contained in many Church teachings. For instance, Pope Benedict XVI reminds us in Deus Caritas Est: “A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented.” The Eucharist, celebrated as a community, teaches us about human dignity, calls us to right relationship with God, ourselves and others, and invites us to community and solidarity. Together transformed, we are then sent forth to fulfill God’s will in our daily lives, helping to transform our communities, our neighbourhoods and our world.

The Eucharist draws each of us closer to Christ not only as individuals, but also as a community. As Catholics, no one believes alone, and no one worships alone. At the Eucharistic table, we gather with the young and the old, the rich and the poor, as well as millions around the world and the saints in heaven, to celebrate Christ’s sacrifice. This powerful reality reminds us, in the words of John Paul II that, “A truly Eucharistic community cannot be closed in upon itself” (Ecclesia de Eucharistia, #39). Rather, the Eucharist challenges us to recognize our place within a community and the human family. The Eucharist is a sign of our “incomparable dignity” as human persons. This dignity, given to all equally, regardless of their social or economic status or their racial background, causes us to recognize “what value each person, our brother or sister, has in God’s eyes, if Christ offers Himself equally to each one… If our Eucharistic worship is authentic, it must make us grow in awareness of the dignity of each person,” John Paul II writes (Dominicae Cenae, #6).

St. Paul taught that the celebration of the Eucharist is insincere if there are divisions within the community based on class (1 Corinthians 295 Benedict XVI, Encyclical Deus Caritas Est, 2005, no. 25.)
11:18-27), status or privilege (Romans 12:1-18), or there are factions within the community (1 Corinthians 1:10-13). Partaking in the sacrament as equals in the family of Christ challenges us to unity as one family. As we meditate on the Eucharist, we experience Christ’s love for us—and for others. In the depth of prayer, we become so moved and sensitized to His love for those who suffer that the words of St. Augustine become a reality for us: “the pain of one, even the smallest member, is the pain of all” (Sermon Denis). In the Eucharist, the boundlessness of the Father’s love, “springs up within us a lively response” that causes us to “ourselves begin to love” (Dominicae Cenae #5). Contemplating Christ’s sacrifice for the world in need, we are compelled to follow his example. Drawn “into the very dynamic of his self-giving” we are moved to self-giving action in solidarity with the members of our human family who face injustice (Deus Caritas Est, #13). Saint John Chrysostom’s words in the 4th century become real for us as we reflect on Matthew. 25:31-46: “Do you wish to honor the body of Christ? Do not ignore him when he is naked.”

Communion with Christ and with one another in the Mass runs through the different aspects of the Eucharistic liturgy from the gathering of the assembly to the dismissal. From the entrance hymn through the introductory rite to the penitential rite, readings from the Word of God, prayer of the faithful, presentation of gifts, the Eucharistic prayer and Communion rite, we see different aspects of our communal worship through the use of perceptible signs, words, actions and gestures. The Concluding Rite and Dismissal prepare us for mission: Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we live out our baptismal consecration in the world. Renewed by the Eucharist, we are sent back into our daily lives to transform our communities and world. Pope John Paul II writes that the Prayer after Communion, Final Blessing and Dismissal should lead “all who have shared in the Eucharist’ to “a deeper sense of the responsibility which is entrusted to them.” Returning to their daily lives, Christ’s disciples are called to “make their whole life a gift, a spiritual sacrifice pleasing to God (cf. Romans 12:1). They feel indebted to their brothers and sisters because of what they have received in the celebration” (Dies Domini, 45).

In the celebration of Mass, we see that communion with the Lord is always also communion with our brothers and sisters. We cannot communicate with the Lord if we do not communicate with one another. If we want to present ourselves to him, we must also take a
step towards meeting one another. The good news we have received should overflow into our lives and move us to mission in the world. John Paul II issues this challenge: “Why not make the Lord’s Day a more intense time of sharing, encouraging all the inventiveness of which Christian charity is capable? Inviting to a meal people who are alone, visiting the sick, providing food for needy families, spending a few hours in voluntary work and acts of solidarity: these would certainly be ways of bringing into people’s lives the love of Christ received at the Eucharistic table” (*Dies Domini*, 72).

Likewise, Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that our “fraternal communion” in the Eucharist, must lead to “a determination to transform unjust structures and to restore respect for the dignity of all men and women, created in God’s image and likeness” (*Sacramentum Caritate*, 89). Transformation by Christ in the Eucharist should compel us to address injustices which degrade the life or dignity of others – the poor, the unborn, immigrants, the elderly – all brothers and sisters in need. The two most important commitments of our participation in the Eucharist are care of the poor and care for God’s creation.

The Eucharist is the place where Christ washes our feet. Daily life is the place where we ought to wash the feet of others. In other words, diakonia “is [all about] offering, in life and in society, a witness like that of the prophets, which continuously united the word of God and life, faith and rectitude, worship and social commitment” (Benedict XVI, *Africæ Munus*, 16). While the Eucharist is the preeminent sign of God’s love for us in the person of Jesus Christ, the washing of the feet of our brothers and sisters is the preeminent sign of our love for our neighbour. Thus, when our Eucharistic devotion fails to lead us to the service of others, we diminish the essence of our Christian vocation. This is because if we truly understand the logic of foot-washing it will take us to the Eucharist; and if we truly understand the meaning of the Eucharist, it will take us to foot-washing. Only a community where the Eucharist leads to life and life leads back to the Eucharist can really call itself a Eucharistic community.

According to Benedict XVI, “The world needs God- not just any God but the God of Jesus Christ, the God who made himself flesh and blood, who loved us to the point of dying for us, who rose and created within himself room for man.” Christ was not playing with words when he gave us his Body as bread broken for the life of the world (cf. John.
6:48, 51). We cannot genuinely participate in the Eucharist without, like Jesus, taking water and towel, washing and wiping the feet of our brothers and sisters. In his exhortation on the Eucharist as a symbol of unity, Saint Augustine said: “See what you have received! Since you see that the bread is one, strive also to be one: by loving one another, by holding firm to the one faith, to the one hope, to the one invisible charity.”

**Conclusion**

The implications and challenges of the Eucharist are many. The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ imposes upon believers and partakers a new perception of reality, a new logic of existence, and a new ethic of life. The Eucharist highlights both the vertical and horizontal dimensions in our devotional life. The Eucharist challenges us to freely surrender our own lives to God in the service of our neighbours. It challenges us to love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our might and with all our strength. And it challenges us to love our neighbour in the same way as Christ loves us and gave His life in ransom for us. By giving his flesh and blood, Jesus Christ identifies completely with humanity, and now says that whatever we do to the least of his brethren, we do unto him (Matthew 25:40).

The solution to the world’s numerous problems are to be found in an authentic Eucharistic spirituality. Anything less will not bring the desired restoration, reconciliation and peace. The Eucharist challenges us to choose this sacrificial love in place of a life devoted to the cult of the (false) self. For a life devoted to the cult of the self translates to a life of sin. In place of the idolatry of the self therefore, the Eucharist calls us to become food to be eaten for the life of the world, to become active agents of wholesome existence, freedom and salvation for the world. To eat Christ means to take in Christ, wholly and entirely with His logic of love and service, mercy and forgiveness. To eat Christ means to be totally absorbed in the logic of the Kingdom (see Matthew 5:3-12). It is to be totally conformed to Christ in such a way that one would be able to say with St. Paul: “I live now, not my own life, but the life of Christ who lives in me,” or, to be able to say, “life to me of course is Christ...” (Galatians 2:20; Philippians 1:21).

Finally, Eucharistic devotion is complete only when such a devotion expresses itself in the love of neighbour, in the sharing of life and resources with the neighbour, in the readiness to forgive the
neighbour, in the willingness to deny oneself of comfort and privileges, and to engage in selfless service for the well-being and salvation of the neighbour. In a world of widespread hatred and enmity, injustice and violence, brokenness and pain, Eucharistic devotion is complete only when it leads to an untiring commitment on the part of the partaker, toward greater justice reconciliation, unity and peace. Eucharistic devotion is complete only when leitourgia expresses itself in diakonia, and partakers in the Eucharist truly allow Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount to become their programme of life.
A Paradigm Shift in the Liturgical Ministry of the Church

Paul Puthanangady

The Church exists in the world as a community of service. This is the specificity of the New Messianic people. The early Church was a community sent out by the Lord in order to continue the mission of Jesus, the servant of God. It did not appear as a religion, but as a group of people who had to communicate the love of God for the world. Every activity of this community, including liturgy had this orientation. But when she began to institutionalize her life she began to appear in the world as a religion. The service mentality gave place to institutional mentality. Consequently her liturgy also underwent a change; it became more and more a cultic or ritual act to glorify God. Where she was a powerful majority she appeared as a powerful religious conqueror; where she was a small minority she became a religious ghetto preserving or fighting for its rights. With Vatican II, there is a change in this image. The Church is called to be a community at the service of the world as we read it stated in the Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes: “The Church is not motivated by earthly ambition but is interested in one thing only – to carry on the work of Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, for he came into the world to bear witness to the truth, to save and not to judge, to serve and not to be served”\(^{296}\). This demands a paradigm shift in her ministry, including her liturgical ministry.

The nature of this paradigm shift

The Church needs to get rid of her conquest mentality as well as her ghetto complex. She needs to free her liturgy from its otherworldly objective and make it become a proclamation of the Mystery of Christ with a view to build up a new earth and new heaven. This was the

\(^{296}\) GS n. 3.
characteristic of liturgy in the early Church: an eschatological thrust. The Eucharist which constitutes the core of Christian worship was the experience of the risen Lord present in the midst of the community continuing his mission as servant of Yahweh. The Christians connected this experience with the second coming of the Lord. “As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor. 11, 26). But soon they realized that there was something more in it than a mere pious desire to meet the Lord again; they realized that it was a proclamation of their commitment to create the conditions in this world by which the new earth and heaven would become a reality. They realized that through the Eucharistic celebration they were committing themselves to collaborate with Christ and to contribute towards the realization of a new world order. In this sense, we may say that the Eucharistic proclamation is not only of a memorial of the past but also a challenge for the future. It is this dimension of the liturgy that I would like to present briefly in this article. If this has to happen in our world today, our liturgical celebrations should undergo a change and acquire a new style; our liturgical ministry will have to begin with our involvement in the world. It is necessary to take care that our celebrations are not merely excursions into the other world, but an experience of the risen Lord present in the midst of our world, continuing his redemptive mission. This means that our liturgical celebration should never lose sight of the liberative thrust of the Mystery that is celebrated. “The celebration of the risen Christ by the assembly of believers is one of the most effective political actions people can perform in this world – if it is true that this celebration, by contesting any power system which oppresses humankind, proclaims, stirs up and inaugurates a new order in the created world”297. We shall spell out the liberative thrust of liturgy which is proclaimed in every celebration with a view to create a new earth and new heaven under three aspects corresponding to the three actions of the liturgical celebration: proclamation of the Word, breaking of Bread and sending out in mission. This is the paradigm shift which I am proposing.

The Proclamation of the Word in the Liturgy: its liberative thrust

Reading from the Bible and the homily which follow are integral part of every liturgical celebration. In fact, especially after Vatican II,

we have no liturgical celebration without these two elements. But very often both the people and the priests are not fully aware of the meaning and purpose of these actions. The biblical texts proclaim to us the Word of God that came down into the world to transform persons and recreate the world. In other words, it is the good news of God for the world. The priest who gives the homily is expected not merely to explain the scriptures, but to make the biblical message become good news for the community that is celebrating. This means that he has to situate the text within the life-situation of the people. He should make the word of God that has been read become the good news for the life of the congregation. This will necessarily imply the denunciation of a bad news; there will certainly take place a confrontation between the sinful situation of the world and the word of God. If this does not take place, the purpose of the liturgy is defeated; it is no more a redemptive act in its full sense. “To envisage the liturgy as rehearsing and celebrating a story of God independent of the stories of the people who participate is simply to perpetuate the split between faith and life, between the actions of the liturgy and the manifold activities that make up our lives as human beings”.

We need to bring in the hopes, fears, sufferings and aspirations of the people into our liturgy and we should proclaim the word in that context; then the liturgical proclamation of the Word will initiate a process of transformation into the society and the world which will ultimately result in the building up of the new earth and new heaven. In fact we affirm this power of the Word in one of the Eucharistic Prayers of the Roman Rite in these words: “He is the Word that brings salvation. He is the hand you stretch out to sinners. He is the way that leads to your peace”. But in the actual celebration of our communities this liberative thrust is not sufficiently brought out because our liturgies are not situated in the actual context of the people and of the world in which the celebrations take place. As a result we proclaim the word merely for instruction or for drawing out some pietistic and moral conclusions, the practice of which is expected to give the participant a reward in the next life. It does not challenge the people to commit themselves to make the message become good news for the society in which they live.

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299 Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation n.2.
The Breaking of the Bread: Its liberative thrust

The centre of the Eucharistic celebration is the breaking of the bread by which the self-gift of Christ is made present to the community. The death of Christ is the greatest and most decisive act of liberation which God has effected in the world. It removes the root cause of all slavery and oppression, namely, human selfishness, which creates a world order of enslavement and exploitation and deforms the creation which God intended to be good. The resurrection of Christ inaugurates the new creation which is based on freedom to relate in love among human beings and in sharing of all material realities among all the children of God so that there is no one in need (Acts 4,34). This is what we see beginning to happen as a result of the preaching and acceptance of the Gospel by the first Christians. They celebrated the Eucharist and experienced the death and resurrection in their lives. This was immediately followed by a life of fraternal love and generous sharing among the members. The Eucharistic celebration produced a new community and new world order. The Eucharist thus inaugurated the new earth and new heaven. This takes place on three levels: a) In the first place the bread and wine becomes the body of Christ, the perfect sign of God’s love. The consecration of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ is a sign of the transformation of the material elements of this world into signs of love, thus heralding the ecological liberation of the world; b) secondly the bread and wine become the body of Christ that is shared: Take and eat; this is my body: this initiates a new style of life based on sharing, heralding human liberation which frees the human beings from all types of selfishness and alienation; c) thirdly the bread and wine which becomes the body of Christ that is given for the life of the world inaugurates a new world order based on justice and equality.

Eucharistic change and ecological liberation

We are living in a world in which our technological advancement has adversely affected the nature in a serious manner. The creation which God named ‘good’ in the beginning has been degraded by the steward, the human person, whom God put in charge to take care of it. “We are stewards of creation, not its masters. We need to respect and cherish every part of creation rather than seeking to dominate as if we owned it”\textsuperscript{300} But we have exploited it for our selfish interests in

such a way that there is a serious state of imbalance in its functioning today. During the Eucharistic celebration the bread that comes from our world is changed into the body of Christ. While the ordinary bread nourishes the body by a consumerist act, the Eucharist bread builds up body of Jesus by the infusion of his Spirit into the communicant; he or she, thus nourished by the Spirit of Christ becomes a person who lives in love, lives by giving; in the place of a consumerist life there begins to exist a self-giving life. At the Eucharist, in some sense, the bread is restored to its original quality of being good by bestowing on the one who eats the capability of self-gift. The ecological authenticity of bread which was lost by the selfish use of it by sinful man is restored. We see this happening in the first Christian communities. The Eucharistic meal was followed by a life of sharing (Acts 2, 46). When the human beings used creation selfishly (see the first sin of eating the forbidden fruit) God cursed the earth and made it become hostile to humankind (Gen. 3, 17). Jesus took bread and blessed the bread (gave thanks, that is, recognized the goodness of God in it) and made it become the source of the new earth and new heaven by making it a sign of love and giving it to his disciples at the Last Supper with a mandate to do it in his memory. It was the memorial of his death and resurrection by which the total liberation of mankind from sin would take place. The Eucharist thus heralds the liberation of the world from the sinfulness to which the sinful human being had subjected it. “When Jesus took the bread, said the blessing, broke the bread and shared it, he demonstrated, unforgettably, the proper use of material things. The early Christians realized this: they eucharisticized their lives by blessing God in all things and by making their possession available to one another”

Eucharistic sharing and human liberation

The problem of poverty, hunger and underdevelopment can ultimately be traced to the exploitation and lack of concern for the other on the part of human beings. The words of Cain to justify his murder of the brother: “Am I my brother’s keeper” (Gen. 4, 9) is still resounding in our world. The Eucharist takes away from our communities all types of alienation because the sign of the Eucharist is sharing. It restores

fellow feeling and concern for one another among the participants. Our Holy Communion is not only a communion with the divinity, as in the case of prasadam in the worship of other religions. It is an act of communion among the participants of worship by sharing in the same bread. This leads us to the communion with the Lord. It opens us up to our brothers and sisters in need; we enter into solidarity with one another and become people who are concerned with one another. We are not a community merely by professing the same formula of faith; we are a community, above all, because we have the same blood, the blood of Christ flowing through our veins. “Anyone who celebrates the Lord’s Supper in a world of hunger and oppression does so in complete solidarity with the hopes and suffering of all men, because he believes that the Messiah invites all…to his table and because he hopes they will all sit at the table with him.” This is the human liberation which the Eucharist effects.

