Reflective Practice of Diaconia from the Margins: Ecclesiological and Professional Implications

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One of the characteristics of the practice of diaconia is working at the margins of society. However, do we fully understand the complexity of the margins in diaconal practices? This paper expands the notion of the margins and look at some of the ecclesiological and professional implications for deacons' work. I argue that there exists a double marginalization, at least for deacons working in the Church of Norway. An analysis of the document "Deacon Ministry in the Church of Norway" indicates that suffering is not placed in the center of the ministry of the church, and neither are the deacons placed in the center. However, if we do a thought experiment and place the margins in the center, what happens then? In this paper, I sketch some ecclesiological and professional implications of this "upside down" experiment. Furthermore, I argue for an expansion of the Church of Norway's definition of diaconia.

Keywords: Deacon, diaconal practice, professional, ecclesiological, margins

1. Introduction

One of the characteristics of the practice of diaconia is working at the margins.[1] However, do we fully understand the complexity of the margins in diaconal practices? This paper expands the notion of the margins and look at some of the ecclesiological and professional implications for deacons' work. I argue that there exists a double marginalization, at least for deacons working in the Church of Norway. Based on my research field[2], the findings of this paper are limited to the Church of Norway. Nevertheless, I think the implications discussed may be relevant to other Lutheran congregations as well. Many people working with diaconia experience a double rhetoric and ambiguous language in their work, and not least in the deacons' professional position within the church.[3] On the one hand, diaconia is said to be an important expression

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1 Wyller, "Compassion between the own and strange," Diaconia. Journal for the Study of Christian Social Practice 1, no. 2 (2010); Olav Helge Angell, "Diakonia, hospitality and welfare," in Diakonia as Christian social practice, ed. Dietrich et al. (Oxford: Regnum, 2014); Rodriguez Nygaard, "Modes of Deacons' Professional Knowledge – Facilitation of the 'Space of Possibilities,'" Diaconia 5, no. 2 (2014).

2 Rodriguez Nygaard, "Caring to know or knowing to care? Knowledge creation and care in deacons' professional practice in the Church of Norway" (2015).

3 Rodriguez Nygaard, "Diakoners profesjonsvilkår i Den norske kirke" Halvårsskrift for praktisk teologi Årg. 28, nr. 2 (2011); Rodriguez Nygaard, "Caring to know or knowing to care? Knowledge creation and care in deacons' professional practice in the Church of Norway" (2015).

of being a trustworthy church.[4] On the other hand, as I elaborate, deacons do not have much authority in church structures or many working positions in congregations.

This paper is based on my trial lecture at the public defense of my PhD on deacons' professional work and knowledge creation in the Church of Norway.[5] The given topic was *Reflective Practice of Diaconia from the Margins: Professional and Ecclesiological Implications.*

The paper proceeds in the following way: First, I address my understanding of the main concepts regarding "Reflective Practice of Diaconia from the Margins." Second, based on an analysis of one of the main documents on deacon ministry in the Church of Norway[6], I argue that there is a double marginalization. Third, I elaborate on the ecclesiological implications of the reflective practice from the margins and, fourth, on the professional implications of the reflective practice from the margins. The document analyzed raises many issues within Lutheran theology. However, I limit myself from going into these issues because my main interest in this paper is to look at the ecclesiological and professional implications of reflective practice from the margins. Furthermore, in the document analyzed, the deacons' role and diaconal work are intermingled, and therefore I do not clearly distinguish between them. The analysis could also have been broadened to compare the deacons' role in what constitutes the church. In the Church of Norway, pastors and bishops effectively constitute the church[7], while in the Church of Sweden, for instance, deacons are also included in the constitution.[8]

2. Reflective Practice of Diaconia from the Margins

When using the term, "*practice of diaconia*," I am referring to two practices, namely, the practice of diaconal work and the science of diaconia that reflects diaconal practices, including empirical findings from my thesis. In other words, I regard both the practice of diaconal work and the science of diaconia as important elements reflecting significant perspectives of those who work with and from the margins.

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4   National Council, Church of Norway plan for diakonia (Oslo: Church of Norway, National Council, 2009).
5   Rodriguez Nygaard, "The Deacon Ministry in the Church of Norway" (2015).
6   "The Deacon Ministry in the Church Ministry Structure" (General Synod 9/2011) (Kirkemøtet 9/2011).
7   (Bispemøte 03/10)
8   Read 19.8.16: https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/biskopsmoten/brev901/bi-pr-d3.htm#E9E3. Unfortunately, there is no room here to go into ecclesiological or professional implications of reflective practice from the margins by comparing the different European national churches.

Further, I rely on a definition of margins that emphasizes margins as the various groups "that social discrimination processes have excluded from the decision-making processes."[9] This definition emphasizes both social discrimination processes and exclusion from decision-making processes.

