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THE LITURGICAL-SOCIAL AXIS OF  
THE DEACON'S MINISTRY: SIGN AND  
INSTRUMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

This paper seeks to present a theological model of the deacon's ministry, on the basis of the language of sign and instrument of the Kingdom of God. It does so by exploring the interface between the deacon's liturgical ministry and the ministry of social engagement. These form, it is suggested, an axis around which the theological significance of the deacon's ministry turns, and a central core, which indicates that the *locus* of the deacon is at the fulcrum where Church and Kingdom intersect. In other words, in the liturgical actions of the deacon at the Eucharist, itself the foretaste of things to come, the integration of the present with the eschatological perspective is revealed. Here also the needs of the marginalized and the disempowered, the 'poor' in all senses of that word, which are encountered in the ministry of social engagement are brought into the centre of the Church's life, to challenge its prevailing values and priorities. Keeping life now and end-time together in both these forms of ministry, the figure of the deacon relativises all separations, unifying them within the eschatological hope of the fulfilment of all things in Christ.

Research and writing on the diaconate has tended to treat separately the liturgical ministry and the ministry of social engagement which the deacon exercises, though in some churches where the ministry of social engagement is strong, for example in the Churches of Norway and Sweden, a basic link between that and diaconal liturgical ministry has in practice begun to be acknowledged. Moreover, when the practices of the early Church are studied, a clear link may be observed between service at the Lord's table and service at the tables of the poor<sup>1</sup>. However, there is no explicitly stated consensus among the churches today about the deeper theological significance inherent in that link.

In the work undertaken in phase 1 of the Anglo-Nordic Diaconal Research Project (ANDREP) and published in September 1999,<sup>2</sup> the researchers worked to an agreed inventory template in constructing a comparison of the deacon's ministry in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland, the Church of Norway, the Church of Sweden and the Church of England. This template<sup>3</sup> required the gathering of preliminary data about the liturgical work of the deacon in those Churches. Such data was needed at the outset, because little had been published on the deacon's liturgical ministry. It was thought that this might be one of the areas of greatest divergence between the four churches and that much more research in this area would need to be done, some of it in phase 2 of the Project.

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Pinnock, J., *The History of the Diaconate*, in Hall, C. (ed.), *The Deacon's Ministry*, Leominster 1991, pp. 9-23.

<sup>2</sup> Borgegård, G. and Hall C. (eds.), *The Ministry of the Deacon, vol. 1 Anglican-Lutheran Perspectives*, Uppsala, 1999. Hereafter, this work is referred to as MOD1.

<sup>3</sup> See MOD1, Appendix A, pp. 248-250 for template details.

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What is written here represents, and should be read as, a starting point of that further research, in an area that is ripe for much deeper joint exploration. The purpose of this paper is to build on the general picture that has already emerged in the first stages of research, though not with the aim of achieving a more detailed measurement of the extent and type of liturgical ministry undertaken by deacons in the four churches. Rather the aim is two-fold: a) to explore the theological significance of the deacon's liturgical ministry, drawing on historical and contemporary practice in representative parts of the universal church, and b) to try to interpret the sign which is given when diaconal liturgical ministry and the more widely practised ministry of social engagement are seen to be integrated.

### ANDREP PHASE 1: FINDINGS RELEVANT TO THIS PAPER

In relation to liturgy and to social engagement, research in ANDREP phase 1 indicated that the deacons in the Nordic Churches were not only more active in the social context than their Church of England counterparts but that they were required to have a prior professional qualification in social work or in nursing or, in some cases, in teaching, before embarking on their specifically diaconal education. By comparison, though a small number of them did happen to be social workers, the deacons of the Church of England came from a very wide variety of backgrounds. Their social engagement was, for the most part, of an enabling and more indirect kind than that of the Nordic

professional social worker-deacon. The question arose and has again been posed in this volume as to whether the deacons of the Church of England have enough preparation for the social situations with which they deal, since their formation programmes are, in Nordic terms, much more like those of priests.<sup>4</sup>

ANDREP Phase 1 research also revealed that the least amount of diaconal involvement in liturgy was probably to be found in Finland, though the picture was by no means consistent in any of the Churches surveyed. The Swedish statistics revealed a greater involvement of deacons in liturgy than had been expected from previous anecdotal evidence available.<sup>5</sup>