**Eucharistic life and social liberation**

The Eucharist celebrates, anticipates and participates in the reign of God. By reign of God we mean the establishment of a world order in which the norm of life is love and the style of life is sharing. This will call for the destruction of all oppressive structures of our society. In the Acts of the Apostles we have a brief description of a society in which the kingdom of God has been realized: “There was not a needy person among them” (Acts 4, 14). This is the justice of God. It does not consist in equal distribution of goods; but it consists in creating a situation in which the use of things is conditioned by the other person’s need and not my own; this, in its turn, will take place only when I realize that the other is my brother or sister because we are children of God and we all have equal rights to share in the property of the Father who is God. This world order is not based on a legal system, but on a system of relationship. In the Eucharist we take part in the meal which reveals that we all belong to the same family; it is the meal of the Kingdom of God. The participation in this meal obliges the members of the community to contribute their share to build up this kingdom wherever it is present. One of the concrete ways in which the kingdom building role of the Eucharist is expressed in our

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302 Prasadam is a Sanskrit word used in Hindu sacrificial worship to indicate the participation of the devotees in the sacrificial offering made by the priest.

liturgies is through the offertory collections. In the first three centuries the offerings brought by the people who came for the Eucharist were meant for the poor of the community. But as the meaning of the Eucharist became more and more spiritualized, the social dimension of these gifts was lost. But today, this is being restored. Once again the poor and the needy of the parish are seen as the recipients of the offertory gifts “God’s poor are singled out as normal recipients. As this understanding of the meaning of the Eucharist and the gifts offered for a Mass or given in the liturgy penetrates the consciousness of the priests and people, it will provide a new appreciation of the relation between worship and social justice. Furthermore, it will provide the theological basis for the laity to meet their social obligations in the liturgy and so bring a new commitment to social action in their daily lives”304. The real meaning of participation in the liturgy also consists in this. Today many understand active participation merely in terms of answering the prayers of the priest and joining in the singing. True meaning of participation calls for a sense of belonging to the community which, in its turn, will prompt the members of the community to contribute their share to build up a parish where there will be less and less people in need. Then we can say that the liturgy is truly building up the Kingdom of God in that parish. This is the social liberation which the Eucharist effects.

The Dismissal Rite: Its liberative thrust

The closing part of the Mass is not a mere formal rite of concluding the celebration. It has a missionary thrust. Those who have experienced the Paschal Mystery become proclaimers of the Gospel. They are charged with the Spirit of the risen Lord who sends them out to continue his redemptive work. They are missionaries of the Gospel. It is important to note here the distinction between proclaiming the Gospel and religious proselytism. Jesus did not come into this world to found a new religion, nor did he send his disciples to propagate a religion. He came to establish the Kingdom of his Father which is nothing else but the translation of the love of God into love of neighbour. He sent his disciples as messengers and witnesses of his Kingdom. The missionaries of the Gospel are those who have experienced the love of God for the world in the liturgical proclamation of the Mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection; they

go out into the world to share this experience with all peoples and thus to create a new earth and new heaven wherein this love will be symbolized, expressed in human relationships and in structures that communicate it to the world. The dismissal rite of the Eucharist is, therefore, the diffusing of the liberative thrust of the Eucharist into the world. “In a very real sense, this sending forth to ministry is an embodiment of our prayers and intercessions. God uses the people of God to effect God’s saving, healing, reconciling presence in the world. We become Christ’s peace and grace in our ministry”\textsuperscript{305}. The ultimate goal of the Christian mission is the universal gathering of all peoples in a spirit of love and understanding. This must happen within the parish territory of a Christian community. All those who take part in the Sunday liturgy should return to their milieu of life and activity in order to function as the leaven in the society. They will remain a small minority, but they will be leavened by the Eucharistic experience which will enable them to build up a new society wherever they may be. Understood in this sense the Eucharist will not remain a mere cultic act of a community that lives in a ghetto, but the action of a community that is open to all other people in their locality, be they Christians or people of other religions. They will be fully committed to collaborate with all men and women of good will. At this juncture, one may ask: is it absolutely necessary to have a Eucharistic experience in order to participate in this type of liberative act? In itself it would seem that it is not necessary; but given the fact that Jesus’ life and death has been unique because it has been given a divine approval as the sure way to arrive at this universal reconciliation and peace through his resurrection, we can be rest assured that this is the surest way to liberation. Besides, our experience has shown that all the human efforts towards liberation, however sublime and committed they have been have not succeeded in realizing the objective and answering fully the aspirations of humankind. Our contribution as Christians can give a definite and decisive answer to the search of humanity because of the resurrection of Jesus. In the Eucharist we receive the same Spirit of Jesus Christ. But at the same time, if we are moved by the Spirit of Jesus, we should be conscious of the fact that the same Spirit is also operative in others. Our mission is to allow the Spirit to act in us as he acted in Jesus Christ. We follow Jesus’

style in the fulfillment of our mission. In doing this we will also work with others in a spirit of genuine dialogue and collaboration for the total liberation, for the realization of the new earth and new heaven.

Conclusion

The main thrust of this change in the focus is to go from a Church Centered liturgical ministry to a Kingdom-centered liturgical ministry. In the early Church this ministry consisted in proclamation of the Gospel with a view to bring about the Kingdom of God. In the Middle Ages this underwent a change. The ministry was more and more understood as a means for catering to the members of the Church as an institution that had the mission of bringing people to salvation conceived as life after death. This gave a totally changed image to the ministry of the Church and that of her ministers. Today with Vatican II, the Church being in the world, there is a shift in focus. The mission of the Church is to build the Kingdom of God or God’s reign in this world. It has to be a ministry in which we take into account the many enriching new factors that have come into light. The phenomenon like the global outlook on reality, the multi-religious character of the world, the cultural revival among peoples, the growth of scientific and technological progress, all these call for a new understanding of a Kingdom-centered ministry for the modern world. The liturgical ministry must be seen in this new perspective. It should engage itself in the creation of a new world order liberated from all types of evil. It should enable the Christian community that participates in the liturgy to get more and more involved in the task of transforming this world. Celebrating the liturgy Sunday after Sunday, the final Day of the Lord will dawn. Then the new world envisaged by God in the book of Genesis will appear “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good” (Gen. 1, 31). And on that day he will truly proclaim “See I am making all things new” (Rev. 21, 5).
Liturgy and Servant Catechesis

Víctor Hernandez Hernandez

The liturgical catechesis should draw attention to the splendid diversity of cultures and the efforts made to ensure their survival, evidence of which can be found in the Paschal Mystery. The process of cultural depletion during the period of Roman rule – an instance of impoverishment brought about by a desire to control – reduced the diversity of ritual acts to a minimum. Fear of losing power is a sure sign that those exercising it are not guided by the Spirit. Catechesis as a service requires the utmost respect for different cultures if the liturgy is to be an expression of the Church’s catholicity. A Church that removes traces of its origins deprives itself of its inherent servant qualities. What kind of a Church is it that, in the performance of its ministerial duties, does not serve different cultures in their struggle to survive? The service we propose is one that pays due heed to different expressions of culture and the manifestations of the Paschal Mystery they contain. To our own shame we must admit that a Church which does not serve because it does not listen goes against its own nature and makes common cause with the prevailing pseudo-culturalism that leads to a deplorable uniformity.

A “quick” exegesis of John 13:1-35. Jesus the servant, at the feet of his disciples:

306 Montemayor, C., ed., Las / enguas de América, Recital de Poesía, Colección “La pluralidad cultural en México 9, UNAM, 2005, 304-305. I am Cuauhtémoc, the descending eagle / And I am Cuauhtlehuanitzin, the ascending eagle / I am the young man / and the old man / Our sun extinguished with me / and with me the new sun will be born.
"The theme of the Fourth Gospel is the non-historical that makes sense of history, the infinite that makes sense of time, God who makes sense of men and is therefore their Saviour." Hoskyns

The context: It was the eve of the Passover 13:1. In St John’s Gospel the description of the supper Jesus took part in with his disciples is not the same as that in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 26:17-25, Mark 14:12-25, Luke 22:7-13). It states that Jesus will die on the eve of Passover. During the supper Jesus washes the feet of the disciples (13:2-12), an act generally performed by the lowest of servants. According to the theologian Joseph Ratzinger:

The Lord accepts and performs the service of a slave, carrying out the most humble work, the lowest task in the world in order to make us feel worthy of sitting at the table, to open up communication between ourselves and God, to accustom us to worship and familiarity with God.307

Jesus subsequently says that the disciples must love one another and washing feet is a demonstration of this love. Here we have the fulfilment of what had been announced earlier: We saw his glory, the glory that he has from the Father as the only Son of the Father (John 1:14). Jesus is quite clearly about to return to the Father (John 13:1), an act which is to the glory of Jesus. No other gospel shows that the passion of Jesus is the presentness of his glorification. God appears as the opposite of what he is. Hence the cross seems more like a throne than a gallows.

Broadly speaking, St John’s Gospel describes in literary form a farewell speech that is to be found in both testaments: Genesis 49, Deuteronomy 33, 1 Chronicles 28-29, Joshua 23-24, Acts 20; 2 Peter. A farewell speech made by a person preparing to meet his death, it typically includes the announcement of a farewell to a group of relatives or friends, some words of consolation, predictions or promises about the future and blessings for those who remain behind. The final author of the Gospel according to St John has compiled a series of teachings on Jesus which have audaciously been called his spiritual testament; they extend from 13:1 to 17:26.

The essential message of these five chapters is the departure of Jesus from this world via his death on the cross. Surprisingly enough, this is how his glory is manifested. Two incompatible realities are reconciled in the conception of the Almighty Jew: the divinity of Jesus and his being the Messiah. The confession “So I am” in 13:13 and the manner of its manifestation – the cross, the humiliation, the work of a slave in 13:7 – are to be united all at once. This is the reconciliation of the unique and the great with the discreet and the lowly.

It should be pointed out that the Fourth Gospel replaces the passage on the institution of the Eucharist with that on the washing of feet. This underlines the significance of the act. It shows that Jesus, who was the Master and the Lord, performs a task usually carried out by slaves and servants, thereby foreshadowing the threatening Cross and signifying, with unrivalled eloquence, that the path to follow is that of devotion and service.

Benedict XVI, previously a theologian and now the Pope, has a wonderful explanation of the washing of feet as a demonstration of Jesus’ extreme love:

For John, the washing of feet represents the meaning of Jesus’ whole life: getting up from the table, removing the garments of glory and turning to us in the mystery of forgiveness, in the service of human life and death.  

This reference to the words of the theologian Joseph Ratzinger makes it easy for us to explain the nature of the Church as the People of God and its ministry.

The nature of the Church as servant

The sacred ministry. The servant Church has its origins in the mystery of the incarnation, which finds expression in the person of Jesus in the mystery of a God who takes on human form. In the New Testament the mystery is presented not as an unfathomable ocean, but as the astonishing pouring out of God in Jesus. This is a source of bewilderment to the powerful of this world. If he is God, they say in their false sense of security, he must be in heaven.

\[308\] Ibid.
The Second Vatican Council led by Pope John XXIII, who radiated the simplicity and depth of the Gospel, proposed a number of radical changes in the teachings of the Church. The Apostolic Constitution *Humanae Salutis* announcing the Second Vatican Council sounded almost like a refutation of the encyclical of Pope Pius XII. John XXIII said: “While distrustful souls see nothing but darkness falling upon the face of the earth, we prefer to restate our confidence in our Saviour, who has not left the world he redeemed.” With a prophetic touch he added: “This will be a demonstration of the Church, always living and always young, that feels the rhythm of time, that in every century beautifies herself with new splendour, radiates new light, achieves new conquests…” There was a distinct change in the Pope’s tone from denunciation to dialogue, from an attitude of arrogance to one of service to the world, the latter being described as God’s space.

*Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, which for some was the most innovative and distinctive document to emerge from the Second Vatican Council, offers a completely new interpretation of the relations between the Church and the world. Surprisingly, it talks of the autonomy of human culture and especially of the sciences. The pilgrim Church addresses the issue of a self-reappraisal, of a community in the throes of transformation, courageous enough to re-examine ecclesiastical structures and doctrine. This is why it discusses *aggiornamento* (modernisation) and the radical consequences it will have. The document states that the Church must respect the ways of life in the world and learn from the signs of the times while heeding the message of the Gospel. The conclusion drawn is that the Church must consider itself part of the entire human family, submitting to the same rules as everybody else. This is an unmistakeable signal that an end is to be put to the era of arrogance.

After stating that the Church must engage in an open dialogue with all men and women, the Constitution emphasises that, just as Christ came into the world to serve and not to be served, so the Church in the world must serve and not be served. In carrying out Christ’s mission it tries to serve the world by inspiring all men and women and acting as a family for them. In the Gospel we read of the simplicity of the saints. What choice does the Church have but to heed Jesus’ call to follow him? In the words of those who study the Gospel and understand its radical message:
The renewal of the Church requires that, instead of being communities consisting largely of "supporters", we should become communities of "disciples" and "followers" of Jesus. This will enable us to identify more strongly with the process of reform. No longer slaves of a past that was not always faithful to the Gospel, we can cast off the fear and servitude that prevent us from hearing His call for change.\textsuperscript{310}

The theological method underlying this ecclesiological approach is vastly different from that practised in previous centuries when there was a strong emphasis on vertical, top-down structures. We call this method a secular dialogue.\textsuperscript{311} The use of the term ‘secular’ indicates that the Church has discovered the world as a \emph{locus theologicus}, as a place of service and humility, where it is possible to overcome hypocrisy and, heeding the advice of its Creator, venture to discern and interpret the signs of the times. The word ‘dialogue’ is used because of the wish to operate along the borderline between the contemporary world and Christian tradition (including the Bible) rather than simply applying the latter as a measure of the former. This secular dialogue and the methodical approach underpinning it are quite simple and straightforward; they document the willingness of the Church to negotiate on an equal footing.

This concept of the Church is in keeping with its image as a servant. The servant theme and the image of Jesus at the feet of those he loves are familiar in the Council. The image of the Church as servant has taken on more distinct and dogmatic contours since the days of the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s. The images of a Samaritan Church and of a Church as servant that “shakes the imperial dust from its feet” in order to “lose time” with the thousands and millions of men and women who have been abandoned on their journey through life strike us as being free in evangelical terms.

We believe, therefore, that the Church as servant and the actions it performs must demonstrate the following:

- Every service consists primarily in an exercise of faith which, pervading reality, people and their everyday situation,

\textsuperscript{310} Pagola, J. A., \emph{El camino abierto por Jesús (Mateo)}, San Sebastián, 2010, 2.

\textsuperscript{311} Dulles, A., \emph{Modelos de la iglesia, Estudio crítico sobre la iglesia en todos sus aspectos}, Santander 1975, 95-110.
attempts to discover the “seeds of the Word” in every culture, human group and individual.

- Service is the revelation of God, who is present and acts in every person, group of people and nation for the purpose of communion with God and among human beings, incorporating the whole of human life. In other words, service helps to build the Church as a sacrament of universal unity.

- For the same reason every service evangelises and assists conversion, which calls for a response to the Gospel, always in respect of human and Christian plenitude in holiness.

- At the same time, every service that furthers the proclamation of the Gospel releases all the energy and grace that is inherent in individuals, groups and peoples. Its objective, therefore, is to overcome all personal, collective and structural means of denying human dignity. Every service is an education in faith.

- Service is for the good of the community so that it becomes aware of its historical situation, interprets this situation in the light of the faith and gradually renews its life in keeping with the faith on the road to ever better forms of unity.

- An indication of the authenticity of the service and of the ministerial nature of the Church is that “the poor are evangelised,” as a consequence of which both the Church and its adherents are evangelised. This is a wonderful exchange among equals. It is the spirit of cooperation. This is the way to overcome vertical structures and foolish arrogance.

**What kind of catechesis and teaching is needed for an inculturated liturgy?**

The catechetical and pedagogical value of the Second Vatican Council resides without doubt in its Christocentrism. This is based in turn on personalism, which restores the dialogue-based model of Christianity as an expression and communication of the mysteries of the faith. Moreover, it generates coherence and an atmosphere conducive to life, the doctrine and Christian spirituality, building the Church as *communio*. Indoctrination is overcome, paving the way for a structure, the impact of which is felt in both the evangelising and the evangelised. A wonderful logic propels the transition from addressee to partner.
When the Revelation was considered to be the communication of God’s revealed truths and these were accepted by the faithful as true, catechesis provided the key to Christian enlightenment of the intelligence because of the information revealed and its retention in the religious memory. A Christian was thus an enlightened believer.

If we regard the Revelation as the Word of God and faith as a personal attitude, we discover the new, more liberated and encultured face of catechesis. Catechesis, as a service of the Word and cultures, is first and foremost the start of a personal encounter with Christ in the places where people live. In turn, faith is the vital communion with Jesus and those associated with him. Catechesis, as the servant of the Word of God embodied in cultures, encourages this enculturation in order to heighten the clarity of God’s calls to human beings at all times and in all places. Faith is an operative response in the service of the world. Finally, catechesis – as the servant of the Word, the gift of the Spirit – requires an atmosphere of acceptance and flexibility and does not have to limit itself to support from man-made laws of communication and organisation. It requires moments of prayer and contemplation. In turn, faith is experienced as a free gift that requires the strength of the Spirit.

To conclude, the catechesis was enhanced by the Council in that its theological foundations were updated: the Revelation and faith are now not only focused more strongly on the revealed truths, but also better meet the needs of the men and women of today.

Liturgical according to the Second Vatican Council

“Let’s celebrate the work, the hope and the toil needed to sow life with dignity in our fields.”

Rosa Martha

Seen from outside, the biggest innovations introduced by the Second Vatican Council are to be found in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium, but they are by no means the most far-reaching. Number 37 states:

312 GS 58. 44.
Even in the liturgy, the Church has no wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not implicate the faith or the good of the whole community; rather does she respect and foster the genius and talents of the various races and peoples. Anything in these peoples’ way of life which is not indissolubly bound up with superstition and error she studies with sympathy and, if possible, preserves intact. Sometimes in fact she admits such things into the liturgy itself, so long as they harmonize with its true and authentic spirit.