The focus on processes underlines my view that human beings are relational. In his book *Walking with the Poor,* Myers writes:

> There can be no other meaningful understanding of a person apart from his or her relationships – with God, self, community, those he or she calls "other," and the environment. People as individuals are inseparable from the social system in which they live.[10]

However, it could be said that not everyone has a relationship with God. Nevertheless, I still stick to Myers' definition because of the diaconal recognition that the experienced relationship with God can be deeply important in many peoples' lives.[11]

Further, I want to add that the social systems in which people live are multilayered. The system can be a macrosystem, as seen in political systems, a mesosystem as seen in institutions, or a microsystem, as seen in close relationships. People can be at the margins in one of these systems, but not necessarily in all of them. However, being at the margins in macrosystems often has an impact on all the other levels. For instance, from my office in Ecuador where I worked with diaconia and empowerment in poor areas, the level of marginalization was obviously at the macrolevel in society due to corruption and the neglect of the poor.

The photograph on the right (in Figure 1) shows an area of Oslo that can be seen from the Norwegian School of Theology. It is a view of one of the richest parts of Norway, a country where individuals normally have a high level of influence. However, the deacons, who have worked in these areas, talk about marginalization – but they do so in terms of margins that are often invisible to others, for instance, when living with drug addicts and loneliness. Nevertheless, the pictures illustrate the contrast between being at the periphery with less influence and being in the privileged position of having more influence on one's own life.

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 9 Nissen, "Creating a space for the others. The marginalized as a challange to Diacona and Church – a theological perspective," Diaconia. Journal for the Study of Christian Social Practice 5, no. 1 (2014: 32).

10 Myers, Walking with the poor: principles and practices of transformational development, Rev. and exp. ed. ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2011: 201).

11 Pargament, The psychology of religion and coping: theory, research, practice (New York: Guilford Press, 1997).

Figure 1: Center and periphery. On the left, the view from my office in Ecuador; on the right, the view from the Norwegian School of Theology (Photos: Marianne Rodriguez Nygaard).

2.1 Center and Periphery

If we look at the two pictures together, it is easy to imagine that the notion of a center is implicit to the notion of margins. The pictures show the contrast between the periphery where people are found with less influence on their own situations, and a privileged center that enjoys a high range of influence. However, the language of margins can easily be criticized for creating distance between those who have needs and those who satisfy those needs. To address that critique, I want to establish a link between the two spheres. The link I use is the basic conditions for human life.

2.2 Basic Conditions for Human Life

By basic conditions for human life I mean the five conditions we cannot choose to live without.[12] First, people are vulnerable; second, people are dependent on others; and third, people make mistakes: Relationships are fragile. Fourth, we are limited by death – life has a definitive end. Finally, being cared for by others is also regarded as a basic condition, because we cannot live without it.[13]

Even though these conditions may be more visible in people who are at the margins, these conditions are also basic to *everyone*. Thus, I regard these basic conditions of human life as a boundary object, which can be understood as a link between the margins and the center. Therefore, in my opinion, the mar-

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12 Henriksen and Vetlesen, Nærhet og distanse: grunnlag, verdier og etiske teorier i arbeid med mennesker, 3. utg. ed. (Oslo: Gyldendal akademisk, 2006).

13 Ibid., 77.

gins visualize our true selves. Further, being at the margins reflects the multi-layered position of being human. In some sense, being at the margins means being like all others; everyone can be at the margins in some sense (or at some time). Further, they can be like some others and like no others.[14] Being like no others reflects what is particular in each situation and in the person's life.

2.3 Resources and Possibilities

In my notion of the margins and in the diaconal theories related to the margins, it is crucial to see the margins as resourceful agencies.[15] I return to the notion of recourses in the section about the ecclesiological and professional implications.

To sum up this section about the margins, I understand the margins as individuals and groups that have insufficient influence on their own decision-making processes in the systems they belong to. Furthermore, the margins, or periphery, also include a center. Finally, the basic conditions of human beings represent a link between the margins and the center. I now expand upon the notion of the margins and talk about double marginalization.

3. Double Marginalization

The Church of Norway, like many Christian churches (at least in the West), is currently at a crossroads where it has to decide who or what it would like to be in the future.[16] Many groups within the church are struggling, for instance, pastors who must negotiate their role in a new era. However, as mentioned, in this paper my emphasis is on the role of deacons, because they are the focus of my research.

There is an underrepresentation of parish deacons, with 300 deacons being distributed in over 1260 congregations in the Church of Norway. The church also persists in resisting the inclusion of deacons in the "orders of ordained ministry." Finally, findings from my empirical research on the everyday work done by deacons show that they often experience a low level of cooperation with other staff members.[17]

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14 Lartey, In living color: an intercultural approach to pastoral care and counseling, 2nd ed. ed. (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2003: 34).