The following picture emerged of the deacon's liturgical ministry in the four churches researched:

### The Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF)

In the Finnish situation, it was established that many deacons are not employed by parishes and do not have close ties with a particular parish,<sup>6</sup> in which they might naturally exercise a liturgical ministry. The ELCF's current guidelines on the diaconate list the deacon's duties in eight categories, none of which mentions liturgy.<sup>7</sup> The social work undertaken by deacons is 'very challenging and wide-ranging' and that makes it 'difficult

<sup>4</sup> See Fanuelsen O, *The Education of Deacons in the Nordic Churches and in the Church of England*, pp. 175-206 above/below, where these issues are discussed in more detail.

<sup>5</sup> pp. 78-79 below and note 20.

<sup>6</sup> Pohjolainen, T, in MOD1, pp. 151-152.

<sup>7</sup> MOD1, pp. 158-159.

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for them to concentrate on what should be at the heart of their life as deacons: on the functions of the deacon, in worship and spiritual care, which secular nurses or social workers do not undertake.<sup>8</sup> Although this statement obviously covers worship in a wider area than the strictly 'liturgical', the point is nevertheless made that social engagement dominates in the Finnish deacon's profile, whether the deacon's professional qualification prior to becoming a deacon is in nursing or in social work.

Finnish practice might thus seem to indicate that no great significance is attached to liturgical ministry for deacons. However, the report of a Ministry Committee set up in the mid-1970s by the National Synod emphasized that 'there should be no ministry in the church which does not have a function in the church's worship'.<sup>9</sup> An officially commissioned study completed in 1991 by Risto Ahonen concluded that 'the diaconate is both an essential part of the one ministry of the church and an independent, lifelong vocation with its own special ministry within the church.' Whilst the diaconate's principal area of responsibility was described as that of 'loving service', the study also emphasised that this service 'should always be closely connected with divine worship and the Holy Communion. Its ministry proceeds from the altar and always returns there'.<sup>10</sup>

These two clear statements, fifteen years apart, have quite evidently not yet led to the widespread development of a

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<sup>8</sup> MODI, p. 162.

<sup>9</sup> MODI, p. 168, and footnote 25.

<sup>10</sup> MODI, p. 169 and footnote 27.

liturgical ministry for deacons, though they are said to be taking 'an increasingly active part in worship in local parishes, for instance by assisting in the distribution of Holy Communion'.<sup>11</sup> Planning worship with pastors for special days such as *Diakonia Sunday*, preaching, reading the Gospel and acting as intercessors at the Eucharist, were also identified as duties that, in recent years, some deacons have on occasion, been asked to undertake. There are no regulations to enable them to take extended Communion to the sick and housebound among whom they minister.<sup>12</sup> Features of the traditional liturgical ministry of the deacon are thus beginning to appear. However, there is still overall ambiguity and uncertainty in ELCF about whether the diaconate is an ordained ministry or not, and this cannot help but impede a full development of the deacon's liturgical ministry, despite the fact that this ministry has more than once been clearly recognised as important.

The situation is still far from resolved. The 1997 report of the ELCF Diaconate Committee, set up in 1994, defined the basic tasks of the deacon as 'essentially charitable, catechetical and liturgical', but the implementation of this report has still to be agreed. A synodical response was expected in November 1999, but the National Synod decided only in January 2000 how to continue the process of discussion about the diaconate. It came to no definitive position on the question of deacons' ordination, taking the compromise route of electing a new Diaconate Committee of 11 members to serve until 2002.

<sup>11</sup> MOD1, p. 171.

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In the meantime, deacons maintain that 'spirituality gives their work its reason and meaning',<sup>13</sup> and they see that 'the renewal of the diaconate would provide a stronger spiritual identity for them.'<sup>14</sup> It is difficult to see how the deacon's spiritual identity could be strengthened in the absence of a more developed public liturgical ministry.