In view of the assumptions outlined above, i.e. that we fortify ourselves with the image of Jesus as servant and of the Church as no less a servant, the catechesis modernised by the Second Vatican Council is urged to discover the identity of peoples, to learn from them and, at the same time, to give them a more prominent place in the liturgy. This produces a catechesis serving the Gospel that is embodied in all creatures and all cultures. People should always live in harmony with their original culture and not bow to the arrogant dictates of the dominant cultures which, without realising it, serve the interests of those who use their wealth to exploit and plunder.

**Signs and indigenous music: a significant example**

We would like to begin this section by looking at a comparison of classical music and traditional music.

It is not that traditional music is worse or better than classical music or any other kind of music, nor is it a question of evaluating the aesthetic aspects of the music. When we talk about traditional music, we mean that it goes back a long way and is played in certain regions, where it contributes to a local identity ... This traditional character appears to be a static phenomenon; it is there all the time and then suddenly it vanishes ... Mexican song and dance began to develop after independence. However, we could say that it came into being after the revolution. Studies have revealed that among the phenomena we now refer to as traditional there are some aspects that were created specifically to help establish a national identity. Among the first people in Europe to study this development was Eric Hobsbawn, one of the most outstanding music historians of the past fifty years.314

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314 Caballero, J., Mi pasión es registrar la música tradicional viva, in: La Jornada, 6-June-2012, 8.
Travel, it is said, is an education. The surprise we register at seeing something unfamiliar tells us something about ourselves. The poet Antonio Machado notes this in referring to the romantic statement of a woman who reveals something about the man whose name she pronounces: A man is a man until he hears his name from a woman’s lips. Your “tongue”, which pronounces my name in your language and expresses your feelings, says something about me; the moment my name is pronounced it becomes a continent to discover. However, looking at the celebratory customs of many countries, they would appear to be the same, irrespective of where and among which people they originated and where they are now observed. In our view, the “universal” norms of Roman liturgy, repeated without any sense of creativity in the various Catholic countries, negate the universality of the Catholic Church. Music generates identity, and so the rejection of indigenous music as “inappropriate” for celebratory purposes confronts us with the arrogance of a Church which, disturbed by something it perceives as alien, denies the essence of its own being. To ignore such musical performances is to obscure a part of the Church’s catholicity. If we do not listen to others, there are things that will remain beyond our knowledge.

It is painful and embarrassing to have to admit that, in accordance with an Episcopal decree, there is a ban on the performance of mariachi music in liturgical celebrations in the Mexican city of Guadalajara, which is where this music originated. It is comforting to know that the Archbishop of Puebla includes this music, which is so closely associated with Mexico, in his celebrations.315

Prospects for a catechesis that serves liturgy and the feet of those who walk on native land.

Consequences of a catechesis in the service of a liturgy that reads the signs of the times:

• Is God green? In view of the threats to our survival posed by global warming, we are surprised by the lack of elements in the liturgy that would be in keeping with common sense, which tells us that the destructive neoliberal model is unsustainable. Our planet and the people who inhabit

it are witness to the Paschal Mystery. We can see that, like someone bleeding to death, our living space is being destroyed. It would be ridiculous and a waste of time to add petitions to requests. We have a tremendous wealth of indigenous cultures, which make it clear to us what it means to turn to Mother Earth and to perceive in her entirety our sacred space. Reverential gestures to Mother Earth are the same as those to men and women as a WHOLE, awakening the hope that triumphs over the signs of death, as revealed in the everlasting resurrection. Yes, God is green.

• Celebrating dignity. In view of the merciless pillaging that is going on, the liturgy must be re-energized in the interests of dignity. Javier Sicilia\textsuperscript{316} and the Peace with Justice and Dignity Movement in Mexico offer an excellent example of what it means to focus on the absolute value of the Kingdom of God: the re-establishment of human dignity. In Sicilia’s words: The modern world turns people into numbers. It turns them into tools to maximise capital. We have put their dignity back at the heart of human and political life.\textsuperscript{317} We celebrate the Easter of life and life in the Easter festival. In the face of the cruel and deadly attacks launched by economic terrorism, which is undoubtedly the most brutal form of all, the liturgy must make contact with the resistance organisations whose creative attempts to tend to people’s needs are a source of hope.

• Celebrating the indigenous cultures and their activities, languages and opposition to the uniformity of neoliberal “culture.” How can we celebrate the God of Life, incarnated in Jesus, who embraced the whole of human reality to strengthen people and instil in them the hope of the Resurrection? In our celebrations we do not see any promotion of human rights or activities to safeguard our own survival in the face of neoliberalism and globalisation.

• In view of the permanent rejection of indigenous cultures and the new cultural diversity, the liturgy has a prophetic

\textsuperscript{316} Sicilia, J., Estamos hasta la madre, México, 2011.

\textsuperscript{317} Gayol, Y, Ivan Illich en la “hechura” de Javier Sicilia, (an interview), in: Campus Milenio, September 2012, 44.
challenge to address. At a time in which neo-liberalism and
globalisation have succeeded in homogenising cultures, the
Church and its servant liturgical catechesis have a great
opportunity to strengthen the identity of the local churches of
both the indigenous cultures and the emerging cultures as an
act of protest against a dominant and despotic culture. The
Church has the option of not allying itself with the dominant
cultures, which put their earnings above the peoples and their
identities. We, therefore, propose a catechesis which serves
the interests of the cultural diversity to be found among the
indigenous peoples and the new cultural conglomerations
in urban districts and the surrounding areas; a catechesis
that analyses the elements of this diversity in the everyday
lives of men and women; a catechesis that enhances their
creative capacity to celebrate their faith and everything it
entails.

- The liturgy must serve the urban and suburban cultures that
emerge from the quest for identity among the new inhabitants
of the towns and cities. Cities pose a challenge to the liturgy
with its new, revelatory actions.

- There is a need to overcome a cynical\textsuperscript{318} liturgy that
deliberately ignores the objectives (the ethical requirements)
of the texts and contexts of the word that it celebrates: The
theological activities of the Third World countries were an
expression of their ethical aspiration to liberation, a critical
reflection of the situation they found themselves in and a
faithful reading of the traditional text.

- We would like to conclude by asking some provocative
questions. What will the consequences be if what we cele-
brate is no longer the space in which we celebrate life, the
whole of LIFE? Will God and the best of God, the Virgin Mary,
perhaps then no longer be with us, because they are looking
for the place which expresses the Kingdom that gives all
creatures glory? And what would happen if, by pure chance,
the Kingdom were to be taken from us to be celebrated
by others? What grounds will we have for saying that our
celebrations are still the expression of a community that

\textsuperscript{318} Parra, A., Textos, contextos y pretextos, Teología fundamental, Bogotá, 2005.
celebrates its Lord when – as millions of men and women all over the world know – the Paschal Mystery is ignored? We should like to end by providing a “modest example” of what is sung in many places where there is apparently no place for God. This is a song composed by Rosa Martha319, a singer who looks after our brothers and sisters who have emigrated to the neighbouring countries of the north and suffered the cruelty of social exclusion. The words are as follows:

Let’s go Maria, let’s go
There’s no place here, not even for God
Let’s go Maria, let’s get away from here
There’s no place for you here.

Let’s go Maria, let’s go
There’s no place here, not even for God
With their despicable raids
They tear our love away.
Come on Maria, let’s go
Let’s go and look for
A manger where
Flowers and peace can grow.

Its walls are covered in death
Its immigration laws
Ruin the dreams
Of the working people.
Let’s go Maria, let’s go
Let’s get out of this country
Before the immigration police come
Let’s go, what are we doing here?

Let’s go to our village
And we’ll fight from there

319 Rosa Martha Zarate Macias lives a religious life in keeping with her baptismal consecration in the city of San Bernardino on the outskirts of Los Angeles, California, where she strives to provide dignity for men and women in the USA, bleeding Mexico’s northern neighbour. She is the co-founder of the Del Pueblo bookshop; in the dedication of her album “Por un Mundo sin Fronteras” (“For a World without Borders”) she writes: I dedicate these songs to the guards, men and women who have fought on their eternal pilgrimage, while they walked under the stars on a road that is studded with the bloody footprints of the fighters, the defenders of life, the dead migrants who risked their lives to find a place to live in dignity.
Let's go into battle
And build a future
Free of false governments
That sell themselves to the invader
We have to break through the barriers
That cause so much pain
Leitourgía: Serving God and Serving One’s Neighbor –
On the connection between liturgy and charitable work
Cardinal Joachim Meisner

Liturgy as “public service”

*Léiton érgon* – public work: even the linguistic root of the term liturgy reveals a connection between the service of God and the service of man. In Ancient Greece – specifically in Athens – the *leitourgós* assumed public duties at his own expense, thus proving himself a good citizen. Anyone who failed to do this stood exposed as an *idiōtes*: someone who, unlike or indeed in contrast to the public-spirited citizen, concentrated entirely on his own affairs (*to idion*) and his private life. Such self-centred individuals were held to be lacking in experience and education, in abilities and expertise – especially with regard to their social skills. Thus the word increasingly came to mean a layman as opposed to a professional. The Apostle Paul, for example, admits that “there is something lacking in my public speaking” (*idiōtes to lógo*, 2 Cor. 11:6); in the same sense he describes anyone who kept aloof from the Corinthian congregation as “an unbeliever” or “someone uninitiated” (*ápistos kai idiōtes*, 1 Cor. 14:24). The Elders of Jerusalem are astonished at the fearlessness shown by Peter and John, considering that they were uneducated laymen (*ánthropoi agrámmatoi kai idiōtai*, Acts 4:13). The further development of the term *idiōtes* in modern European languages speaks for itself.

Anyone wishing to provide a public service in Ancient Greece out of selfless motives had plenty of opportunities to do so. One could, for example, support a choir financially, equip a warship, give great feasts or organize (cultic) games. Last but not least, one could demonstrate civic commitment by holding public religious services. This was also considered a contribution to the common weal, as it was believed that
religious liturgy would incline the gods to spare the city. So here we have an instance of the service of God coinciding with serving one’s neighbour.

Cyprian of Carthage (200/10-258 A.D.) uses the original, multiple (i.e. not just cultic) meanings of the term “liturgy” for the moral admonition and exhortation of Christians. In his treatise On Good Works and Alms (De opere et eleemosynis) he, too, is concerned with the connection between serving God and serving one’s neighbour when he stresses that:

*our prayers and our fasting achieve less if they are not supported by alms, that our pleading by itself is too weak to be heard if it does not have good deeds and works to back it up (n. 5).*

In order to urge the Christians to greater efforts Cyprian compares heathen and Christian *leitourgía*:

How wonderful it is when an important donation is made in the sight of God! How great and glorious a spectacle of the heathen appears when proconsuls or imperators are present as participants, and when the splendour and extravagance on the part of the sponsor of the feast is all the greater to earn the plaudits of the great. But how much greater and grander is the glory of a donation made with God and Christ as witnesses! How much more extensive preparations will have to be set in train, how much more extravagant expenditures will have to be made when the heavenly hosts gather round to watch, when all the angels are present, when what is at stake for the donor is not a four-in-hand or the office of consul, but the granting of eternal life, when one is not pursuing the vain and fickle favour of the populace, but receiving the eternal reward of the Kingdom of Heaven (n. 21).

The religious, cultic aspect of liturgy became established as a result of the language used in the Old Testament (e.g. the ministry of the Levites, Num 8:22-24; of the priest, Deut 17:12). Although in the New Testament the Epistle to the Hebrews, in particular, adopts and continues this usage, it is this very letter that severs the classical, direct link between serving the gods and serving man. For Christ has abolished the necessity for constantly repeated liturgical sacrifices by finally making them obsolete through His sacrifice on the cross. “Such is the high priest that met our need, holy, innocent and uncontaminated, set apart from sinners, and raised up above the heavens; he has no need to offer sacrifices every day, as the
high priests do, first for their own sins and only then for those of the other people; this he did once and for all by offering himself. The Law appoints high priests who are men subject to weakness; but the promise on oath, which came after the Law, appointed the Son who is made perfect for ever.” (Heb 7:26-28).

Serving God and service of God

Thus the Epistle to the Hebrews spells out the priority of the love and the grace of God in a cultic sense as already attested by the Corpus Paulinum (e.g. Rom 5:6-8, 10) and Johanneum (e.g. 1 John 4:10-19). “But now Christ has come, as the high priest of all the blessings which were to come. He has passed through the greater, the more perfect tent, not made by human hands, that is, not of this created order; and he has entered the sanctuary once and for all, taking with him not the blood of goats and bull calves, but his own blood, having won an eternal redemption.” (Heb 9:11-12). All attempts to win the favour of God the Father by human sacrifices and works are doomed to failure: It was He Himself who reconciled the world to Himself in the Holy Ghost through His Son Jesus Christ. In this (and only this) sense is it true to say what is often said with regard to well-meant pastoral motives, although there is no philological or historical authority for it: namely that liturgy – the service of God – refers not to man’s serving God, but to God’s serving man.320

Finding a balance between serving God and serving one’s neighbour:

Holy Scripture

Christ has not left us any systematic doctrine about the relationship between liturgy and diaconal work, although He liked to refer to the admonition in Hos 6:6: “For faithful love is what pleases me, not sacrifice; knowledge of God, not burnt offerings.” This does not mean that He is against liturgy in principle; He is not concerned with criticizing or even rejecting the cult of sacrifice, but with making clear the absolute priority of charity.321 This tendency is also shown by Jesus’ rebuke to the Pharisees and scribes. God’s commandment

320 Nevertheless the designation Servant of God remains one of the noblest titles of the saints, whereas non serviam, as we know, was never to become a Christian phrase.

requires loving and compassionate concern for (elderly) parents, while the law of man countermands the will of God under the pretext of liturgical interests: “For Moses said: Honour your father and your mother, and, Anyone who curses father or mother must be put to death. But you say, “If a man says to his father or mother: Anything I have that I might have used to help you is Korban (that is, dedicated to God),” then he is forbidden from that moment to do anything for his father or mother. In this way you make God’s word ineffective for the sake of your tradition. (Mark 7:10-13).

According to Jesus, the desirable balance between serving God and serving one’s neighbour can also tilt in the other direction. Consider the following example. “He was at Bethany in the house of Simon, a man who had suffered from a virulent skin-disease; he was at table when a woman came in with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the ointment on his head. Some who were there said to one another indignantly, ‘Why this waste of ointment? Ointment like this could have been sold for over three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor’; and they were angry with her. But Jesus said, ‘Leave her alone. Why are you upsetting her? What she has done for me is a good work.’ (Mark 14:3-6) Thus Jesus takes sides with the woman by declaring the anointment to be a quasi-liturgical act (anointing the body for burial). It is also interesting what he intimates about caring for the poor: “You have the poor with you always, and you can be kind to them whenever you wish, but you will not always have me. She has done what she could: she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial.” (Mark 14:7-8). The duty to care for the needy is not set aside but treated as a permanent obligation. In the given situation, however, Christ and the hint of his future sacrifice have priority, which the anointment – being suggestive of liturgical acts at least – makes clear.

A very similar message is conveyed by the familiar story of Jesus’ stay with the sisters Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42). If Christ gives Mary’s listening to Him priority over Martha’s household duties, it is not to devalue the latter, nor – as tradition would later have it – to raise the vita contemplativa over the vita activa as a matter of principle. It is to emphasize that when Christ speaks and teaches, there is no greater duty than to listen to him.

The interplay of liturgy (in this case the Eucharist) and the active love of one’s neighbour are expressed with exceptional clarity in the
epistle written by St. Paul to the Corinthians in about 55 A.D. At this time Eucharist and Agape – the love-feast – are not yet separate, but held in the same place at the same time. The prosperous members of the congregation, who can come earlier than the poorer ones (and especially the slaves among the latter), begin to consume the food and drink they have brought with them. “... for when the eating begins, each one of you has his own supper first, and there is one going hungry while another is getting drunk.” (1 Cor 11:21).

The Apostle reacts with great irritation to this deplorable state of affairs. He does not content himself with an appeal to the better nature of the rich Christians, but simply denies these liturgical assemblies their claim to be a celebration of the Lord’s Supper in view of their blatant lack of Christian love of one’s neighbour (1 Cor 11:20). Those who forget their less well situated sisters and brothers are confronted by Paul with the words of institution of the Eucharist. The memory – and that means in the language of the Bible: the recalling! – of the sacrifice of Christ cannot be celebrated if love is neglected. “Therefore anyone who eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily is answerable for the body and blood of the Lord.” (1 Cor 11:27). Anyone who celebrates the Eucharist, no matter how often, but has no love is missing the meaning and purpose of the liturgy. Not only that, he will be eating and drinking the body and blood of God! The historical separation of Eucharist and agape/love-feast that was soon to follow removed the immediate occasion of the apostolic admonition, but not its fundamental validity.