15 Myers, Walking with the poor: principles and practices of transformational development: 201. Nordstokke, Liberating diakonia (Trondheim: Tapir akademisk forl., 2011).

16 Ideström, For the sake of the world: Swedish ecclesiology in dialogue with William T. Cavanaugh, vol. 3, Church of Sweden, research series (Eugene, Or: Pickwick Publications, 2010: 125).

17 Rodriguez Nygaard,'Conflicts and care among staff members – Professional knowledge development in the Church of Norway (2014).

In this paper, I am not going to look at the deacons' everyday work as I did in my thesis; rather, I would like to address the question of *how the deacons' role is constituted as lying at the periphery or the center in the document*, "The Deacon Ministry in the Church Ministry Structure" as determined at the "General Synod" (Kirkemøtet) in 2011. However, one can critically add that the reality is far more complex than one document can illustrate. Nevertheless, in my view this document is interesting because it was written by the highest decision-making unit in the Church of Norway. How does the synod reflect upon the deacons' role in this public document? What do they present as their main thoughts regarding the deacon ministry?

I employ the theoretical definition of marginalization previously described and focus on the extent to which deacons have an influence on their own situation in the social system to which they belong.

In the document "The Deacon Ministry in the Church Ministry Structure," the ministry of the deacon is described as independent and necessary. Nevertheless, I find the document demanding, because of its *double rhetoric*. On the one hand, it uses inclusive language; on the other hand, one can detect an excluding rhetoric. In the following discussion I provide some examples from the Introduction of the document, as it addresses the decision-making processes related to the deacons' role in the church. The Introduction also reflects on what is considered periphery and center. I would first like to present a section from the Introduction to the document and then go into it in more detail, sentence by sentence:

> It is gratifying that many years of discussion and dialogue on the interpretation of diaconia in the Church of Norway has found a good solution. The committee feels that the bishops' conference has found a serviceable and positive way of recognizing the deacon's role in the church and congregation. By confirming (fastholde) that the diaconal service is a caritative service, the traditional Norwegian view on diaconia is maintained. At the same time, by emphasizing care, people's suffering is placed at the center of diaconia. This corresponds with the church's calling to preach the Gospel in word and through actions. It is important and valuable for a Lutheran church and for society at large that the church gives weight to the suffering of marginalized groups through a consecrated ministry. In this way, the church is portrayed (profilert) as a diaconal church.[18]

The first quote states that it is gratifying that a good decision has been made. However, the quote does not address whether or not the deacons themselves find the solution good. Moreover, the phrase "*has found* a good solution" may imply that the process is now closed. The long process indicates that this has been a difficult issue.

When I read the sentence "The committee feels that the bishops' conference has found a serviceable and positive way of recognizing the deacon's role in the

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18 (General Synod 9/2011, KM 9/2011).The quote is the author's translation of the Introduction from Norwegian to English.

church and congregation," I became curious about who exactly was present in the committee. In the lists of participants, I found only one deacon out of 21 committee members. Of the 115[19] voting members of the General Synod, there was only one deacon, the same deacon as in the committee. This low representation of deacons is interesting, in particular because the deacons' role in the Church of Norway was the issue at stake. In other words, the deacons find themselves at the periphery of the decision-making processes on the deacons' role in the Church of Norway, whereas the bishops and members at the General Synod lie at the center. Thus, the first sentence only says something about how the General Synod and the Bishops find it acceptable that a good decision has finally been made. In this case, they possessed the power of definition.

In the table below I distinguish between center and periphery and place the bishops and general synod at the center side of the table. I believe there are good reasons to place deacons at the peripheral side of decision-making processes.

Center	Periphery
Bishops	Deacons
General Synod	

Figure 2:   Table of center and periphery found in the introduction to the document "The Deacon Ministry in the Church Ministry Structure"

It is also interesting that the focus is on "recognizing the deacon's role" and not on integrating it. The recognition comes from a center that acknowledges the periphery. Thus, the processes of dialogue and discussion do not refer to interactions with the deacons.

The next sentence "By confirming (fastholde) … " indicates that some people have the power to preserve a reality. The General Synod preserved the reality that diaconia is a caritative reality. Even though the deacons may agree, they are not placed at the center of what should be perceived as diaconia.

The following sentence addresses periphery and center: "At the same time, by emphasizing care, people's suffering is placed in the center of diaconia." The calling from the other's suffering is placed in the center for the deacon and the diaconia, and it is *not* placed in the center of the church. When deacons are placed at the periphery, the people's suffering is also placed at the periphery and at the margins of the church. In Figure 3, I have added diaconia and suffering to the rubric of periphery.

"This corresponds with the Church's calling to preach the Gospel in word and through actions." I return to the dichotomy between word and actions in the next section.

