

Christine Hall

## THE MINISTRY OF THE DEACON: ECCLESIOLOGICAL EXPLORATIONS

Readers of *The Ministry of the Deacon, vol. 1: Anglican-Lutheran Perspectives*<sup>1</sup> will know that it contained a comparative review of the history, theological basis and development, in policies and practice, of the deacon's ministry in the Church of England, Church of Norway, Church of Sweden and Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland<sup>2</sup>, undertaken as part of phase 1 of the Anglo-Nordic Diaconal Research Project (ANDREP) and using an agreed inventory template<sup>3</sup>. The volume also contained a study of the diaconate as an escalating ecumenical phenomenon, which has featured in many reports and ecumenical agreements.<sup>4</sup> The diaconate emerged from the ensemble of the research undertaken as a ministry integral to the nature of the Church, and its ability to transcend divisions was identified as one of the most important sources of ecumenical potential today.

<sup>1</sup> Borgegård, G. and Hall, C (eds.), *The Ministry of the Deacon, vol. 1: Anglican-Lutheran Perspectives*, Uppsala 1999, hereafter referred to as MOD1.

<sup>2</sup> Authors were: Sven-Erik Brodd (Sweden), Christine Hall (England), Roar Meland (Norway), and Terttu Pohjolainen (Finland).

<sup>3</sup> See MOD1, pp. 248–250 for details of the template.

<sup>4</sup> Brodd, Sven-Erik, MOD1, pp. 11–48. See also pp. 260–262 for reports and ecumenical agreements (1963–1998) featuring the diaconate and listed chronologically, and pp. 252–259 for a substantial bibliography of books and articles, listed by language of publication.

The aim and methods of ANDREP were also set out in volume 1, and readers who wish to see the whole picture from the start are referred there.<sup>5</sup> The purpose of this short introductory paper is to explain that *The Ministry of the Deacon, vol.2: Ecclesiological Explorations* is part of the work of phase 2 of the project and it picks up a series of themes and problem areas, which were identified as requiring more research in phase 1.<sup>6</sup> It has become evident that the historical events of the nineteenth century, which were so influential in the development of diaconal work and deacons' ministry in various parts of Europe, need to be better understood, in order for accurate theological conclusions to be drawn about the views and motives of influential figures such as Fliedner and Wichern. Consequently, this volume begins with Olav Fanuelsen's exploration of some of the historical issues<sup>7</sup>. This leads naturally into Sven-Erik Brodd's detailed examination of the terms *caritas* and *diakonia*,<sup>8</sup> whose history and usage require considerable disentanglement. Throughout the research undertaken for ANDREP, the need for a theological model that brings together the deacon's liturgical and social ministry has become more and more evident. Christine Hall's paper attempts such a model on the basis of the language of sign and instrument of the Kingdom of God.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See Hall, C., *Researching the Diaconate: an Anglo-Nordic Project (1997-2002)*.

<sup>6</sup> See MOD1, pp. 56-57.

<sup>7</sup> See below: *Some Historical Aspects on the Renewal of the Diaconate*.

<sup>8</sup> See below: *Caritas and Diakonia as perspectives on the Diaconate*.

<sup>9</sup> See below: *The Socio-Liturgical Axis of the Deacon's Ministry: Sign and Instrument of the Kingdom of God*.

Three further areas of the deacon's ministry were identified as requiring further exploration at the end of phase 1 of ANDREP. These were, first, the role of the deacon as a voice of prophecy and challenge, effecting transformation and change within the life of the Church in its social context. Kjell Nordstokke has reflected on this, including, *inter alia*, some of the important perspectives offered by liberation theology.<sup>10</sup> Secondly, Ninni Smedberg draws on a number of significant recent writings on spirituality and also on the experience of deacons, to highlight the potential and the problems that present themselves in any attempt to identify a spirituality for deacons. This is one of the most difficult areas of research, from which, however, a pattern seems to be emerging, which promises to open the way for a better understanding of the place of deacons in the life of the Church, whilst at the same time challenging the churches to review their responsibilities towards them. Thirdly, Olav Fanuelsen examines the education and formation programmes for deacons, as they currently exist in the Nordic Churches of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland, and the Church of England and raises important issues about diaconal identity and professionalism and their bearing on the kind of curriculum that is required for deacons' education.

Finally, the research of ANDREP phase 1 led to the conclusion that 'the nature of the Church is the proper starting point for the search for a better understanding of the diaconate'<sup>11</sup> and in

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<sup>10</sup> See below: The Diaconate: Ministry of Prophecy and Transformation.

<sup>11</sup> Hall, C., *Researching the Diaconate*, in MOD1, p.56.



the work undertaken in phase 2, the existence of ecclesiology as a thread running through every other subject area continued to be apparent. This volume thus concludes with two studies of a specifically ecclesiological nature, one, by Risto Ahonen, from a Lutheran<sup>12</sup> perspective and the second, by Robert Hannaford, from an Anglican<sup>13</sup> perspective. These deal with important matters such as the nature of ministry, the way in which ministries relate to each other and the changing position of the Church in the modern world, with its serious implications for mission and for the apostolic ministry of deacons.

Although the ANDREP researchers have not confined themselves only to the Porvoo Communion, they have continued to bear in mind, as they did in phase 1,<sup>14</sup> that they are all members of Porvoo Churches, which have committed themselves to coming to a common understanding on diaconal ministry. The survey with which ANDREP began has led to this present collection of ecclesiological explorations, which already manifest in many areas a growing convergence of understanding. There are a number of proposals in the papers below for further work to promote greater common understanding, and the reader is asked to be attentive to these and to respond, where possible. In phase 3 of ANDREP, which is due for completion in 2002, the research team intends to examine the ecumenical implications for the churches of the research results. Areas likely to be

<sup>12</sup> See below: The Diaconate and Ecclesiology.

<sup>13</sup> See below: The Representative and Relational Nature of Ministry and the Renewal of the Diaconate.

<sup>14</sup> MOD1, p.53 refers.

included in this examination are: recognition of ministry, three-fold ministry, ordination and ordinals; the implications of worldwide Anglican-Lutheran bilateral dialogues; ecumenical insights and statements as they impact on the deliberations and decisions of national committees on the diaconate, and the issues raised by identified convergences and differences, particularly in relation to the identity and *proprium* of the deacon, the spirituality and formation of deacons.

The Members of the Editorial Committee for this volume were Gunnel Borgegård, Olav Fanuelson, Christine Hall and Ninni Smedberg. All the papers were presented at a plenary meeting in Farfa Sabina, Rome, in autumn 1999 and the findings, after further work, were discussed at Worth Abbey, England, in autumn 2000. Whilst the papers here published are the work of those who have signed them, the authors are grateful to each other and to the following colleagues for their comments and/or contributions to ANDREP working sessions: Gunnel Borgegård, John N. Collins, Revd Paul McPartlan, Deacon Roar Meland, Deaconess Terttu Pohjolainen, Bishop Geoffrey Rowell, Deacon Rebecca Swyer.