Finding a balance between serving God and serving one’s neighbour:

Fathers of the Church

The Early Church consistently recognized and observed the connection between liturgy and charitable work. John Chrysostom (349/344-407 A.D.), for example, cites Matthew 25 in stressing that serving the needy takes priority over costly consecration gifts:

... Therefore let us hear, priests and laity, what we are deemed worthy of; hear and shudder! Christ has allowed us to sate ourselves with his flesh; He has given himself as a human sacrifice! So how can we justify ourselves if we, despite this sublime meal, still commit so many and such grievous sins? ... This mystery is a mystery of peace; it has nothing to do with the pursuit of riches. If
Christ, for our sake, did not spare Himself, what do we deserve if we take care of our money and pay no heed to our souls, for whose sake He did not spare Himself? ... Let us therefore flee from this abyss and let us not believe that all we need for our salvation is to donate a golden chalice encrusted with precious stones for the altar after having previously robbed widows and orphans. ... Do you wish to honour the body of Christ? Do not pass Him by if you see Him naked; do not honour Him here with silken raiment if you do not look after Him when He is outside in the street where He will perish of cold and exposure! The One who said: This is my body, and followed His words with deeds, the same also said: “For I was hungry and you never gave me food”, and: “In so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me.” So let us learn to be wise and honour Christ the way He wishes to be honoured. ... Even Peter thought he was honouring Him by trying to prevent Him washing his feet; nevertheless it was no honour he showed Him but the opposite. So show Him the honour that He Himself demanded, and use your riches to help the poor. God needs no golden chalices, but golden souls.322

The already quoted Cyprian of Carthage also points out that good works contribute to the fruitfulness and effectiveness of prayer:

Our pleading shall be useless if we turn to God in fruitless prayer. For just as every tree that bears no fruit shall be cut down and thrown into the fire, words that bear no fruit cannot awaken God’s grace, because they are not rich in good works. ... For He who on Judgement Day shall reward good works and alms, lends even today a gracious ear to all who come to prayer having done good works (On the Lord’s Prayer, Final Section I, ch. 32). With quotations from the books of Tobit and Isaiah, as well as a quotation from Paul, Cyprian proceeds to present biblical authority for stating that prayers quickly rise up to God if they are borne by the merit of our good works in the eyes of God.323

Mass collection

From the very beginning the liturgy and the diaconal work of the Church have not only been intertwined in principle, but also in a con-

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322 50th Homily on the Gospel according to St. Matthew, ch. XIV, V.23-36, n. 3; cf. n. 4 with reference to Mk 14, s.o.
323 On Good Works and Alms, ch. 33
crete, “institutionalized” form, namely the collection\textsuperscript{324} taken during the Mass, which in the course of the 11th century replaced the donations made in kind by the faithful, and which – especially in the Western Church – were assembled at the outset of the Mass and brought to the altar for “sacrifice”. From the abundance of donations received those required for the liturgy – bread and wine – were separated out.

From this is derived the custom of washing hands before the Eucharistic Prayer, which was originally necessary after handling land produce and later became a spiritualized, symbolic act accompanied by a plea for the forgiveness of sins.\textsuperscript{325} Despite the altered form – the original offertory procession with donations in kind was replaced by the collection of monetary donations – the collection taken immediately before the Eucharistic Prayer, i.e. in the heart of the celebration of the Eucharist, testifies to the Church’s care for the needy to this day.

**Liturgy and diaconal work: a response to God’s loving concern**

Thus this glance into the history of the liturgy shows that Christ and His Church combined serving God and serving one’s neighbour right from the start, even seeing them as being internally related. But how can this be theologically substantiated, when the self-sacrificing care for the poor and sick seldom bears any relation to a liturgy that sometimes tends towards the sumptuous?

The source of this connection does not lie in human action, but in the already mentioned priority of the love of God. He loves us, lets us see and feel His love, and this “primacy” of God can cause love to burgeon in us as a response.\textsuperscript{326} For love of us the Son of God “took the form of a slave” (Phil 2; cf. John 13) – “even to accepting death, death on a cross” (Phil 2:8). Such a love, than which there is none greater (cf. John 15:13), requires both the requited love of men and their mutual love. They enter the service of Christ, acting as limbs in the service of their head, regardless of whether this service

\textsuperscript{324} The Mass stipends, which cannot be dealt with here, also arose in this context.

\textsuperscript{325} It may be that this separation of sacrificial material and donations explains the old name of the subsequent prayer Secreta (from Lat. secemere, to separate), which later came to mean “secret” as it changed from an oration delivered aloud to a silent prayer. Such an explanation would appear persuasive, but has not been adequately confirmed.

is rendered to their divine Father or to their (needy) fellow men. For this reason serving God and the active love of one’s neighbour are two different but inwardly related ways of responding to God’s love. “If anyone is well-off in worldly possessions and sees his brother in need but closes his heart to him, how can the love of God be remaining in him? Anyone who says ‘I love God’ and hates his brother, is a liar, since whoever does not love the brother whom he can see cannot love God whom he has not seen.” (1 John 3:17; 4:20).

In his Accession Encyclical Pope Benedict XVI describes this connection as follows:

Here we see the necessary interplay between love of God and love of neighbour which the First Letter of John speaks of with such insistence. If I have no contact whatsoever with God in my life, then I cannot see in the other anything more than the other, and I am incapable of seeing in him the image of God. But if in my life I fail completely to heed others, solely out of a desire to be “devout” and to perform my “religious duties”, then my relationship with God will also grow arid. It becomes merely “proper”, but loveless. Only my readiness to encounter my neighbour and to show him love makes me sensitive to God as well. Only if I serve my neighbour can my eyes be opened to what God does for me and how much he loves me. […] Love of God and love of neighbour are thus inseparable, they form a single commandment. But both live from the love of God who has loved us first. No longer is it a question, then, of a “commandment” imposed from without and calling for the impossible, but rather of a freely-bestowed experience of love from within, a love which by its very nature must then be shared with others. Love grows through love. Love is “divine” because it comes from God and unites us to God; through this unifying process it makes us a “we” which transcends our divisions and makes us one, until in the end God is “all in all” (1 Cor 15:28). 327

The collective turning of the Christian faithful to God in the liturgy and the mutual concern in the active love of one’s neighbour are both forms of expressing the Church communion; they are imbued with each other and supplemented by the martyria, bearing witness to the faith. The Church’s deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (kerygma-martyria), celebrating the sacraments (leitourgia), and exercising the ministry.

327 Loc. cit. no. 18.
of charity (*diakonia*). These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable, because the links between them have been forged by God.
Vision of a Diaconal Church
A Diaconal Church: a Vision of the Future

Raymond Bernard Goudjo

Against the backdrop of today’s globalised society one is tempted to ask which individual or institution can offer man hope of a new beginning. Both the numerous economic, social and political crises and the radical, often belligerent choices made by aggrieved populations, who consider themselves oppressed, in an attempt to solve their problems beg the question of what trustworthy institution, run by efficient, dedicated individuals, can successfully intervene.

The modern world is hard put to find an answer. The power of cronyism, reinforced by the grinding of utilitarian institutional machinery, is the only thing which enables individuals to reach the peaks generally reserved for the generous of heart. In the final analysis, and despite all the proactive pronouncements and the enactment of a slew of laws, human endeavour yields nothing better than little mice which gnaw at the expectations of populations imperilled by insecurity and poverty.

Enlightened by Christ, the Church is and remains sacred in the “Light of nations”329, exemplifying in its very essence diakonia, or service to humanity in all its many facets. It can forgo neither the Gospel nor the hope of a better future, which is by no means opium for the masses. Also perceived as the “people of God, marching along the narrow way of the Cross”, the Church offers in its sacramental function a unique type of service, which consists principally in an appeal to all peoples and nations in order to help them discover that “man receives salvation only in the name of Jesus”, an all-encompassing salvation which “also embraces the world, penetrating the sober fields of work and economics, technology and communication, society and politics, the international community and intercultural and interpersonal relationship.”330

After establishing the common theme of these deliberations, we shall reflect on the sources of diakonia, or social welfare work, in the Church, this on the basis of a re-reading of the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 6:1-7), before subsequently contemplating it as an expansion of faith and, finally, delineating it as a space for a reconstruction of charity.

The visionary origins of a diaconal Church

“About this time, when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenists made a complaint against the Hebrews: in the daily distribution their own widows were being overlooked. So the Twelve called a full meeting of the disciples and addressed them, ‘It would not be right for us to neglect the word of God so as to give out food; you, brothers, must select from among yourselves seven men of good reputation, filled with the Spirit and with wisdom, to whom we can hand over this duty. We ourselves will continue to devote ourselves to prayer and to the service of the word.’ The whole assembly approved of this proposal and elected Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus of Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these to the apostles, and after prayer they laid their hands on them. The word of the Lord continued to spread: the number of disciples in Jerusalem was greatly increased, and a large group of priests made their submission to the faith.” (Acts 6:1-7)

A complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists

It all starts with a question of injustice: the sense and the fact of being less privileged, shunned, neglected, despised and more. The Twelve by no means deny the reality of the situation, but attempt instead to gauge it accurately. In their view, engaging in direct acts of charity constitutes a distraction, leading away from the Gospel to be preached. Proclaiming the Word of God, or the kerygma, is of more significance than the concept of ‘service at tables’ or the performance of charitable duties. Their human reasoning is not erroneous, as it is important to adhere to the essentials, even if material concerns are undeniable and should not be neglected.

The Apostles subsequently decide to entrust this task to helpers who compensate for their inability to practise diakonia of word and
deed simultaneously – as preaching the Word of God is also an active form of diakonia, known as ‘prayer and ministry of the Word’. This is why anyone seeking to become an Apostle must fulfil the following eligibility criteria: he must be a man of faith, with a sense of God’s justice and an unsullied reputation, who should also be filled with the Holy Spirit or, at least, be an excellent counsellor. The choice of seven men, reflecting the interpretation of the number seven as an expression of plenitude, refers to the pertinent function of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit and the seven sacraments dispensed by the Catholic Church. It follows that the diaconal function is inextricably linked to the confession of faith.

Service at tables and proliferation of the Word of the Lord

The Acts of the Apostles underlines two essential aspects in this excerpt: the Twelve accept the principle of subsidiarity, and ‘service at tables’ is a direct proclamation of the Word of God.

The Twelve and the deacons

Preaching the Word of God is fraught with complexity. It concerns man as a whole and cannot ignore the ‘milk and honey’ promised by Yahweh to the people of Israel. One of the first bones of contention within the early Christian community concerns ‘the stomach’ as a primary economic reality. Man, with his vision of faith, is unable to avoid the projection of a speculative philosophy and the principle of speech onto concrete action and immediate experience. Those who live out the Word are not invulnerable to partisan behaviour as far as the division of material goods is concerned: the wish to have more than others and to take care of one’s own is a natural propensity which must be countervailed by a heightened sense of justice which only the spirit of wisdom confers upon humanity. In order to avoid scattering, the Apostles entrust this task to particularly reliable individuals. Hence the deacons are by no means inadvertent assistants, but rather direct contributors to the kerygma. “… the mission of the Seven exceeds diakonia, or ‘social welfare work at the table’. Not only do they attend to the meals, but also preach the Good News…”

Service at tables and direct proclamation of the Word of God

Divine providence had it that the first Church martyr was a deacon who was not disembowelled by a community loudly bewailing the injustice of service at tables, but stoned for having professed his faith by preaching the Word of God. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Stephen worked miracles and great signs (cf. Acts 6:8 and 7:55). Although the Acts of the Apostles fails to elaborate further, it is evident that he did not shirk his duties in terms of service at tables – an expression of the essence of Christian diakonia is crucial to the act of attending to others as demanded by the Apostles. The “I should be in trouble if I failed to do it” (cf. 1 Cor 9:16) applies perfectly to Christ’s witness and first martyr. Indeed, Stephen was not accused on the grounds of his deep sense of human justice and his ability to create order by reconciling hearts, but as a result of the driving force of his acts of righteousness. What inspired in him such an abundance of virtuous vigour and the strength to move mountains? The answer is his faith in Jesus Christ. Hence, Stephen was convicted of blasphemy and suffered a cruel and merciless death (cf. Acts 7:58). Stephen’s death sparked a deliberate scattering of the deacons and prompted a new definition of diakonia, which has, since then, been synonymous with spreading the Word of God (cf. Acts 8:4).

In the wake of the persecution which followed Stephen’s death, another deacon called Philip came to the fore as a missionary. Philip appeared as Apostle to the Gentiles long before Paul and just after Peter. He preached the Gospel in Samaria and paved the way for the Apostles’ missionary efforts in what was a renegade, schismatic swathe of Israelite territory (cf. Acts 8:5-17). According to Paulin Poucouta, Philip the deacon is, “as a result of his missionary zeal, sensitive nature and accessibility… a man of encounter.”332 Buoyed by his charisma, Philip, “witness to this boundless Word”333, assumes the role of fellow traveller and places himself at the disposal of those who do not understand the Word of God and who wish to deepen their knowledge. Philip preaches the Gospel to an Ethiopian eunuch and becomes “Africa’s first missionary.”334 Humbly offering his services to the eunuch in order to help him discover the meaning of the scripture, he slips away as soon

332 Cf. Poucouta, op. cit., 46.
as the spiritual encounter has taken place. His *diakonia* is reflected in the tendency to exhibit the behaviour of a ‘useless servant’ who merely does his duty (cf. Luke 17:7-10; Acts 8:26-39).

A diaconal Church cannot close its eyes to that which constitutes the very heart of the ‘people of God marching along’: Christ, the “Great Shepherd”, who guides his Church and saves humanity by shedding his “precious blood”.335 As a result, “the mission of the seven Hellenists does not lie primarily in the resolution of a material problem, a problem of equitable redistribution.”336 Of more relevance to them “is conversion to the God of Jesus Christ, submissiveness to the actions of the Holy Spirit.”337 What galvanises service so effectively? Living faith in Jesus Christ. This is the ecclesiastical vision of *diakonia*.

**Ecclesiastical diakonia as expansion of the faith**

When we contemplate service to others and other human matters, what is capable of kindling a flame of boundless joy in each of our souls? Put plainly and simply, it is that every heart should acknowledge, by deed and action, that Jesus Christ is Lord (cf. Philippians 2:11).

**On the necessity of a life dedicated to Christ**

At a time in which the Catholic Church is engaged in self-scrutiny, yet simultaneously treading the path of ‘New Evangelisation’, the following call to God rings out unremittingly in the heart of every Christian, and, indeed, of every man: “Increase our faith!” (cf. Luke 17:5). These transformative words of hope pose a continual challenge to interpersonal relationships. The strong utilitarian current spurred on by our post-modern age, at once paradoxically relativist and absolutist, has not spared the Church, which is carried along on its tide, a fact reflected in the voluntary, valiant dedication exhibited by a substantial number of its members towards all manner of social issues, within the context of non-governmental organisations run by both Church and laity. However, the confession and practice of the faith are marginalised in the process, or even consigned to oblivion. Since its very beginning, the Church has dared to scrutinise its own mission and its loyalty to Christ in the face of “social and cultural

335 Cf. CSDC 1.
337 Cf. Poucouta, op. cit., 49.
transformation, which radically alters man’s perception of himself and the world around him and also influences his belief in God.”

However, does it remain true to Christ when some of its sons and daughters believe that it is sufficient to solve questions of humanity without referring to Jesus Christ?

This erroneous approach to *diakonia* jeopardises the essence of Christian social welfare efforts, the more so if they are Catholic. The anonymous author of the Russian work “The Way of a Pilgrim” underscores this fact: “You should recall the Creator of all that exists in all that you do; when you see the light, remember the One who gave it to you [...]. In short, may all your movements prove an impulse to celebrate the Lord, causing you to pray assiduously and inspire incessant joy in your soul.”

Emphasising that, far from being neutral, each relationship bears in itself a symbol which, thanks to the diverse interpretations to which it may give rise, constitutes an appeal to communion with the Creator, his commentator Michel Evdokimov notes that: “This remarkable text extends an invitation to engage in conscious acts of Christian fellowship, not only while contemplating creation, but during working life and when performing routine daily activities. One source of the neuroses which plague the modern psyche is the dissociation with the world, the narrowing of temporal and spatial awareness and the narcissistic retreat within the self.”

To fail to comprehend the necessity of a life dedicated to Christ and made manifest in service to others is to misunderstand ecclesial *diakonia*. Humanity and social commitment vanish in the absence of an ‘Amen’ which transcends the visions and expectations of peoples and nations. Why journey the world and fight against injustice when human life is destined to end in a return to dust?

**From a useful to a living faith**

In his essay, provocatively entitled “Can God die in Africa?” Éloi Messi Métogo uses numerous examples to illustrate the transhumant

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and nomadic aspects of faith in Africa, including a prayer from Benin, which originates from the traditional milieu of the Yoruba people. He emphasises that “the petitions pertain predominantly to the believers’ material concerns, their everyday lives and actions”\(^{342}\), citing the Yoruba prayer: “May our awakening be blessed with happiness. May our awakening be blessed with money. May our awakening be blessed with women. May our awakening be blessed with children…”\(^{343}\), from which he concludes: “Strictly speaking, it is the ‘faith’ itself which, in certain cases, becomes the object of bargaining. Divinity must prove itself in order to continue to earn the trust of the faithful. It is, after all, not unknown for a cult or fetish to be abandoned if it is no longer deemed effective.”\(^{344}\) Perhaps this is a possible explanation for the plethora of Christian, Islamic and other deities and sects in Africa?

However, this would mean that the faith of black Africans is not sustained by the vision and bedrock of the ‘Amen’ as a lifestyle act based on unwavering hope and borne out in patient and plucky work. It would, instead, be founded in a tacit magical-religious contract with a deity who heeds man’s spontaneous whims. Is there an explicit space reserved for praise and spontaneous giving in our prayers in Africa? There, all sacrificial offerings are traditionally linked with the expectation that the deity invoked to fulfil the wishes of the individual praying will acknowledge the petitions immediately; the services performed by the deity must be palpable.\(^{345}\) If the expectation is not met, the person praying appeals to a deity deemed swifter and more efficient. The fetish-priest seeking to retain his followers behaves in a similar manner. Africans talk candidly of their religious transhumance and nomadism, saying for instance: “I was a Catholic and fell ill. So I went to see the priest, who prayed for me and told me to pray, but I wasn’t cured. By chance I met a guru, who prayed for me and healed me. That is why I believe this guru and his religion are authentic.” Even within the Catholic Church, the African quest for exorcists and effective prayer is rarely based on the desire to strengthen the faith, but instead on a type of individual pragmatism little concerned with the Christian, let alone the Catholic faith and its tangible foundations.