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19 http://www.kirken.no/?event=dolink&famid=170370. Accessed 28 April 2011.

Center	Periphery
Bishops	Deacons
General Synod	**Diaconia**
	Suffering

Figure 3:   The table of center and periphery (continued)

The next quote is: " … the Lutheran church and for society at large that the church gives weight to the *suffering of marginalized* groups through *a consecrated ministry* ." Thus, the church, being the center, defines the suffering of the marginalized, as included in one consecrated ministry. Again, the calling from the margins is placed at the center of one ministry and not of the church as a whole.

Finally, the sentence "In this way, the church is portrayed (profilert) as a diaconal church" refers to the previous sentence that the "church gives weight to the suffering of marginalized groups through a consecrated ministry." In Norwegian, "profilert" may refer to showing something or being known for something. In my opinion, the emphasis lies not on diaconia as an integrated center, but as something that can be used to present the church as diaconal.

In the following section, I look at one sentence from the bishop's conference's[20] suggestion of the deacon's ministry in the church ministry that emphasizes an ecclesiological understanding: "The church is created and renewed by being given the Gospel of Jesus Christ, through word and sacraments … "[21] The center of the creation and recreation of the church is thus described through word and sacraments. Furthermore, "In the Lutheran confession, the pastoral ministry is more than anything based on CA V[22], which speaks of God establishing 'a service of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments.' "[23]

Center	Periphery
Bishops	Deacons
General Synod	Diaconia
Pastors	Suffering
Word	
Sacraments	

Figure 4:   The table of center and periphery (continued)

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20 "Bishop Conference" is "Bispemøtet" in Norwegian. The abbreviation is "BM," and the abbreviation for the quoted meeting document is "BM 03/10"

21 "BM 03/10"

22 Confessio Augustana 5

23 "BM 03/10"

The pastors are placed at the center of what it means to be church because, in a particular way, they can distribute the word and the sacraments. In my view, this sentence fails to reflect the idea that one can learn about the Gospel through, for instance, experiences, emotions, art, and relationships.

As previously mentioned, I would now like to return to the dichotomy between word and actions. In my opinion, the Church of Norway's definition of diaconia also rests on a dichotomy between word and actions: "Diaconia is the caring ministry of the Church. It is the Gospel in action and is expressed through loving your neighbor, creating inclusive communities, caring for creation and struggling for justice."[24]

Center	Periphery
Bishops	Deacons
General Synod	Diaconia
Pastors	Suffering
Word	**Actions**
Sacraments	

Figure 5:   The table of center and periphery (continued)

So, the power of definition regarding the deacon's role belongs to the Bishops, the General Synod, Pastors, Word, and sacrament. Hence, these are constituted as being the center, whereas the periphery consists of deacons, diaconia, suffering, and actions. Crucial in the *logic of center* is the significance of the word. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is mediated through word and sacraments. Therefore, I call the center the *logic of word*, which refers to the Gospel-as-word.[25] The emphasis is on hearing the Gospel. The logic of the periphery focuses on actions, and the Gospel is mediated through actions. Therefore, I call this logic the *logic of actions*.

One can critically ask if this is only one logic, a dichotomous logic? Yes, on the one hand it represents only one logic as a dichotomy. However, I choose to call it two logics because of the very different notions of the Gospel. In the logic of action, the Gospel is mediated not only through what you hear, but through all the senses that are contribute to how you experience the world and of what you do.

Finally, I sum up with the table below. The logic of word lies in the center and the logic of action at the periphery. So, in my point of view, even though the intention is to acknowledge the deacons' role in the Church of Norway, that role is constituted as the periphery in the document analyzed.

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24 *National Council, Church of Norway plan for diakonia.*
25 Myers, Walking with the poor: principles and practices of transformational development (2011: 317).

Logic of word (Center)	Logic of action (Periphery)
Bishops	Deacons
General Synod	Diaconia
Pastors	Suffering
Word	**Actions**
Sacraments	

Figure 6:   The table of "logic of word" and "logic of action"

Nevertheless, I think it is important not to divide the Gospel into separates entities, because I think this mutually reduces *both* sides of the entities. In the following, I suggest a third logic based on empirical findings of the deacons' professional every day work.

4. A Third Logic

The definition of diaconia in the Church of Norway does not correspond to the empirical findings of what actually deacons do. The empirical findings show that the deacons use the word as Bible texts, one of the sacraments (Holy Communion) and actions in their interactions with participants. Thus, they expand the dichotomy of word and actions. By referring to interactions, I introduce a new analytical unit based on interactions and not on the dichotomy between word and actions. By interaction, I mean an analytical unit that places an emphasis on the interchanges *between different agencies.* In this paper, I refer to the interactions between deacons and the people the deacons meet in their work, people who are not colleagues. Further, the analytical unit includes the resources used in the interactions and the consciousness of the purpose of the interactions based on sociocultural theories.[26] The core elements in the sociocultural analytical unit are (1) the subject (the deacons), (2) the mediating resources used between people, and (3) the object, which may represent the purpose of the interactions between the deacons and those the deacons meet in their work. This trialogical analytical unit is illustrated in Figure 7.