### The Church of Norway

The Church of Norway has guidelines for the liturgical ministry of deacons, though this need not necessarily mean that they are consistently followed. In Norway, as in Finland, there is ambiguity about whether the deacon is ordained or not.<sup>15</sup> The Norwegian Church's Qualification Requirements and Service Arrangements for deacons include among the deacon's duties 'liturgical functions in the church services and at the Occasional Offices' and 'visiting people at home with the Sacrament of Holy Communion'.<sup>16</sup> It was made clear in 1996, when the General Synod of the Church of Norway agreed these tasks, that 'visiting people at home with the Sacrament of Holy Communion' meant that 'the deacon should consecrate the elements at the person's home', and, in the guidelines for the deacon in the liturgy,<sup>17</sup> it is laid down that the deacon 'must use the prescribed liturgy for such an occasion'.<sup>18</sup> This is a practice that is unique

<sup>13</sup> MOD I, pp. 173-174.

<sup>14</sup> MOD I, p. 177.

<sup>15</sup> MOD I, pp. 84-85.

<sup>16</sup> MOD I, p. 75.

<sup>17</sup> See Section 2 of the Qualification Requirements and Service Arrangements.

<sup>18</sup> MOD I, p. 76, footnote 17.

to the Church of Norway, where the view is however also taken that the Holy Communion should be distributed to the sick from the Eucharist celebrated in church. The liturgical guidelines also indicate that

the deacon has duties in the preparation of the High Mass (the service held every Sunday at 11 a.m., with the Holy Communion) and of other services, with a special responsibility to arrange for fellowship (*koinonia*) and the participation of all visitors in the service. The deacon has special responsibility for the diaconal dimension in preaching, and is authorised to preach, especially in services where diaconal tasks are emphasised. The deacon ought to take part in the preparation of the intercessions regularly, and may lead them. In the Holy Communion, the deacon assists the pastor.<sup>19</sup>

As with Finland, the picture in the Church of Norway is that early Church forms of the deacon's liturgical ministry are emerging, though again practice is not consistent throughout the Church.

### The Church of Sweden

Since the 1980s, deacons of the Church of Sweden have become more and more liturgically active.

A greater awareness of the relationship between the diaconate and the Eucharist has led to deacons being active in the Mass. In 90% of the parishes which have

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a deacon, 90% today take part as deacons in the eucharistic liturgy, 60% are vested in alb and stole, and sometimes the dalmatic, or alternatively, in the case of women deacons, wearing the deaconess habit. 80% distribute the Holy Communion. In the Mass, deacons read the Gospel, lead the prayers of the church and administer the chalice.<sup>20</sup>

The above suggests that deacons have a significant level of liturgical involvement, based on recognition of the link between the diaconate and the Eucharist. However, there is not overall consistency of practice. Moreover, the deacon's liturgical ministry is not covered in the canon law or in liturgical rubrics and it continues to be a matter for debate. As in England, it was noted that 'one of the main arguments advanced against the liturgical ministry of the deacon is that deacons deprive the laity of their activities in the Mass'.<sup>21</sup>

### The Church of England

The survey undertaken in the Church of England, as part of ANDREP Phase 1, revealed that deacons spent 20.3% of their time on liturgical duties<sup>22</sup>, which would be likely to include mainly the Eucharist, extended Communion, the offices of Morning and Evening Prayer, marriages and funerals. As provided by the canon law, deacons may also baptise when there is no priest available. Unlike the Nordic situation, all ordained

<sup>20</sup> MOD1, p. 114.

<sup>21</sup> MOD1, p. 114.

<sup>22</sup> By comparison they spent 29.3% on pastoral work, 21.4% on education, 14.1% on social action and 14.9% on other duties. See MOD1, p.209.

ministers in the Church of England are ordained first to the diaconate, and priests consequently have a tendency to claim that, as they are still deacons, they may take the deacon's liturgical ministry as their role in the Eucharist, particularly if another priest is presiding.

The survey indicated that, at parish level, understanding of the deacon's liturgical ministry varied widely, depending largely on churchmanship, availability of role models, and on the willingness of the parish priest to learn and to educate. There was still resistance to allowing the deacon to exercise an appropriate liturgical ministry, on the grounds that this deprives the laity of their liturgical involvement. However, there would not appear to be any specific reliable evidence to support this claim.

Where the liturgical ministry of the deacon is encouraged in the Church of England, it is usually organised along the traditional pattern, much of which originated in the early Church, and which is also to be found in the contemporary Roman Catholic Church<sup>23</sup> and in other parts of the Anglican Communion, for example the Episcopal Church of the USA (ECUSA).<sup>24</sup>

### Other Ecumenical Comparisons

On the wider ecumenical scale, and by comparison with the above findings, it may be interesting to note briefly in passing that when the diaconate was restored in the Roman Catholic

<sup>23</sup> See Kwatera, M., *The Liturgical Ministry of Deacons*, Collegeville 1985.