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\(^{342}\) Metogo, op. cit., 49.
\(^{343}\) Ibid.
\(^{344}\) Ibid.
\(^{345}\) Metogo 50.
In the face of the growing adversity which littered the path of his mission, Jesus responded with the entire truth and intelligence of the scripture, displaying an attitude of *kenosis*. Those who followed in his footsteps, like Stephen the Deacon, dedicated themselves to obliterating the evil of persecution with the same self-sacrifice with which they surrendered their lives. Does not Stephen’s loud cry of “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:60) while being stoned equate to “Lord, increase our faith”? (cf. Luke 17:5). Paulin Poucouta comments that “the death of Stephen doubtless marks the first step in the evangelisation of Saul, his persecutor (Acts 8:1-3), who would prove an indefatigable servant of the Word after his conversion.”346 It follows that the appeal “Increase our faith” is no individual entreaty, but a voluble, communicative faith which involves the praying, supplicating individual and simultaneously touches on the universal; a faith which echoes the mute, perennial cry of a humanity externalising its insane, macabre acts of violence in the hope of attaining a peace which can be found solely in the desire for a strong faith; a faith which is a gift of God and lends meaning to the life of each individual. Metogo asseverates that “the faith in the resurrection threatens to alienate and mislead if it does not transform us now and allow us to work on the transformation of our communities and societies.”347

**Ecclesial diakonia as ‘diakonia of the imagination’**

Pope John Paul II prepared us for the new millennium by opening our minds and hearts to what he hoped would become our continual entreaty for the strengthening of the faith. For current questions fundamentally preoccupying humanity can only be solved by our capacity to examine and revisit all factors related to the governance of pluralism and difference.348 As a result, he speaks of a “new creativity of charity” as the challenge faced by contemporary *diakonia*. In the presence of a diverse and complex “scenario of poverty”, John Paul II recommends “This means carrying on the tradition of charity which has expressed itself in so many different ways in the past two millennia, but which today calls for even greater resourcefulness. Now is the time for a new “creativity” in charity, not only by ensuring that help is effective but also by “getting close” to those who suffer, so that the

346 Poucouta 48.
347 Metogo 223.
348 Cf. CSDC 16.
hand that helps is seen not as a humiliating handout but as a sharing between brothers and sisters.”

**The act of faith is charity**

Everything begins with and leads back to the act of faith. Ecclesial charity is always inventive when it starts afresh from Christ, who summons us to advance with ever greater steps towards a contemporaneity within its dense networks of relationships. The saintly founders of religious orders who continue to enrich the Church (Francis of Assisi, Ignatius of Loyola, John of God, Camillus of Lellis, etc.) used the Catholic Christian faith as the foundation stone of a new type of charity in their lifetimes, which has transformed into the charity practised in the present day. This act of faith in Jesus Christ, a Christian and Christological vision of God, opened their hearts to the universal via a confession of faith in humanity. They wed “Lady Poverty” with the prospect of the Kingdom of God, which is made manifest here and now in the world today.

It is clear that the entire context of the fight against material poverty urgently demands a living faith which can move mountains, in order to enrich the hearts which are, so frequently, filled with material greed, yet characterised by spiritual vacuity. Our frame of reference, ‘creativity in charity’ must concentrate on education and re-education in terms of the Christian faith, in order to prevent it from becoming subsumed by “the poverty situation in Africa, which forces its populations to make scraping the barrel of subsistence their top priority”.

It is indeed crucial to avoid reducing the charitable works of the Church and of our Christian communities to the mere equivalent of social services or charitable organisations. Despite comprehensive knowledge of the beliefs and expectations of the people, we must address the difficult issue of “the organisation of thought” as well.

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349 John Paul II, Apostolic Letter entitled *Novo millennio ineunte*… At the close of the great jubilee of the year 2000, Vatican City 06.01.2001 – NMI 50.


352 Cf. Jean Paul II, NMI 52.

as the structural framework which dilutes the transfer of meaning. Conscious of the fact that the charitable ministry of the Church is derived from the *kerygma* as water from a spring, we are confronted by two key working fields of the apostolate, or efficient *diakonia*.

**Diakonia and families**

The first field of reference is *diakonia* within the family. Let us not delude ourselves: without the family, ‘sanctum of life’ and site of faith, where we learn to place ourselves, in all sincerity, at the disposal of others, with their well-being in mind, the educational and charitable efforts of the Church would amount to an empty gesture. Upon closer inspection, the family of today resembles a frayed, patchwork-like fabric of social connections, fragmented in favour of an all-consuming ego at the forefront of its convolutions. Long-term, durable solutions for vital social issues cited frequently and demanding resolution cannot be found without the stability of a family cemented by a contract of fidelity and mutual commitment to marriage. The Church candidly affirms repeatedly that the family is both “recipient” and “protagonist of charitable efforts”\(^3\).

**Diakonia and men and women of politics**

The second field of reference is *diakonia* directed at intellectually accomplished men and women who are, unfortunately, also distinguished by a ‘lack of education’ in the sense of poor education or failure to grasp meaning, or lack of education accompanied by the absence of meaning. The political and economic aggression characterising contemporary society testifies to a progressive loss or downright absence of spontaneous giving and self-sacrifice as a cardinal expression of the justice due to both God and our neighbours. Only those strong expressions of love, self-sacrifice and spontaneous giving are able to stem the tide of postmodern ideas inherent in economic, social and political relationships defined as conflict-laden or consensual and ensure that mankind succeeds in becoming the true manifestation of a humanity at once innately coherent and anxious to restore fraternal bonds.\(^4\)

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redefining the capacity for friendship, an intimate legacy which has remained immanent in man’s social nature.

To conclude, the vision of a diaconal Church should not be anchored in the utopia or illusion of a society which will, in the future, provide a better place to live, but instead in the continual appeal to conversion, which must reassess all human questioning of the immeasurable immensity of a God who is incarnate in our reality without ever becoming entrenched or immured therein. Jesus Christ showed his Church that effective service by man undoubtedly leads to the elevation of the human heart towards the celestial realm via a heightened and enhanced awareness of the problems of humanity. The diaconal Church must ‘live God’ in order to help ‘God live’ in the human context, in order that, by so doing, God Immanuel, God among us, remains manifest eternally.
The church in the twenty-first century is situated in the context of a world culture where an increasing globalization and a growing international chasm separate the privileged few from the vast masses of the poor. Media inundates us with images of violence, hunger, homelessness and many untold human suffering. What touches and concerns one part of the world affects people everywhere whether they are aware of it or not. These images – whether they sensitize or desensitize us – are challenging us to an authentic soul-searching and calling us as church for a response.

This is the context in which I would like to situate my exploration on the subject of this essay – the vision of a diaconal church. With the breathless pace of changes happening in the world and its consequences not just on humanity but on the entire created universe in recent decades, the topic of diakonia has re-surfaced attracting the interest of many communities not just within the Catholic Church but also in a more worldwide and ecumenical setting, thus provoking an ongoing debate and discussion. It has generated many studies and reflections, exploring its meaning and challenges as well as how it might contribute to a renewed understanding of being Church in the twenty-first century.

What is happening in the world and in societies that is calling the Church to renew its missionary and diaconal vocation? What would a diaconal Church look like? What are the underlying needs and desires among God’s people that make them want to see the realization of a Church that is truly diaconal? What is the fundamental law and spirit of diakonia? What kind of spirituality does a diaconal Church engender? These are the underlying questions that this article will reflect upon to draw a clearer focus on what is the vision of a diaconal church.
Connecting Diakonia

A Quick Look at Events Giving Rise to the Importance of Diakonia

A quick look at some of the events in modern history that had given rise to an interest in diakonia will help us situate the gospel message, which is at the heart of the diaconal church. Kari Latvus gives us a review of the various historical events in the modern era that had given rise to the diaconal movement. According to his research, the first major peak occurred around the nineteenth century when industrialization and urbanization forced large groups of people into poverty and were in need of special help and care.

Latvus identified the start of second major peak in the development of diakonia in the 1960s citing as main reason behind it the growing understanding and awareness of individuals, and also more collectively, the awareness and social responsibility of churches. In this context, he mentions the growing awareness of churches to the needs of the third world and to the increasing inequality inside western societies where flourishing city centers turned into areas of the fourth world.

The winds of change blew open the doors of the Catholic Church with Vatican II. It was also in the 1960s when the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) happened:

… for the first time in its 2000 year history, the Church attempted a study and an understanding of itself. That internal study involved a more overt return to its roots in Scripture and its early apostolic, sub-apostolic and patristic traditions. But it also began to emphasize its humanity: the Church is in the world and not over and against the world. It shrugged off its fortress mentality; it strove to be more in touch and in dialogue with the world in terms of other Christian traditions, other faiths, the cultural, the political and the technical milieu in which we all live. It considered the true boundaries of the Church and the needs of humankind.

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359 See http://vatican2voice.org/2need/need.htm.
Vatican II thus took the church and the world by storm and had far reaching effects on the way Catholics pray, work, and live the Gospel and their mission in the world. The central topic of the council was the nature of the church itself and its place in today’s world. Even though the term “diaconal” was not prominent, certainly the challenges the documents presented envision a diaconal church.

Structural changes have to happen in response to the signs of the times. Older structures, which used to work in the past, are no longer effective in meeting the changing demands and needs of the world. Like in the first centuries of Christianity, the first community had to begin putting structures that would respond to the needs of their time.

These modern historical movements have undoubtedly renewed the quest for a diaconal church, generating several studies re-examining the biblical meaning of diakonia as well as its various interpretations and practices all throughout history. Most commentators agree in principle that the term διακόνος, like many biblical words, has both a broad general meaning (servant) and a specific technical meaning (deacon).360 Most of the instances of diakonos in the New Testament have the broader sense. In other words, they are not referring to the specific office of deacon, but rather to the general role of helping or serving. The context determines how the word is used.

There are those who propose the expansion of the understanding of διακονία beyond its traditional view and interpretation of the term in the Greek New Testament, which means humble service or table service. We are invited to shift our perspective in understanding the term. Some reject the limited traditional interpretation and suggests that the “meaning of the concept is connected to the role of messenger. A diakonos is a ‘go-between’, an authorized figure that acts under the service of a higher power.”361 In the ongoing debate, there are others who suggest that such expanded interpretation must be read in context, as there are variations in the meaning according to the connection.362 However way the term is interpreted in more recent

studies, one thing seems clear – Diakonia can never be divorced from the gospel imperative of love of neighbor. ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12.28, 34).

**Love of Neighbour: the Heart of Diakonia**

The commandment of love and care for the other is so foundational in the Judeo-Christian tradition that it defines the communitarian nature of faith. Compassion and care for others were the most important factors in the early history of Christianity as these were concrete expressions of the following of Jesus.

The Gospel is replete with the message of love. Through the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus deftly and gently challenges our understanding of neighbor – from one who is the object of attention and thus including some and excluding others, to that of one who is the subject, who in love, does not reject the other, but is neighbor to all no matter what one’s status, gender, religion, or race might be. Our neighbor, then, is anyone in need whom we have the ability to help! Only an active compassion makes us neighbors to one another in an affective and effective way. It is costly to practice compassionate love and service as the parable demonstrates. No wonder both priest and Levite did not bother stopping to assist the “half-dead” person.

**Humble service: love in its perfection**

The expression of love is further defined by Jesus through his action of humble service in John 13, when he washes the feet of his disciples, urging them to do the same to one another in a spirit of humility and love. Before the act of washing his disciples’ feet, we are reminded in the first verse of Jesus’ commitment of love: “Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved to the end.” Here we see the heart of God in the humility of Jesus. Love is at the core of the act of humble service. This is a pattern for his disciples to follow (v.15), of how his followers are to serve one another. This is not a pattern to be followed for worship primarily or even in performing one’s diaconal act, but one that is essential to living the commandment of love, the heart of which is the willingness to give from one’s heart and not to count the cost in loving. It is essentially sacrificial and self-giving. There is a clear reversal of roles in this diaconal act evoking in us a question of how we must serve as Jesus did.
How do we serve as Jesus did? Jesus did not insist on his position as rabbi even when Peter initially refused to allow him to go down to the level of a slave whose job it was to do foot washing as a sign of hospitality. If the structure of society at that time were to be respected, Peter ought to have served Jesus, but Jesus radically reverses expectations and serves those who are socially lower than himself. Jesus also washes all the disciples’ feet, including Judas, the one who would betray him. He extended to him the same humble service that he gave the others, even though he knew Judas would betray him. Thus the kind of love Jesus manifests in John 13 is a love inclusive and unconditional, recognizing no boundaries and limits.

The Diaconal Calling in the Early Church

If love is the fundamental law of the Christian community and therefore of every Christian; and if this love is to be expressed in humble service based on Jesus’ instruction in John 13, why were there specific persons appointed to perform the caritative tasks of the community in the early church or given the title of diakonos, deacon? Let me focus on three names mentioned in the Christian Testament that would shed light on the development of the diaconal vocation. These names are Stephen in Acts 6, Phoebe in Romans 16, and Timothy in Paul’s First Letter to Timothy 3. Many commentators have also identified these three scriptural references in understanding the diaconal vocation. In focusing on these three biblical characters, we can begin to expand the interpretation of diakonia beyond its core meaning as “humble service” and envision what a diaconal church looks like.

Stephen, deacon and martyr (Acts 6)

According to the accounts of Acts 6, Stephen was one of the first deacons chosen by the apostles to serve the Greek-speaking Christians in Jerusalem. He was zealous in preaching the faith, even to those who found fault with his preaching. He was brought in front of the council of the synagogue. There were those who considered him a troublemaker and wanted to be rid of him by bringing false charges against him for blasphemy. Mob rule took over and he was taken and stoned. Praying aloud, Stephen was thrown down; and while the people were thrusting upon him “a stone as much as two men could carry”, he was heard to utter this supreme prayer, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (vii, 58).
How did his appointment come about? According to Acts 6:1, two things were happening. First, the number of disciples was growing and there was dissatisfaction among the Greek-speaking Jews concerning the distribution of alms from the common fund as the native Hebraic Jews were overlooking their widows. There came about a need to put a structure that would correct this inequality. Seven men were selected and were put in charge of the necessary task of “waiting on tables” to ensure that prayer and the ministry of the word of God would not be neglected as the needs of providing for the poor increased (Acts 6:2-4). Thus, the seven diakonos were given the special task of taking care of the temporal relief of the poorer members. Of these seven, Stephen, is the first mentioned and the best known the account in Acts is rather straightforward. The diaconal calling was a clear response to the developing challenges of the early church. In the choice of the seven, the requirement was clear: persons who were well attested, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, who could be entrusted with the diaconal task (v. 3). The diaconal task however did not prevent Stephen from preaching the faith and his appointment as deacon was not for the preaching but primarily for the performance of the task of waiting on tables. Thus diakonia has maintained its caritative nature.

When we move to the Epistles, it will present us with an expanded interpretation of diakonia. Here, Phoebe’s role gives us fresh insights about the nature of the term.

**Phoebe, deacon and missionary (Romans 16:1-2)**

There are two features worth noting in this brief passage. First, in literary form, this part of the conclusion to Romans is largely conventional as letters of the period typically include a recommendation of the person who would deliver the letter. In this case it was Phoebe who was given such a task.

The second feature is the prominence of women among the names mentioned in this letter, first of which is Phoebe whom Paul refers to as a deacon (diakonos) of the church of Cenchreae. Paul specifically mentions the church of Cenchreae where Phoebe

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originated. This makes us wonder what importance Cenchreae had to Paul’s listeners. The second verse where Paul specifically mentions how Phoebe has been a benefactor to many including himself helps us locate Cenchreae as a strategic place for the first Christian missionaries.364

In this brief passage, Paul bestows three designations to Phoebe: sister, deacon (diakonos), and benefactor (prostatis). For Paul to call Phoebe ‘our sister’ indicates that she was a Christian as the first Christian community referred to one another as brothers or sisters. The second designation Paul gives her is that of diakonos or deacon of the church at Cenchreae. Traditionally this Greek word, when used to describe men, has been translated ‘deacon,’ ‘minister’ or ‘missionary,’ but when applied to Phoebe, a woman, it has been given a subsidiary meaning, such as ‘deaconess’ or ‘helper.’365 For instance, whenever Paul calls himself, Apollos, Timothy, or Tychicos diakonos, exegetes translate the term as ‘deacon’, but when the expression refers to a woman, as is the case with Phoebe, scholars translate it as ‘servant,’ ‘helper,’ or ‘deaconess.’ Such a translation has perpetuated discrimination, and a disservice not only to Phoebe, but also to all the other women deacons in the early church. Many scholars have argued that this is a mistranslation because the Greek term, diakonissa (or deaconess) did not appear in Greek during the period of Pauline Christianity and, therefore to suggest, in view of the later and modern deaconess movements, that Phoebe’s role was subordinate to that of male deacons and involved primarily a ministry to other women is a misinterpretation.366 Paul, however, indicates no inferiority or restrictions due to gender in Phoebe’s role in referring to her as ‘deacon of the church at Cenchreae.’ The text itself does not reflect feminine stereotyping of Phoebe. It seems that the stereotyping were translators’ attempt to downplay the importance

364 Ibid. According to several archeological studies, New Testament topography bears out the importance of Cenchreae, one of the two ports of the city of Corinth. Cenchreae was a pivotal point as a port city in East-West trade and the movement of people and therefore an important place for early Christian missionaries, who had to travel between east and west in their efforts to establish and nurture the scattered Christian communities in the Roman Empire. The church in Cenchreae could have provided the necessary hospitality for travelling missionaries because of its strategic location. See: MacKenzie, J., Dictionary of the Bible, London1978, 148. Scranton, R., Shaw, J., Ibrahim, L. Kenchrae, Eastern Port of Corinth I: Topography and Architecture, Leiden 1978, 34.


of the title because it was used with reference to a woman. It can therefore reflect the preconceived assumptions of the translators. That Paul should identify her as a deacon on the same level with others, including himself, raises questions about her very role and ministry as well as her qualifications for the position. Whenever Paul uses the term diakonos for himself and the various male co-workers, it is in connection with the activities of preaching and ministering within churches entrusted to them as missionaries.367

This brings us to the third designation Paul gives her in his letter, that of prostatis or benefactor. Like the biased interpretation of the title ‘deacon’ given a woman, the same fate falls on the translation of prostatis. It is unfortunate that no details are given of Phoebe’s activities in the epistle, as a consequence of which, there is little restraint on those translators who felt that the high social status of a prostatis was an improbable role for a woman in Greco-Roman society.368 Nonetheless, scholars have attempted to gain analogous insight into Phoebe’s activities as prostatis by considering first century epigraphic evidence about other influential female ‘patrons’ in the Roman Empire.369

We return to one of the curious questions about Phoebe’s seeming freedom to be mobile and Paul’s choice of her as his messenger. If Paul had to mention Phoebe in his official letter to the community in Rome, there is greater probability that she did not only go there for a social visit. Paul had to make sure that she would be accorded a ‘welcome worthy of God’s holy people,’ and be helped with whatever she needed (16:2).