Vygotskij claimed that learning, or change, is not a direct relationship between stimulus (S) and response (R) (the dotted line in the triangle to the left in Figure 7), or between the learner (subject or agent) and the content (object).

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26 Vygotskij et al., Mind in society: the development of higher psychological processes (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978); Yrjö Engeström, From teams to knots: Activity-theoretical studies of collaboration and learning at work (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
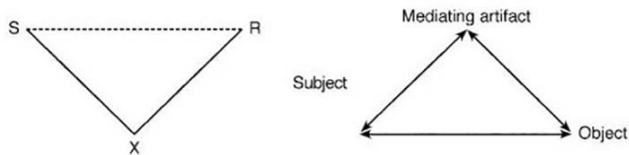
Figure 7:   Illustration of Vygotskij's model of tool mediation and of its common reformulation (Engeström, 2001: 134)

Learning is, however, mediated by tools called artefacts.[27] Artefacts can be materials, symbols, and conceptual resources, such as language.[28] More specifically, tools or resources are important because deacons' interactions and creative processes cannot be analyzed without taking the resources used into consideration. Language is perhaps the most common tool deacons use in their everyday work, but they also use tools such as the Bible, coffee, food, candles, lights, books, emails, and liturgies.[29] Engeström (2005) writes:

> The insertion of artefacts into human actions was revolutionary in that the basic unit of analysis overcame the split between the Cartesian individual and the untouchable societal structure. The individual could no longer be understood without his or her cultural means … [30]

This means that we have to understand the human being in interaction with cultural artefacts. The subject/agent cannot be analytically separated from its tools, but must be understood in the interplay between the agent and the tools.

Therefore, I think that word and actions cannot be separated. Both are often used simultaneously in interactions between people. I argue for a third logic, *the logic of interactions,* and an expanded definition of diaconia based in the empirical findings.[31]

> Diaconia is the caring ministry of the Church. It is the Gospel in *interactions,* and it is expressed through loving your neighbor, creating inclusive communities, caring for creation, and struggling for justice.

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27 Engeström, Expansive learning at work: Toward an activity-theoretical reconceptualisation, Occasional paper / School of Lifelong Education and International Development (London: Institute of Education, University of London, 2001: 134). Vygotskij et al., Mind in society: the development of higher psychological processes: 40.

28 Wertsch, Mind as action (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998: 30–31).

29 Rodriguez Nygaard, "Caring to know or knowing to care? Knowledge creation and care in deacons' professional practice in the Church of Norway" (2015).

30 Engeström and Rückriem, Developmental work research: Expanding activity theory in practice, International Cultural-historical Human Sciences (Berlin: Lehmanns Media, 2005: 60).

31 Rodriguez Nygaard, "Caring to know or knowing to care? Knowledge creation and care in deacons' professional practice in the Church of Norway" (2015).

In the next section, I look at the ecclesiological implications of moving the margins to the center by presenting a thought experiment. What would happen if we turned things upside down and placed the periphery in the center?

5. Ecclesiological Implications of the Margins in the Center

In the following I look at some possible implications of placing the margins at the center of being a church.

5.1 How Does the Church Exist for the Sake of the World?

If the suffering of people is placed in the center of the church, and not only in the center of the deacons' work, new challenges can appear. Thus, a crucial ecclesiological question will emerge: How does the church exist for the sake of the world?[32]

The question is not "How can we preach the Gospel and distribute the sacraments?" or "What can the deacons do for the sake of the world?" Rather than having some sort of static essence, the church is challenged to reflect its identity in the sense of being someone in relationship.[33] If people who suffer are placed at the center, the church can only reflect its identity with respect to the margins. A father can only be a father if he has a child. Likewise, the church can only be a church if it is in relationship with the margins. The church must be identified through its relationships.

I propose that the margins can challenge the church to find new perspectives on what it means to be a church and to develop new possibilities for itself. In particular, I believe the margins can challenge the church because of the often complex situations that break with both the logic of word as the center and the logic of actions at the periphery.

The privileged position of the logic of word is challenged. The tendency to reduce people solely to being cognitive beings, and thus reducing them only to their cognitive functions, fails to correspond to the complexity of life.[34] In addition, it suggests that our cognition is the most important thing to God – instead of our overall existence. To interact with the margins calls for another analytical unit than what is possible with the dichotomy of the word as the center and the actions as the periphery. So how can the Christian faith be *gestalt* for the sake of the world?