We have seen earlier in the discussion of Phoebe’s second title – as deacon – that Paul indicates no inferiority or restrictions to Phoebe’s role because of her gender in referring to her as ‘deacon of the church at Cenchreae. This brings up the question as to what qualifies her for such an esteemed position?

367 Ibid.


369 Ibid., pp.189-211 in which the author uses epigraphic evidence on the lives of two women contemporaries of Phoebe: Iunia Theodora and Claudia Metrodora. Both were female benefactors who possessed Roman citizenship and who lived in cities of the Roman east around the middle of the first century C.E. Both used their wealth and high social standing to assist their fellow citizens and to improve the circumstances of their lives.
Timothy, deacon and companion

We can glean the answer to this question in the First Letter to Timothy. But first a little note about Timothy. What we know about him was that he was a son of a Jewess mother and a Greek father. His mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois, are renowned for their piety and faith (2 Timothy 1:5), which indicates that they may have also been Christians. Paul, impressed by his “own son in the faith,” arranged that he should become his companion in his missionary journeys to Phrygia, Galatia, Mysia, Troas, Philippi, Veria, and Corinth. That Timothy was jailed at least once during the period of the writing of the New Testament is implied by the writer of Hebrews mentioning Timothy’s release at the end of the epistle.

In 1 Timothy 3:1-13, we are given a list of qualifications or character outline for any holder of office in the early church. According to studies, these lists of qualifications pre-existed before the establishment of Christian community. Both Hellenistic and Jewish sources (e.g. 1 QS, the community rule of Qumran), contain models for such lists of qualifications, although the model that gives most direct insight into the particular, even peculiar character of the material in the epistle is the Hellenistic one. Interestingly enough, the noticeable feature of the list in 1 Timothy 3 of desirable qualities for both bishop and deacon is more related to virtue rather than to specific capabilities. The qualities as described by the epistle are as follows:

Deacons must be respectable, not double-tongued, moderate in the amount of wine they drink and with no squalid greed for money. They must hold to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. They are first to be examined, and admitted to serve as deacons only if there is nothing against them. Similarly, women must be respectable, not gossips, but sober and wholly reliable. Deacons must be husbands of one wife and must be people who manage their children and households well. Those of them who carry out their duties well as deacons will earn a high standing for themselves and in authoritative voice in matters concerning faith in Christ Jesus. (1 Tim. 3:8-13, NJB)

Based on these verses, it seems that the qualities required for men deacons are the same for women deacons. The fact that

Paul inserts the women in the middle of his discussion of deacons suggests that their work is similar, and on a plane not quite the same as that of elders. In general, whatever is said here about deacons would apply to the women, at least in principle, for their work is much the same.371 Thus, the qualities or qualifications are not in any way gender-specific as the Pastorals and other early Christian writings have attached them to both women and men.372 They are to be ‘respectable,’ ‘sober’ or ‘moderate,’ and ‘faithful to the mystery of the faith’ or in its secular sense, ‘reliable’ in the performance of one’s basic Christian commitment.

**Some conclusions on diakonia gleaned from the three biblical passages**

The very nature of the church as diaconal, i.e. a church that is founded in love as expressed in humble service and care for the poor and the little ones, remains at the core of Christian identity. But from the three biblical characters and passages we have just explored, we can draw some insights about the historical development of the diaconal calling and how certain misinterpretations have persisted in the church.

The first insight is that as Christianity began to flourish in the early church, there came about the need of restructuring the community for the sake of more effective service and ministry. This restructuring involved the setting up of appointed roles in the community and the identification of two important values in the early church: the care for the poor on one hand and on the other, prayer and the ministry of the word.

The second is that, with the changing landscape of Christianity in the time of Paul, where communities in far-flung places were beginning to be established, the diaconal tasks needed to be expanded. In the case of Phoebe, we begin to see that the expanded task of ‘messenger’ or someone who is sent ahead to prepare the community for the proselytizing endeavors of the Christian missionaries.

The third: in the First Letter to Timothy, it is clear that both women and men could be deacons and thus exercise the diaconal calling of

372 Ibid. 444.
the church, yet in our discussion on Phoebe and Timothy, it seems obvious that an androcentric perspective on early Christian history has to explain away the meaning of both words (diakonos and prostates), because it does not allow for women in church leadership, or it can accord them only ‘feminine’ assisting functions. Since this traditional interpretive model takes it for granted that the leadership of the early church was in the hands of men, it assumes that the women mentioned in the Pauline letters were the helpers and assistants of the male apostles and missionaries, especially of Paul. Such an androcentric model of historical reconstruction cannot imagine or conceptualize that women such as Phoebe could have had leadership equal to and sometimes even superior to men in early Christian beginnings. On women’s leadership roles, Phyllis Zagano argues that – “In fact, the humanity of Christ overcomes the limitations of gender, and no church document argues an ontological distinction among humans except documents that address the question of ordination. This view is not likely to dampen growing worldwide enthusiasm for women deacons.”

It is worth noting at this juncture that the quest for a diaconal church has always been present throughout the history of the church albeit expressed differently according to the signs of the times. One of these expressions is the rise of religious orders of both women and men, which is part of the charismatic development of diakonia as prophetic witness. Responding to the needs of the poor, the suffering and the “little ones” in society, many apostolic and missionary religious communities of women have taken on the caritative dimension of a diaconal church. These religious communities are microcosms of the bigger church and provide a witness of what church must be as they strive to live the gospels and the ideals of the early church. The members of the religious communities give witness to a diaconal spirituality, which is nourished by a life of prayer and contemplation. This enables them to see, hear and discern God’s will and ways, which, in prophetic ministry, shapes the content of the message they proclaim and the activity they undertake in service to others.

The Spirituality of a Diaconal Church

It is therefore important that we include the dimension of spirituality in this discussion otherwise our vision of a diaconal church will be incomplete. First, how do we understand spirituality in our post-modern era? How integral is it to our life of faith, to our becoming a diaconal church?

Spirituality, in its broadest sense, refers to people’s fundamental sense of what life is all about, i.e. their fundamental values which give meaning to life itself. “Spirituality can be distinguished from religion since the first refers to an immediate, intrinsic and direct experience whereas the second alludes to extrinsic, institutional and conventional religiosity as a mechanism of social affiliation and control.”375 We look at spirituality as a continuum where in our life of faith we continue the advances made in the previous periods and as we learn from struggling to make sense with the paradigm shifts of each historical era, we begin to see a new perspective and a new insight into the meaning of life and our relational being which drives us toward others.

The spirituality of the diaconal church is a particular expression of our relationship with God and the mission of Jesus. It is a spirituality that deems compassion as the heart of mission, calling us to an affective and effective love of neighbor. As self-giving love is at the heart of this spirituality, we are reminded in the parable of the Good Samaritan, that it is costly to practice the spirituality of compassion. No wonder both priest and Levite did not bother stopping to assist the “half-dead” person. But isn’t the following of Jesus costly? The spirituality of compassion is costly because it asks us to leave our comfort zones to cross social, cultural, and religious barriers. It asks us to stretch our hearts to accommodate even those whom we consider different from us, especially in our own communities. The spirituality of compassion is costly because it asks us to take risks and expose ourselves to danger and vulnerability. It is costly because it requires us to set aside our busy schedules to take care of those in need. It is indeed costly because it asks us to make sacrifices and to go beyond our perceived limits. For instance, in the Asian context, the costliness of compassion is increasingly becoming palpable in the lives of missionaries in conflict-ridden places, such as in southern

Philippines. While they are caught in the middle of the continuing war between the Muslim separatists and the military, they are also being called upon to attend to the wounded from both camps as well as to provide basic services to the innocent victims of such conflict. Thus the spirituality of compassion in the parable of the Good Samaritan serves as inspiration to those who are feeling the costliness of their discipleship.

In more practical terms this spirituality has four fundamental pastoral goals:

1) To have an ongoing renewal of our personal and communitarian faith through contemplation of the Gospels so that we may be able to know and to love Jesus more intimately and follow him more closely as his followers today. As the Gospel is interpreted, expressed, lived, and proclaimed from the early church until today, we realize the essential role of the Holy Spirit as principal agent of the Church’s mission. The Spirit of Jesus must be the energy, strength and animator of a disciple’s vocation. Through the witness of the disciples in the early church, we are given examples of how we are to live the Gospel today as contemplatives in action.

2) To foster a spirit of – particularly to those in the margins, the poor and the needy, the homeless, those who have no one to care for them.

In order to foster a spirit of hospitality, we must develop a spirituality of dialogue, which stretches our hearts and minds, and expands our capacity to listen and to accept one another and ourselves in our differences and uniqueness. The path of dialogue is one way through which we can become the sign of God’s vast home. The Gospel challenges us to revitalize our communities and local churches to be places where we can learn the language of understanding.

3) To enable our Christian faith to have an impact on the world and the whole of creation by working for the good of humanity, the demands of justice, and the pursuit of peace.

This third pastoral element reminds us of a passage from the Letter of James, which links faith and good deeds. The writer of the Letter asks a challenging question to the reader: “How does it help when someone who has never done a single good act claims to have faith? Will that faith bring salvation? If one of the brothers or one of
the sisters is in need of clothes and has not enough food to live on, and one of you says to the, ‘I wish you well; keep yourself warm and eat plenty,’ without giving them the bare necessities of life, then what good is that? In the same way faith, if good deeds do not go with it, is quite dead. (James 2:14-17).

(4) To be a healing and loving presence to one another in the midst of the many divisions and fragmentations in our world today.

What can touch the hearts of people is the transforming and healing presence of God which happens within a community where stories of life are shared, where songs are sung, where prayers are raised, and where doors are open to welcome the homeless and the stranger.376 Divisions are healed only within the context of church where people’s stories and experiences are honored and listened to, where they are made to feel that they belong.

All of us baptized are called to live the diakonia, to be of service to others, and to be a servant to all in the spirit of Jesus who humbly and lovingly served his disciples on the night before his passion and death. As we have seen in our foregoing discussion, diakonia did not only apply to the material services necessary to the community, such as serving at table (Acts 6:1,4) and the collection for the poor of Jerusalem (Acts 11:29; 12:25, Rom 15:31). It also implied teaching and preaching, as presumably all deacons in the early church, whether men or women, were engaged in. The diversity of ministries then and now simply manifests the diversity of charisms the Holy Spirit continues to give to the church. For Stephen, Phoebe, Timothy and all women and men deacons in the early church, it was at every table fellowship during which they and the community broke bread with one another and prayed together, that their spirits were nourished, their divisions healed, and their commitments renewed. It was at every gathering in the house-church that they remembered and contemplated on God’s word and the teachings of Jesus. It was there that they thanked and praised God for everything, for life indeed is gift. It was at the breaking of the bread that they found unity of heart and mind and solidarity with their struggling and suffering brothers and sisters in the wider community. Every gathering became an opportunity for each one to carry the flame of the Spirit to all those they would come in contact

376 From the response given by this author to Timothy Radcliffe’s talk, “Religious Life After 9/11”, 2004 Congress on Consecrated Life in Rome.
with, spreading the good news of God’s reign to every household, workplace, byway, city and nation in the world.

When our service is a freely given, when we choose to empty ourselves and embrace the service of another, paradoxically our service becomes life-giving, even if still filled with sacrifice.\textsuperscript{377} We then come to understand our servanthood as a reflection of Christ’s call to love one another, giving meaning to our acts of service.\textsuperscript{378}

Stephen understood his diaconal vocation as integral to his discipleship. His deep relationship with Jesus enabled him to give himself freely as Jesus did even to the point of death. Although not much is said in Scripture about Phoebe, Paul’s regard and reference to her as sister, deacon and benefactor have given us a glimpse of the vitality of her Christian commitment and deep relationship with God even to the point of risking her own safety to travel to distant lands for the sake of the mission.

Timothy’s spirituality and that of any Christian, whether or not one is appointed to an official office as deacon, must be rooted in one’s faithfulness to the mysteries of faith.

All through the ages, the Holy Spirit continues to direct the Church’s mission making the whole church missionary as it responds to the needs of suffering humanity in love and service. The Holy Spirit as well never failed to inspire women and men through the ages to respond to the call to follow Christ and to live the gospels in a radical way. Following the examples of the first Christians and the deacons of the early church, women and men have interpreted their calling to live their discipleship in Religious Life. As religious communities strive to live the ideals of a diaconal community by giving witness to its prophetic nature, they have come to realize that their discipleship can only be sustained by continually contemplating on the Word in the world, and that diaconal service is first of all a manifestation of their following of Christ and a fruit of their deep abiding relationship with him.

\textbf{Conclusion: Toward a Vision of A Diaconal Church}

The primary identity of the diaconal vocation is baptismal, vows of commitment serve to expand, enhance, and urge us on in animating


\textsuperscript{378} Ibid.
and exemplifying the diakonia to which all of us in the Body of Christ are called. Watson Epting says it succinctly: “We are all called to Christ-like service at baptism. It is the community that affirms the desire for living reminders that the church itself is called, not only to provide nurture, sacramental sustenance, and fellowship to its members, but to be the church outside its walls in mission, witness and service.”

By our baptismal commitment, we create an alternate world, a community, which is a diaconal church. This community is Gospel-based and “built on love, affirming, promoting, and giving witness to life, not death. It is a community that prophetically challenges unjust power structures, while at the same time offering structures that are responsive to the needs of the poor and the marginalized, to the homeless and victims of war and violence.

From the Christian viewpoint, we need to re-orient our vision of humanity, our Christian faith, and our being church, a vision totally new yet building on the strengths and wisdom of the past. Being a diaconal church is not new. We may have lost the prophetic spirit at certain periods in history, yet the Spirit would not allow its flames to be extinguished, fanning these flames again and again during crucial periods in history to remind and challenge us to live our identity as Christians according to the spirit of the Gospels.

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380 Ibid.
Visions of Diaconal Church
Olga Consuelo Vélez Caro

Fifty years after the Second Vatican Council it is opportune to ask what image or model of the Church proposed by the Council we should foster and strengthen today. The Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* unquestionably presented the outlines of a new Church more in keeping with the times, one that aimed to bear credible witness before the world. But to what extent has a new image of the Church been consolidated? How far does it go to meet the challenges of today? The answers to these questions give grounds for confidence, but there are also challenges which, while they are a source of hope, remind us of the need for loyalty. Hence it remains an urgent task and inescapable responsibility to dig deeper into the reality of everyday Church life and encourage models that bring the experience of the Church closer to that of the first Christian community.

Various Church community models have been suggested in the past. A model in this context should be understood not as “a description or interpretation of reality”, but rather as “an intelligible set of interconnected terms and relations that can prove useful in discovering reality and mapping out ideas. Like a proverb, the model is a tool one should have at the ready to tackle certain issues or set about a task.” No single model can fully reflect Church reality, but each one can help to highlight aspects that could otherwise not be easily expressed.

The model I shall deal with here is one I have called the “diaconal Church.” By that I do not mean the diaconate as a ministry, but rather the aspect of service that is encapsulated in the term diakonia (διακονία = service). When I talk of a diaconal Church I mean a “servant” or “ministerial” Church, in which “there are many different

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ways of serving, but it is always the same Lord. There are many different forms of activity, but in everybody it is the same God who is at work in them all” (1 Corinthians 12:5-6). I will look firstly at the etymology and use of the term *diakonia* (διακονία). I will then examine a number of documents devoted to this ecclesiastical model in order to highlight its key features. Finally, I will draw a number of conclusions to substantiate the ideas outlined.

**On the terminology related to diakonia (διακονία) = service**[^384]

Let me begin by looking at a number of terms that have to do with service (διακονία), serving (διακονέω) and the servant or deacon (διάκονος).

The verb “to serve” (διακονέω) refers to personal service. It differs from other terms such as “to serve as a slave” (δουλεύω), “to serve, to willingly serve” (θεραπεύω), “to serve for payment” (λατρεύω) and “to perform public service” (λειτουργέω). In general the verb is used in the sense of “to wait at tables,” “to take care of” and, in the broadest sense, “to serve.” The ancient Greeks did not hold service in any esteem, since it was a task performed by slaves. It only had a positive connotation if it was to someone’s personal advantage or benefitted the state.[^385]

The Old Testament mentions service, but while the commandment to love one’s neighbour as oneself (Leviticus 19:18) is a familiar concept, as is that of charity work (throughout the Orient), the Septuagint never uses the verb “to serve” (διακονέω). The term diaconos (διάκονος) occurs seven times, but in the sense of an officer (Esther 1:10) and an executioner (2 Maccabees 7:29). In the late Jewish period, Philo and Josephus use the term, the latter with regard to the Essenes in particular.


[^384]: I shall refer here for the most part to contributions made by H. W. Bayer, διακονέω, διακονία, διάκονος TDNT II, 81-93.


surprisingly states that when the master comes he will sit the servants down at table and wait on them. In Luke 22:27 Jesus is “among you as the one who serves,” an expression that radically changes the meaning of serving, resulting in a new model of human relations that even extends to serving at table or washing feet, as in John 13:4 ff. In Acts 6:2 it means “to give out food,” a concept which covers the entire process (storage, preparation and organisation). In all probability this means not only the distribution of portions to those in need of a meal, but the provision of food for the community. This sense lends an additional meaning to that of waiting at tables, as it was understood by the Hellenists. \(\delta\iota\κ\alpha\kappa\omicron\omicron\nu\nu\) is also used for the service Martha gives in Luke 10:40 (cf. John 12:2), for what Peter’s mother-in-law does (Mark 1:31) and when the angels look after Jesus (Mark 1:13 and Matthew 4:11).

In Matthew 25:42 ff. serving involves many activities: giving service to others is to serve Christ and it entails a personal commitment. If the tyrants of the world enslave others, the disciples of Christ must make themselves the last of all and be the servants or slaves of all (Mark 9:35; 10:44). In John 12:25-26 serving others means serving God – possibly until the end of one’s life. Thus the life of the community is a life of service. Every special grace (\(\chi\acute{\alpha}\ripha\mu\alpha\)) must be put at the service of others (1 Peter 4:10). This includes the grace of words and the grace of action; the latter in particular is described as \(\delta\iota\kappa\omicron\nu\epsilon\iota\nu\). Timothy, Erastus, Onesimus and Onesiphorus (Acts 19:22, Philemon 1:10, 2 Tim. 1:16) are cited as examples.

The prophets provided a service in advance (1 Peter 1:10 ff.) and the apostles also carried out a service (2 Corinthians 3:3) which was not arrogant or conceited in any way, but a work to be administered by the power of God and for his glory. A particular service provided by Paul is the collection for Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8:19). Therefore it is \(\delta\iota\kappa\omicron\nu\omicron\nu\) when he says that he has undertaken to go to Jerusalem in the service of the holy people of God there (Romans 15:25, Hebrews 6:10). In 1 Timothy 3:10-13 \(\delta\iota\kappa\omicron\nu\epsilon\iota\nu\) has the official meaning of “to serve as deacons.”

Thus, in the New Testament the term \(\text{diakonia}\) means first and foremost “waiting at tables,” “providing for physical sustenance” and the “distribution of food” (Luke 10:40, Acts 6:1). Secondly, it means “performing a service of love,” as in the case of Stephanas (1 Corinthians 16:15). It is associated with works, with faith, love
and perseverance (Revelation 2:19). There are different gifts, ways of serving and forms of activity (1 Corinthians 12:4 ff.). Preaching in itself is diakonia (Acts 6:4). Preachers are given the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-19); angels are ministering spirits sent to serve (Hebrews 1:14); endeavouring to live in accordance with the law is a service that leads to death; belief in the gospel is a ministry of the Spirit and saving justice (2 Corinthians 3:7 ff.). A more specific meaning attaches to the performance of certain duties, for example by the apostles (Romans 11:13; 2 Corinthians 4:1), the preachers of the gospel (2 Timothy 4:5) or helpers like Mark (2 Timothy 4:11). The collection is also a diakonia (Romans 15:31, 2 Corinthians 8:1 ff.); it is not a random activity but an act of true Christian love.

The term deacon has a general and a specific meaning. The general meaning is a “person who serves at table” (John 2:5-9) or an “attendant” (Matthew 22:13); the Christians are servants of Christ (John 12:26) and as such they must serve each other (Mark 9:35, Matthew 20:26). The term is used in a figurative sense as a “servant of a spiritual authority” (2 Corinthians 11:14-15, Ephesians 3:6-7, Galatians 2:17). Christ is the servant of Israel in Romans 15:8.

As deacons of the gospel, the apostles are the servants of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:23) or of God in special ways and with special concerns and responsibilities (2 Corinthians 6:3 ff.). Paul usually uses δούλος in this way (Romans 1:1, Titus 1:1).

Timothy’s role is also to serve as God’s helper in spreading the gospel of Christ (1 Thessalonians 3:1 ff.) and of Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 4:6). Epaphras is a trustworthy servant of Christ (Colossians 1:7) and Tychicus is a trustworthy helper in the Lord (Ephesians 6:21). Paul calls himself διάκονος or servant of the Church (Colossians 1:25) in view of the responsibility given to him by God. He and Apollos are servants of God and the Church, and they use their gifts so that others come to believe (1 Corinthians 3:5).

Sometimes the term deacon is used to describe someone who performs a specific service. In Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3, deacons are mentioned in conjunction with presiding elders. In 1 Timothy 3 it is said that a presiding elder must be of impeccable character, discreet, the husband of one wife, a man who manages his own household well, not hot-tempered or avaricious, and he must hold to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. From the use
of the term deacon in the New Testament and its association with the presiding elders it can be concluded that deacons were involved in administration and service. It is unlikely that the term derives from Acts 6, as has often been claimed, since the seven men selected were more involved in preaching and proclaiming the gospel. However, an indirect connection cannot be ruled out.

In the secular world the term deacon could be used to describe people as diverse as messengers, stewards, bakers, assistants, etc. Cultic associations can also be detected on inscriptions, but generally the reference is to serving food. This original meaning persists in the Church, since the provision of food is a form of practical service and a shared meal is at the heart of the cult. Like the presiding elders, the deacons came to the fore after the death of the apostles, prophets and teachers. With the rise of the single bishop over the eldership, the deacons were more subordinate to the bishop; following the introduction of a three-tier approach to Church ministry more explicit instructions were issued for the deacons’ work.

An order of deaconesses was also set up, which is mentioned in Romans 16:1, where Phoebe is recognised as διάκονος. 1 Timothy 3:11 may also be a reference to deaconesses or the wives of deacons. Paul likewise uses the word συνεργός or fellow-workers for women (cf. Romans 16:3, 9, 21). Later on, an order is established in which widows pay a role in the community, although their role is restricted almost exclusively to baptising women and praying with them. This was a clear limitation compared to the functions performed by women in Paul’s time. Virgins are also mentioned. Unfortunately, these ministries were never very strong and they disappeared entirely in the Middle Ages.

**Diaconal (servant) Church model**

Having provided a brief explanation of the terms associated with the concept of service, I now look at the characteristics of a diaconal or servant Church. Its roots are to be found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as I indicated above.

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387 I will mainly follow the line of argument pursued by Dulles, *Modelos de Iglesia*, 40-46, although I am well aware that some time has passed since it was developed, which is also true of the literature I have cited. My purpose in doing so is to go back to the origins of these observations in order to bring them up to date.
The historical Jesus demonstrates a special form of service. It is not the degrading performance of work by a person of inferior status or it work that is done for money. There is only one reason for the disciples to provide the service Christ speaks of: it is because the person to be served is Christ “himself.” This is stated quite clearly in Matthew 25:34-46. Moreover, Jesus describes himself as the “one who serves” (Luke 22:27). He thus introduces a new kind of relationship between people based on service and devotion. In addition, this service entails the renunciation of one’s own life, as Jesus gave his life: “the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28, Mark 10:45). It is precisely because Jesus gave his life that his disciples conclude that they, too, must renounce their lives: “This is the proof of love that he laid down his life for us, and we too ought to lay down our lives for our brothers” (1 John 3:16). The disciples do, indeed, remain faithful to this special kind of service and give up their lives, just as Jesus did. Giving service, serving Christ and God are, therefore, features of a unique communion with the triune God who, in His boundless Trinitarian love, wishes to arouse a love of all people in the hope that this love will found the community of brothers and sisters.

This way of being and living with Jesus is a compass for every disciple. The followers of Jesus must make this life of unconditional service readily apparent and present a Church in which this discipleship is practised and the proclamation of the gospel is encouraged. The Church as a sacrament of Christ must make Christ tangible and explain his purpose without any distortions or omissions.

In this respect, the Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes is ideal for a detailed study of the nature of a Church that seeks to present Jesus as the servant of all. This Pastoral Constitution must be seen in the light of a development ushered in by the Second Vatican Council with the aim of radically changing its relations with the world. At the Council the Church renounced the position that it alone possessed the truth and was the sole arbiter of God’s will. Instead, it adopted a humble attitude of dialogue with the world and expressed its intention to walk with it – not in parallel, but in the same direction. Therefore, it takes as its starting point “the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and
anxieties of the followers of Christ,” because “nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts.”

Fifty years after the Second Vatican Council it is appropriate to ask whether we are not still far removed from the willingness to engage in dialogue described in those words. In my view, we still have a long way to go. While the concept of a servant church has progressed at the theological level, the question is whether the guidelines have been taken to heart, whether this model has been blended with our history or whether, on the contrary, no attention is paid to it, as was the case with Jesus in his time.

To continue striving for a truly “diaconal” (διακονία) Church is certainly worthwhile, however, and so I will now take a brief look at a number of key passages in Gaudium et Spes (GS) followed by a more detailed examination of ecclesiological developments relating to the concept of service.

The servant Church in Gaudium et Spes

My starting point is No. 3 of the Constitution, which makes clear the Church’s wish to “serve” humanity.

In view of the joys and anxieties of the men of this age, as GS states at the outset, the Council can provide no more eloquent proof of its “respect and love for the entire human family with which it is bound up” than by engaging with it in conversation about these various problems. The Council brings to mankind light kindled from the Gospel, and puts at its disposal those saving resources that the Church herself, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, receives from her Founder. For the human person deserves to be preserved; human society deserves to be renewed (……) Therefore, this sacred synod (…) offers to mankind the honest assistance of the Church in fostering that brotherhood of all men which corresponds to this destiny of theirs. Inspired by no earthly ambition, the Church seeks but a solitary goal: to carry forward the work of Christ under the lead

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388 Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes 1.

389 This clarification is crucial, because the Church presents itself as “one” among many other institutions, religions, cultures, etc., in the world. One might think that by adopting this position it will lose ground and weaken its universal message of the redemption of all mankind. However, it could well be the case that it is able to offset this apparent loss of power by a gain in legitimacy, since it humbly offers the grace of God to all.
of the befriending Spirit. And Christ entered this world to give witness to the truth, to rescue and not to sit in judgment, to serve and not to be served."

It is precisely because the Church sets outs its fundamental position in this way that it intends to focus on the “situation of humanity in the modern world” (GS 9). It does not begin by recalling its doctrine, reinforcing its attitude or invoking its authority. The most important thing is an understanding of present-day reality, burning questions and new challenges. The Constitution then goes on to acknowledge the dignity of all human beings and the communal character of their vocation and to describe human activity in the world. In doing so, it makes a number of fundamental statements about the world’s autonomy, especially of the sciences, and the merit of this autonomy (GS 59). The document subsequently considers what the role of the Church should be in the world of today, but not without acknowledging that its structures and doctrines must be reviewed (GS 44) to put it more in tune with the modern world. The second part of the document describes some of the most urgent issues, such as the dignity of marriage and the family, the fostering of culture, social, economic and political life, the promotion of peace, and the international community.

This synopsis of the GS sets out the gist of what is meant by a diaconal or servant Church. It is rooted in Christ who “came not to be served, but to serve.” This is illustrated by the Church’s humble concern about current developments in the world and its sincere desire to face the world so as to untiringly and effectively address the challenges it poses. Reflecting on major passages of this Constitution gives us a better understanding of the path pursued by a part of the Latin American Church in order to put the relevant thoughts into practice. GS introduced a new method of perceiving reality, which was endorsed at the 5th General Conference of the Episcopate of Latin American and the Caribbean, as well as the practice of service and devotion to the poor. This practice is questioned by circles that are the

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390 “Many voices from the entire continent offered contributions and suggestions along these lines, stating that this method (seeing-judging-acting) has been helpful for living our calling and mission in the church with more dedication and intensity. It has enriched theological and pastoral work and in general it has been helpful in motivating us to take on our responsibilities toward the actual situations in our continent. This method enables us to combine systematically a faithful perspective for viewing reality incorporating criteria from faith and reason for discerning and appraising it critically; and accordingly acting as missionary disciples of Jesus Christ” (Aparecida Document 19).
most reluctant to follow the guidelines set out by the Second Vatican Council, but it is still valid and rests on the conviction that “a different world is possible,” in which the poorest of the poor have a special place in God’s plan.391

All this enables us to reflect on an ecclesiological model that is based not on power but on service. A willingness to engage in dialogue with the world makes the Church an authentic partner, together with whom it is possible to bring about the conditions that make life possible for all. An ecclesiastical stance of this kind can be understood as an entirely servant Church, as a diaconal Church.

The ecclesiological model of service

The concept of a servant Church is not new, but its contours became clearer after the Second Vatican Council. I shall now mention a number of documents and positions that have paved the way for this ecclesiastical model.392

Particularly interesting is a pastoral letter entitled The Servant Church written by Cardinal Cushing of Boston in 1966.393 In it he draws a powerful portrait of Christ as servant, emphasising that Jesus truly embodies the figure of the Good Samaritan and that the Church must announce the Kingdom of God not just by proclaiming and preaching the gospel, but in its work and through its ministry of reconciliation and of bandaging wounds, as a suffering servant, as a healer (…); just as Jesus was the “the servant of all”, so the Church must be “the Church for all others.”

Since that pastoral letter other documents have referred to this ecclesiastical model, for example the Presbyterian Confession of 1967, the Uppsala Report of the World Council of Churches in 1968, the Conclusions of the 2nd Conference of the Episcopate of Latin America and the Caribbean in Medellín in 1968 and the document on Justice in the World adopted at the Council of Bishops’ Conference in 1971.

391 In his inaugural speed at the 5th General Conference of the Episcopate of Latin America and the Caribbean Benedict XVI said: “Hence the preferential option for the poor is implicit in the Christological faith in the God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty” (Aparecida Document 392).
392 Based on Dulles, Modelos de Iglesia, 41-46.
393 Cushing, Richard Cardinal, The Servant Church, Boston, cited by Dulles, Modelos de Iglesia, 41.
The Medellín document has a number of very significant things to say: “Because of the foregoing we wish the Latin American Church to be the evangelizer of the poor and one with them, a witness to the value of the riches of the Kingdom, and the humble servant of all our people. Its pastors and the other members of the People of God have to correlate their life and words, their attitudes and actions to the demands of the Gospel and the necessities of the men of Latin America.”394 “No earthly ambition impels the Church, only her wish to be the humble servant of all men.”395 The 5th Conference of the Episcopate of Latin America and the Caribbean remained faithful to this idea: “The church is communion in love. This is its essence and the sign by which it is called to be recognised as follower of Christ and a servant of humankind.”396

Two theologians have made a special contribution to the development of this Church model: Teilhard de Chardin and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Throughout his life Teilhard de Chardin attempted to combine science and faith, the Church and the world. Dietrich Bonhoeffer declared his faith in a humble, servant Church that understood the importance of participation in the secular issues of everyday human life and did not try to dominate but rather to help and serve.397 They were both of the opinion that the world was passing the Church by and that the Church claimed to have all the answers to the world’s problems because of the divine Revelation. Both wanted the Church to take a positive attitude to the world.

Gibson Winter, a Protestant, was also in favour of a servant Church that was not an institutional structure of salvation alongside secular structures but rather a community within the structures of historical responsibility that was aware of God’s gratuitous work on behalf of humanity. In this respect, the apostolate of the Church should concentrate not so much on cultic issues but on discerning the presence of God in history.398 In the same vein John T. Robinson, continuing the work of Harvey Cox on The Secular City, insisted that

394 Medellín, Poverty of the Church, III 8.
395 Medellín, Poverty of the Church, III 18.
396 Aparecida Document 161.
the Church should liberate itself from structures that stood in the way of its mission.399

Influenced by these contributions, Catholic theology developed along similar lines. A prominent role was played by Robert Adoifs, who used the Pauline concept of kenosis with reference to Jesus (Philippians 2:7). His purpose in doing so was to say that if the Church wants to be like Christ it must renounce any striving for power, honour and everything that puts it above others.400 Richard P. McBrien also elaborated the concept of a servant Church, considering it to be a universal sacrament of salvation and the body of Christ. As such it must become one of the main vehicles through which the human community preserves the values of the gospel: liberty, justice, peace, charity, compassion and reconciliation.401

Having referred to the documents of the Episcopate of Latin America and the Caribbean in relation to diakonia, I should like to draw attention to another pressing issue. While the problems facing the Church in the First World have to do primarily with atheism, secularisation and a lack of belief, the key issue in Latin America remains that of genuine dedication to the poor, the excluded and the marginalised, who are denied the right to the very basics that would enable them to lead a life in dignity. In Colombia, in particular, the forced displacement caused by the war that has been going on for over 50 years requires an unconditional willingness to be generous in the provision of service and to “bandage the wounds of those who have been left at the wayside” (cf. Luke 10:30-37).