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32 Inspired by Jonas Ideström's book title "How does the church exist for the sake of the world?" Ideström, *For the sake of the world: Swedish ecclesiology in dialogue with William T. Cavanaugh*, no. 3 (2010).
33 Sigurdson in ibid., 144.
34 Nicolini, "Practice theory, work, and organization: an introduction" (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

5.2 How to Gestalt the Christian Faith in Interactions with the Margins

Instead of describing the Gospel as word and as signs as separate entities in which the one is prioritized over the other and, consequently, fails to create a good synthesis, I argue that interactions with the margins can inspire another notion of *gestalting* the Gospel. In the theology of liberation, a Christian is described as "a follower of Jesus."[35] Thus, the Christian faith is about following Jesus, "living out the values of the Kingdom of God and generating community transformed by the love of God and others."[36] Here, the *gestalt* of faith is in the verb, following Jesus, and in being transformed by the love.

Thus, the notion of following Jesus and being like Him expresses an embodied, relational, and social gestalt of the Christian faith. The Christian faith is embodily gestaltet in the notion:

> "… the new hands created through His pierced hands, the new feet created through His pierced feet and most of all the new heart created through the pierced heart of Christ."[37]

In line with the logic of interaction, actions cannot be separated from the word, and the mind cannot be separated from the body. This also means that human beings have the possibility of becoming more like Jesus through His salvation. The Gospel is not constituted by dichotomies; rather, it is constituted in relationships to Jesus, following Him, and increasing one's resemblance to Him in interactions with the world. Sigurdson (2010) also argues for this return of the body, and I agree with him when he states:

> The central doctrine of Lutheran theology that the church is a *creatura Verbi*, i.e., a creation of Word as mediated by preaching, this has worked towards an understanding of faith as something that is "inner" in contrast to what is merely "outward." [38]

In contrast to the Gospel as word, I want to propose that a social embodied gestalt of the Gospel may be more credible and have more relevance to the basic conditions of human life. Moreover, it will not be so easy to see the margins as something external to the church; instead, the margins represent an integrated part of what it is to be a church.

To sum up, I think that to gestalt the Christian faith through the embodied notion as we find in liberation theology creates more trustworthy interactions with the margins than "creation of Word as mediated by preaching." However,

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35 Gutiérrez, We drink from our own wells: the spiritual journey of a people, New ed., ed., Beber en su propio pozo (London: SCM Press, 2005: 1).
36 Groody, Globalization, spirituality, and justice: navigating the path to peace, Theology in global perspective series (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2007: 31).
37 *Gutiérrez, We drink from our own wells: the spiritual journey of a people.*
38 Sigurdson in Ideström, For the sake of the world: Swedish ecclesiology in dialogue with William T. Cavanaugh, no. 3 (2010: 129).

is the logic of interaction concerned only with people who suffer in society and not services and sacraments? Below I argue that services and sacraments are also important in the Gospel of interactions. I introduce an example of a service with the margins in the center.

5.3 Service with the Margins at the Center

On the left, we see a picture of a church, Tøyen Kirken, showing the traditional interior of the church building with an altar in front and benches for church attendees.

Figure 8:   Pictures of Tøyen kirken, Oslo. On the left, an official picture from 1969[40], and on the right, the same church today (Photo: Andreas Kiil).

In the picture on the right, we see another ordering of the materiality in the same church. The church benches are placed to the side, and in the middle of the floor we find a space for collective prayer, normally with a microphone for praying. The center is moved from the front to a place where every person during the service is invited to pray and light candles. When I observed the service, peoples' stories expressed through prayers became the center of the liturgy.

In this case, the interaction with people at the margins and the facilitation of a center for interaction emphasizes how materiality can move the margins

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40 Accessed 23 August 2016:
    http://oslobilder.no/search?searchstring=%22T%C3%B8yenkirken%22
    (official pictures of Oslo).

to the center. The pastors are the leaders of the services, but by their placement of the materiality the center is opened for people at the margins. As such, the center becomes a place for *collective interaction.*

Figure 9: After the praying session – the center of the church room with lit candles (Photo: Carl Petter Opsahl).

The praying space combines materiality in the form of candles, flowers, stones as a symbol of the streets, and a microphone; thus, it embodies the mundane, sometimes difficult aspects of life. The center, the praying place, facilitates people's need to share their needs, and the earlier mentioned *basic conditions of life emerge.* Moreover, as previously mentioned, the sacraments are also important.

5.4 What About the Sacraments?

In this section, I mention only that the sacrament of Holy Communion is used in the interactions with people at the margins. The picture in Figure 10 is from a home visit were a deacon visited a man who was struggling emotionally. In the third article of my dissertation[41], I describe some patterns in the deacons' work in interactions with the margins. I do not go further into this now. Instead, I want to sum up by drawing some parallels to Tron Fagermoen's notion of the Pilgrim Church.[42]

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41 Rodriguez Nygaard, "Modes of Deacons' Professional Knowledge – Facilitation of the 'Space of Possibilities'." Published in *Diaconia* 5, no. 2 (2014).