Conclusion

So far I have discussed the biblical terms that refer to diakonia and mentioned some theologians who have talked of a diaconal or servant model of the Church. My purpose in doing so has been to underline that, while it is not a new model, it is one that is urgently necessary nonetheless. This is something I wish to emphasise here.

Why is it a model that is urgently necessary? Not out of ignorance of other ecclesiastical models that must maintain their validity. We are talking here about a model of communion, a liberating model or a prophetic model. I cannot go into more detail here, but I insist that it is valid and relevant. Among the world's multiple needs I would include the model of a Church that offers its services, which gives what it has to give voluntarily and free of charge and, in doing so, is generous enough not to seek for recognition or power.

Moreover, a diaconal Church can demonstrate to the world the profoundly Christological attitude of Jesus, who took up his place in the community “as the one who serves.” The passage about the washing of feet (John 13:1-17) is the most graphic example of all. It is on a par with the eating of a meal, a visible sign of the Kingdom of God, when everyone has to sit at the table, including at all times the lowest of the low and, in this context, it is Jesus who offers to serve. A service performed by those at the bottom of the pile in a society characterised by inequality is performed by Jesus for a clear and specific purpose: the essence of community is “washing each other’s feet.” The others are not the small circle of those who belong to the community, but the whole of humanity that is the recipient of the Kingdom of God.

A diaconal Church must seek and find its place in the world “as the one that serves” and can respond to the needs of all humanity. In this model of the Church the announcement made by Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth is the same announcement that must be made by a diaconal Church, an announcement of deeds intended to underline words: “... he has anointed me to bring the good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord” (Luke 4:18, cf. Isaiah 61:1, 42:6-7). In other words, a diaconal Church can be open to intercultural and religious dialogue; it can join forces with various social players, be open to criticism and not assume a defensive attitude. It can offer what it possesses without asking for anything in return and demonstrate that it is like “yeast” (Matthew 13:33) that leavens the bread, “salt” (Matthew 5:13) that is the spice of life, and “light” (Matthew 5:14) that illuminates humanity’s path.

In times when there is an urgent need to forge world peace and to work for social justice, cultural and religious pluralism, new social
structures and new gender relationships, a servant Church can act as a powerful image of the Kingdom of God and make a specific contribution to its realisation.
The future of the Church has been an ongoing issue ever since its foundation. Throughout the course of history there have been repeated efforts to discover the path the Church should tread. In the period immediately after Easter the disciples searched for a future for their faith and their community, knowing that they could no longer rely on the physical presence of Jesus. Every council meeting witnessed a struggle to agree on the road ahead for the Church. The Second Vatican Council was the most recent major stage along this road and its reverberations can be felt up to the present day.

Discussions continue in the Church about its future and prayers are said for it. Many papers have been written about the possible nature of pastoral care in the future and the shape of the Church in the third millennium. Often, however, these papers have been put back in the drawer and replaced by others that have been agreed on instead.

The future unfolds

In many places, however, the future has simply entered the present. Over sixty years ago, for example, no one could have imagined that the inconspicuous little village of Taizé in the French region of Burgundy would witness the emergence of a spiritual movement that continues to inspire people today, uniting them in faith across denominational lines. This movement came into being because Brother Roger Schutz had the courage to believe. He did not make any ringing theological speeches; instead, he looked after persecuted Jews and prisoners of war. His commitment to the faith that fascinated him proved infectious. Young people, in particular, were drawn to him. After his violent death those who had had personal contact with him said he was a good listener. Schutz encouraged people to talk about their lives and provided them with a setting in
which their individual traits and personal background were accepted and they could feel at ease. In his presence and the atmosphere of openness and tolerance he created they experienced something that gave them hope and confidence.

Like many occurrences in the history of the Church the Taizé experience shows there is no distinctive, practical, proven theological recipe for the future of the Church. On the contrary, it depends on surprises, on ideas, perspectives and the courage people demonstrate when they embrace the faith. For that reason I do not intend to set out any further concept here for the future viability of the Church. Rather I shall attempt, firstly, to establish the conditions on which its viability depends. Secondly, I will throw some light on the challenges facing the Church and society in Germany. Thirdly, I will outline some theological perspectives for the future viability of the Church. Fourthly, I will highlight the opportunities and the resulting need for action in shaping the future of the Church. My fundamental premise is that the Church will only have a future if it regards and treats service for others, diaconia, to a greater extent than in the past as a mission and an opportunity to meet people and encounter God. Practical service for the benefit of others offers an excellent opportunity to meet people, answer their questions and respond to their needs and thus to become a modern Church in tune with the times.

Prerequisites for a viable future

How can the future viability of the Church be measured? That is a difficult question to answer. A number of key aspects can be mentioned, nonetheless. Firstly, it is crucial for the Church that it should always be aware of the foundations on which it rests – the motivating spirit of God and the biblical message down the ages. It needs men and women capable of taking the Church forward and inspiring others with their own experience of faith. In the future, as in the past, the Church can only develop if it maintains its capacity for renewal and consistently attends to this need.

Secondly, it must be able to realistically perceive and critically appraise the challenges emerging within the Church and as the result of changes in society. It must have the confidence to seize the new opportunities arising from these challenges so that the people of God and hence the Church can make further progress in the discipleship
of Jesus. The fundamental requirement here is a positive view of mankind and the world that treats processes of development not simply as threatening, retrograde steps, but as a source of new momentum for a life of faith. People should experience the Church as a place where they feel accepted and taken seriously.

The Church must, therefore, address people’s needs, answer their questions and go out to meet them in the places where they live. The future of the Church rests on its willingness to address conflict and engage in dialogue. This means that the Church, too, must repeatedly question its own response to God’s message and rise to the challenges of the time.

**Challenges for society and the Church**

In his book *Im Zug der Zeit* the philosopher Herman Lübbe talked of the age of acceleration in which we live. People engage with each other in a world that is moving ever faster and offers endless opportunities for action. Mobility, flexibility and up-to-the-minute communication are taken for granted these days. In an emergency we can rely on the availability of state-of-the-art medical care. Knowledge is expanding by the minute. Inevitably a multicultural society has to come to terms with other religions and cultures. Given the vast array of items on offer in the market, people can now piece together whatever gives them meaning in life and replace the pieces as they see fit.

These developments are frequently associated with what is termed a ‘loss of values’. Traditional values are allegedly at risk or have long since forfeited their validity. People from many different walks of life insist that fundamental values be upheld and safeguarded at all costs. Others, meanwhile, reject the idea of a loss of values and focus instead on the emergence of new values. A good example of this is the criterion of sustainability developed by the environmental movement.

The putative loss of values is often thought to entail a decline in religious affiliation and consequently an ongoing process of secularisation. A decline of this nature is certainly apparent if formal

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membership of a religious community is taken as a criterion. Yet many studies show that the need for religious and philosophical guidance has not diminished. The ways in which religiousness manifests itself have become more diverse and are subject to frequent change. The search for orientation and purpose in life continues unabated even in a pluralistic culture. After all, today’s fast-moving society constantly gives rise to fresh questions about values and meaning which it has to address, as do the people who live in it.

At the same time people are demonstrating a social commitment. Many new forms of active citizenship have developed – and the Church is no exception in this respect.

An important social factor is the change in lifestyles, particularly in respect of families. Another is the demographic development, which has a strong influence on the social structures in Germany.

The Fourth Poverty and Wealth Report of the Federal Government⁴⁰³ – currently available to the ministries in draft form – makes it clear that the widening gap between rich and poor in Germany can no longer be ignored. Poverty continues to affect young people, in particular; their educational and occupational future depends to a disproportionately large extent on their social background.

Fear of an uncertain future is on the increase, as was apparent from the study Perspektive Deutschland carried out in 2005.⁴⁰⁴ Many people are worried that unemployment and cutbacks in social services will lead to a decline in their standard of living. At the same time there is a widespread acceptance of the need for a reform of the welfare state, because only sustainable reforms can ensure the long-term viability of the social security systems.

In recent years there has been a growing awareness that society depends on a more positive attitude to children and families if the birth

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⁴⁰³ See: Lebenslagen in Deutschland – der vierte Armuts- und Reichtumsbericht der Bundesregierung; the fourth report has not yet been published, but a draft version of it has been available to the coordinating ministries since 17 September 2012.


Of the 510,000 respondents who took part in this online survey 60% said they were currently satisfied with life in Germany. Only 28% of the respondents expected this still to be the case five to ten years later. The greatest worries concerned the labour market, where over 55% of the respondents expected the situation to worsen. This represented an increase of 7% compared to the previous year’s study.
rate is to increase. Politicians are expected to create the conditions to bring this about.

For some time now the Church in Germany has been undergoing far-reaching changes. This has a great deal to do with the lack of staff needed to provide pastoral care and the alienation of whole groups of Church members, which has put parishes in a difficult situation. New forms of territorial pastoral care are being devised. Last but not least, the revelation in 2010 of the abuse of children and adolescents by priests and members of religious orders has resulted in a huge loss of credibility. During the annual meeting of the German Bishops’ Conference in Fulda in the autumn of 2010 its chairman, Archbishop Zollitsch, said that “the faith of many people in the Church has been shattered”\(^4\). The debate on major Church issues initiated in the meantime by the German Bishops’ Conference has attempted to generate new trust and revitalise the mission of the Church.\(^5\)

Changed financial circumstances have forced the Church in Germany to make major cuts. Existing structures are under review and jobs at risk. At the same time many parishes are being merged to form pastoral care units. With all due respect for the work carried out in parishes, the focus there is often on the liturgy and catechesis. Love of one’s neighbour thus tends to be concentrated on close friends within the community. In other words, the faithful might look after an elderly member of the parish they know, but have little contact with the excluded, with marginalised groups or the political community. Many parishes appear anaemic as a result. They are more focussed on Sunday gatherings for the initiated than on functioning as a missionary milieu. Care for the weak in society is left to the professional services provided by the Caritas organisation. The reasons for this development naturally have to do with Caritas itself.

The organisation has many challenges to contend with. In its facilities and services it employs an increasing number of people who


\(^5\) For the discussion process see: http://www.dbk.de/themen/gespraechsprozess/
have not undergone any traditional socialisation in an ecclesiastical environment. The Caritas workforce is much more heterogeneous now than it was in the past. This gives rise to completely new questions about the support given to the staff and charitable organisations. At the same time the services and facilities run by Caritas are subject to increased pressure in terms of quality and competition, which also has a number of positive effects. Crucial for Caritas is the question of how it can best and most effectively serve the interests of the disadvantaged in the processes of social upheaval and present ideas and potential solutions that make a positive contribution to social and political development. The same applies to the contribution Caritas can make to the future viability of the Church.

Theological perspectives for the future viability of the Church

The financial constraints and staff issues in many dioceses have called for prioritisation in the use of resources. Central functions and services are to be maintained at all costs. At the same time acute economic need has resulted in the dismantling of structures and the dismissal of employees. It is only logical that competition should arise between Church institutions and players as a result. It is noticeable that in many instances in which priorities have to be set adequate consideration is not always given to aspects of Church social welfare work.

The question is whether this is pure coincidence or symptomatic of ecclesiastical and theological reality. Given the impact of these processes on the future of the Church, a review needs to be conducted of the importance of the various dimensions of the Church and their practical relevance.

The Second Vatican Council changed the face of the Church in the 20th century. It brought the Church into the modern world so that it might address the questions, needs and requirements of the time. A largely up-to-date linguistic form was found for the proclamation of the faith and the liturgy. Of crucial importance was the theological and ecclesiological perspective that the Church developed – as the people of God advancing through history and addressing mankind’s needs and questions. It is no accident that the Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes has been described as the document that most clearly expressed the theology of the Council and the new approach to the Church’s understanding of itself. After all, Gaudium et Spes
begins with the statement: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.” (GS 1) The worries and concerns of people are also the concerns of the Church and its faithful. The Constitution renounces any separation of the Church and the world. The Church regards itself as a part of this world (without being absorbed by it) and considers the present and its culture as places of theology and the real presence of God. The document is imbued with esteem for the world and its contemporary culture, but it does not overlook the problems of the time.

Everyday living environments are regarded as places where it is possible to meet people and encounter God. The prerequisite for this is a hermeneutics of human environments, i.e. a familiarity with, and realistic perception of, the plurality of human circumstances.

The introductory words of the Constitution state that Church life can only develop if people’s needs, questions and concerns are addressed. This is dealt with in greater detail in subsequent chapters. The charitable mission of the Church, which comprises practical help as well as the advocacy of human rights and fair structures, is deemed to be a cardinal feature of Church activities and is manifested in the Church’s mission of service.

This is reflected in the parable of the Good Samaritan. “Which of these three, do you think, proved himself a neighbour to the man who fell into the bandits’ hands? He replied, ‘The one who showed pity towards him.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go, and do the same yourself.” (Luke 10:36f.) Jesus regards the immediate service of others as an essential expression of faith. Giving people support and enabling them to lead a self-determined, meaningful life is part of Jesus’ mission. This is exactly what happens in the services and facilities run by Caritas. The professional and voluntary workers it employs put Jesus’ mission into practice. They do this as part of the provision of service by the Church.

Throughout history people have consistently recognised the needs of their times and shown initiative and creativity in helping

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Connecting Diakonia

their fellows. This has given rise to countless institutions and services which make it possible to recognise the working of the spirit of God. Thanks to these social institutions and services the Church has been able to reach out to and inspire people down the centuries. For many people even today these institutions and services are places where Christian faith is manifested and convinces others. This is underlined by the Perspektive Deutschland survey conducted in the spring of 2005. At the heart of this Christian witness is not just the practical help provided by the facilities and services, but also the ‘spirit’ shown by those giving attention and care to their fellows. In my view, it is increasingly the case that the employees and those seeking help as well as the whole of the Church itself are in need of reading aids so that they can recognise the practical help given to people as an expression of faith and a place of theology. For it is only in encounters with people and the answers given to their questions that issues of meaning and faith can be discovered. An ecclesial act takes place in these meetings. Those who measure the Church character of an institution or of employees solely by the performance of rituals, as seen from an external perspective, ignore key aspects of what constitutes ecclesiality.

The facilities and services run by the Church’s Caritas organisation are to be found where people live, as is the case with the parishes. Here they come face to face with the consequences of social upheaval and encounter people affected by unemployment and social isolation. The neighbour whom Jesus asked after in the parable of the Good Samaritan therefore may well be the person visiting a social advice centre, even if he or she does not ask any questions about faith or believes in a different religion.

The liturgy and proclamation are fundamental dimensions of Church activity. Marginalising the dimension of charitable work would result in the Church losing contact with many people and the places

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409 Cf. Perspektiven Deutschland. Caritas, together with Diakonie and other organisations such as the German automobile association ADAC, the German Red Cross and Greenpeace, is deemed to be in the ‘Green Zone’. These organisations enjoy a high level of trust among the respondents.
where they live. It would forfeit credibility and persuasiveness and thus its capacity for inner-Church innovation, because it would then operate in a timeless manner and be out of touch with the issues of the day.

Opportunities for a Church with a future

A process of realignment with a greater focus on social welfare work could enable the parishes to re-establish contact with many people. As Alfred Delp said, “We must meet the man in the street on his own ground, in all circumstances, with a view to helping him to master them. That means walking by his side, accompanying him even into the depths of degradation and misery. ‘Go forth’, our Lord said, not ‘sit and wait for someone to come to you’.” 410 Parishes that address social needs in their local area find this approach very useful. The liturgy and proclamation are much truer to life and more stimulating as a result. It is important that charitable work should be seen as a fundamental principle and not a special category of pastoral care. This also entails parishes taking innovative steps, for instance participating in neighbourhood projects or all-day care for children in schools. The forms are many and varied – there are no limits to the imagination.

To this end the Caritas organisation must cooperate closely with the parishes, pastoral care workers, volunteers and all interested parties to generate the requisite momentum.411 Given its close contacts with people in the facilities and services it runs, the Caritas organisation can act as a seismograph and draw attention to people’s needs and problems. The networking of Church services and forms of expression can give the activities of the Church a holistic perspective. In the pericope of the Good Samaritan, Jesus cites the beginning of the Shema Yisrael: “He replied, ‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind’, and then he goes on to add “and your neighbour as yourself.” (Luke 10:27) Hence God’s love is to be manifested through people in every aspect of their being, through their perspective on the


world and their fellow human beings, through their love and practical activities on behalf of others. The way to achieve this is by integrating and networking the Church services.

For the sake of people, therefore, the social welfare services must be treated no differently than other services in the setting of priorities. “For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being.”412 (25) Thus Pope Benedict XVI in his first encyclical Deus Caritas Est.

Surprisingly, the Perspektive Deutschland study in 2005 showed that young Catholics in Germany look forward to the future with the greatest optimism.413 They hope for a decent future and see good prospects for themselves. At the same time they also mention the clear need for change in the Church and society.

With this in mind, it makes sense to see the current challenges as an opportunity to reposition the Church as an ecclesia semper reformanda. The prospect that it is not the future of the Church which is at stake can be both liberating and encouraging. On the contrary, the issue is the future of God with mankind, and the Kingdom of God that has already begun.

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413 51% of the 16 to 29-year-old Catholics with strong links to the Church are among the most satisfied with their current living conditions among the respondents in this age group and most optimistic as regards their expectations of the future. See Mitschke-Collande, Th. v., Perspektive Deutschland. Blicken junge Christen optimistischer in die Zukunft? Sonderauswertung zum Weltjugendtag, 16- bis 29-jährige Katholiken im Profil, Düsseldorf 2005, 13.
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