42 Fagermoen in Engedal, Fagermoen, and Sandsmark, Trosopplæring for alle?: læring, tro og sårbare unge, vol. 9, Prismet bok (Oslo: IKO-forl., 2015).

Figure 10:   Picture from a home visit with Holy Communion, reconstructed (Photo: Marianne Rodriguez Nygaard).[43]

5.5 Ecclesiological Notion: The Pilgrim Church

The Pilgrim Church is understood as a social body in motion. This corresponds with the notion of a relational church and an embodied gestalt of "following Jesus."[44] Fagermoen[45] writes about this ecclesiological perspective as it relates to Christian education and vulnerable youths. However, in my opinion, this notion of church is relevant to other people from the margins as well. First, because being in motion facilitates change in the interactions with new experiences and new contexts. Thus, the church must be seen more as a social body that is in the act of becoming than as a static entity.[46] Second, because the ecclesiological view is combined with the emphasis of creating new knowledge in interactions with the environment[47], and, I argue, with the needs and resources of the margins.

At this intersection the church becomes a church of interactions. However, the Gospel as interaction is demanding, because the church will be *constantly*

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43 The same picture is presented in Rodriguez Nygaard, "Modes of Deacons' Professional Knowledge – Facilitation of the 'Space of Possibilities.'" Diaconia 5, no. 2 (2014).
44 Engedal, Fagermoen, and Sandsmark, Trosopplæring for alle?: læring, tro og sårbare unge (2015: 49).
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.

disturbed by new and complex challenges. However, without interacting with the margins, the church may be too focused on its own inner discussions and make itself irrelevant to people. Interactions with the margins reveal basic human needs and therefore more of our true selves.

To summarize the ecclesiological implications of the margins in the center, let me say the following: A church that exists for the sake of the world may be identified by the way in which it interacts with the margins and by the way it embodies the gestalt of the Gospel that unifies the Gospel as word and the Gospel as sign. In addition, this type of church facilitates for the margins a center for interactions in its services and in the distribution of the sacraments. Moreover, as a pilgrim church the church is a social body in motion in its interactions with new experiences and contexts.

6. Professional Implications

In this last section I discuss the professional implications of my previous argument, with an emphasis on deacons within the three logics: the logic of word, the logic of action, and the logic of interactions.

6.1 The Logic of Word

I propose that it is important for each profession within the church to be aware of its own logic as well as other professionals' logics of the Gospel. As previously argued, the notion of Gospel as word represents a reductionist view of the human being, which does not include social and embodied realities. Rather, it reduces people to only being thinking creatures. The call from the margins represents the often complex challenges of human life and needs.

The logic of word not only has professional implications for deacons as not being fully included, it also may reduce the pastors' ministry and the church as a whole. By creating parallel systems of the Gospel that in reality do not result in a successful synthesis, it presents a challenge to the interprofessional work of the church. Thus, a professional implication is that we should work using a notion of the Gospel that offers more awareness of the different logics. This challenges the practice fields, the education of church professions, the research practices of diaconia and theology. In all of these fields, the analytical emphasis on the different logics may help clarify a hidden argumentation within the parallel systems of the Gospel.

However, to a greater extent, pastors hold a centralized power position in the church, so that their work has more influence on others.[48] They are the

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48 As mentioned, deacons are almost not represented in organizations that have the power to define their role in the church structure.

owners of the logic of word: "Power produces knowledge, and knowledge produces power."[49] Therefore, much of the scientific knowledge used in theological and diaconal education is produced by holders of the logic of word. An important implication is thus that deacons themselves should research their own professional practices. However, at least in Norway, only recently has it become possible for deacons to complete a PhD. By conducting their own research, deacons could establish more influence on and provide more relevant knowledge for the church's diaconal practices and for the education of church professions.

Moreover, church documents describe both the pastors and deacons' ministry as being *independent*. In fact, I do not think anyone is independent. Independence is a notion that breaks with the basic conditions of human life. Thus, another professional implication may be an increased emphasis on the *interprofessional cooperation* in education, work, and research.

6.2 The Logic of Action

Based on my empirical findings, then, I suggest expanding the definition of diaconia from "the Gospel in action" to "the Gospel in interaction." Recourses that we use "in actions usually combine the material and the conceptual."[50] As mentioned, language is one of the most widely used recourses in deacons' professional work.[51] Thus, diaconal work cannot be reduced to the logic of action. The professional practice of deacons is characterized as a relational agency[52] that combines actions and language in interactions with people. Reducing diaconal work to "actions" contributes to the under-communication of deacons' professional language. In addition, it under-communicates the complexity of interactions. Many may find the clear division between actions and language to be rather unprofessional.[53] Thus, why continue with this simplified notion of the Gospel and of church professions? If the empirical findings of diaconia

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49 Flyvbjerg, Making social science matter: Why social inquiry fails and how it can succeed again (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010: 132).
50 Edwards, Being an expert professional practitioner: The relational turn in expertise (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010: 6).
51 Rodriguez Nygaard, "Caring to know or knowing to care? Knowledge creation and care in deacons' professional practice in the Church of Norway" (2015).
52 Edwards, Being an expert professional practitioner: The relational turn in expertise (2012).
53 Engeström, From teams to knots: Activity-theoretical studies of collaboration and learning at work (2008); Kirkengen, Hvordan krenkede barn blir syke voksne, 2. utg. ed. (Oslo: Universitetsforl., 2009); Edwards, Being an expert professional practitioner: The relational turn in expertise (2005); Edwards and Daniels, "The knowledge that matters in professional practices," Journal of Education and Work 25:1 (2012); Nerland, "Professions as knowledge cultures," in Professional Learning in the Knowledge Society. The Knowledge Economy and Education, ed. Lahn, Nerland, and Jensen (Dordrecht: Springer, 2012).

as interaction[54] are taken seriously, this will have implications for the notion of diaconia and the language used in church documents, literature, practice and education.

6.3 The Logic of Interactions

Deacons are placed at the periphery with the argument of the logic of word and the argument of the logic of action. However, empirically, the deacons expand this by adding the logic of interaction. Professions are constituted through their specific ways of engaging with knowledge.[55] Expanding the notion of the deacons' forms of *knowledge in use* and *professional practice*, as I do with the logic of interaction, challenges the previous collective models of knowledge about deacons and diaconia.

Consequently, the relational analytical unit as interactions *between* people should be emphasized more. This is already being done in contemporary research on professional practices[56], which focuses on the above-mentioned relational turn in expertise.[57] The relational turn in the research of professional practices may cause a shift in the unsuccessful division of words and actions in some theological approaches. As pointed out in this article, "conventional Christian theologies have sometimes ignored relational ideas and language."[58]

The lack of relational ideas and language in theological approaches hinders deacons' professional knowledge and practice from being understood, expressed, and made visible to others. The relational approach is a core element in diaconal practice. For instance, God is often described in terms of love – a description that is relational in nature.[59] Therefore, I argue that the logic of interaction is more in line with the empirical research on deacons' work and the relational turn in professional practice.[60] Thus, an important professional

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54 Rodriguez Nygaard, "Caring to know or knowing to care? Knowledge creation and care in deacons' professional practice in the Church of Norway" (2015).

55 Nerland, "Professions as knowledge cultures" (2012).

56 Engeström, From teams to knots: Activity-theoretical studies of collaboration and learning at work (2008); Edwards, Being an expert professional practitioner: The relational turn in expertise; Edwards and Daniels, "The knowledge that matters in professional practices" (2012); Nerland, "Professions as knowledge cultures" (2010).

57 Edwards, "Relational agency: Learning to be a resourceful practitioner", International Journal of Educational Research 43(2005); Edwards, Being an expert professional practitioner: The relational turn in expertise.

58 Oord, "Introduction," in Relational Theology A Contemporary Introduction ed. B Montgomery, T Jay Oord, and K Winslow (Oregon: Wipf & Stock. An Imprint of WIPF and STOCK Publishers, 2012: 1).

59 Thompson, "God with Us: Reading Scripture (Relationally) as the Church," in Relational Theoloy A Contemporary Introduction, ed. Montgomery, Oord, and Winslow (Oregon: WIPF & STOCK. An Imprint of WIPF and STOCK Publishers, 2012: 58).

60 Rodriguez Nygaard, "Caring to know or knowing to care? Knowledge creation and care in deacons' professional practice in the Church of Norwa." (2015).

implication is being more aware and using the analytical unit of interactions instead of the unsuccessful parallel systems of the logic of word and the logic of action.

7. Conclusion

Based on the reflective practice of diaconia from the margins, I have identified two logics: the logic of word and the logic of action. However, the empirical findings of deacons' work expand these logics, and the logic of interaction is introduced. I argue for an expanded definition of diaconia. Diaconia and deacons cannot be reduced to actions. Interestingly, in the document analyzed in this research, people's suffering was not placed at the center of the church's attention. The ecclesiological implication of moving the margins to the center of the church means establishing a church that interacts with a complex reality. Some of the professional implications of this include emphasizing interprofessional collaboration, increasing the awareness of different types of logics, and using the analytical unit of interactions instead of the unsuccessful parallel systems of the logic of word and the logic of action.

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