<sup>24</sup> See Plater, O., *Deacons in the Liturgy*, Harrisburg, 1992.

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Church after the Second Vatican Council, the liturgical ministry assigned to the deacon was that which had already been developed throughout the Christian tradition, but, for the most part, with an emphasis on the deacon as assistant to the priest, both in liturgy and pastoral practice, which was more characteristic of later, *post cursum honorum* developments than of the independent order of deacon in the early Church. The model of 'assistant to the priest' appears to be the predominant one in the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales, and though the Vatican has issued a *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons*, there has not been any ecumenical dialogue about the theology that underpins the deacon's ministry. In other European countries, for example in France, a much more varied ministry outside the parochial boundaries, seems to be given to the deacon.<sup>25</sup> In parishes and other places where deacons are used liturgically in the Church of England, practice often differs little from the Roman model, with the same over-emphasis on the deacon as a 'priest's assistant', an emphasis which is also carried through into other aspects of the deacon's ministry. In this situation too there is a need to vary the type of the deacon's ministry and its relationship to that of the priest. Although there are useful ecumenical comparisons, which might have been made to facilitate it, the Church of England has yet

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<sup>25</sup> Evidence suggests that bishops are closely involved in what deacons are assigned to do and that they issue *lettres de mission* to deacons who are engaged in social ministry through their secular work, for example, in prison ministry or industrial chaplaincy work. One bishop at least is known to regard this ministry as that of the whole Church and to ask for an annual report from deacons, so that what they are doing may be known and supported by the church community.

Source: unpublished material collected by Deacon Allan Veness, when on a field visit to the Diocese of Chartres, 1997.

to establish an agreed practice. This is no easy matter, partly because the canon law does not cover the liturgical ministry of the deacon and partly because rubrics have been weak or non-existent on this matter.

### DEVELOPMENTS SINCE THE CONCLUSION OF ANDREP PHASE 1

The picture which initially emerged from all the four churches researched between 1997 and 1999 suggested that deacons are required, as much by default as by the churches' definite intention, to live disjointed lives, that is, the sign they embody is not allowed full expression in an integrated ministry of liturgy and social engagement. Clear theological statements, such as those made in Finland, about the place which every ministry must have in the Eucharist, still do not translate into practice for ELCF deacons, who now face two more years of uncertainty whilst yet another working party examines their position in relation to order, church law, education and training. This discussion is further complicated by the fact that a separate working party, due to report in May 2001, has been set up to examine ELCF ordinals. It is an open question whether this working party will decide that the diaconate is part of the ordained ministry and provide an ordinal accordingly. It will report before the new committee on the diaconate does and potentially, therefore, there is presumably the possibility that it might pre-empt a positive decision in 2002 on the ordination of deacons.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> NB The Church of Sweden had a similarly long discussion process between 1948 and 1999, during which a revised ordinal (1987) preceded the eventual inclusion of the diaconate in the new Church Ordinance of 1999.

Agreed regulations on liturgy, such as those which the Church of Norway has, do not necessarily originate from, or automatically lead to, a holistic approach to the deacon's liturgical ministry, as every liturgical point may still be argued as if it bore no relationship to any other.<sup>27</sup> In the Church of Sweden, where the liturgical ministry of the deacon has not been the subject of regulation, what is not forbidden is practised, and oral evidence suggests that priests and, more importantly, parishes are increasingly accepting and furthering the deacon's liturgical ministry. Whatever the current areas of lack of clarity and inconsistency of practice, in Finland, Norway and Sweden, taken together, a movement of convergence towards a more holistic view of liturgical and social ministry is discernible.

The question has to be asked whether, in theology or practice, the Church of England is moving in the same direction on diaconal liturgy as the Nordic members of the Porvoo Communion. There are a number of factors that may or may not ultimately answer this question. First, a new collection of service books and resources, entitled *Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England* is being introduced.<sup>28</sup> The *General Notes*, which precede the new *Order for the Celebration of Holy Communion*, and the rubrics of the rite do not deal clearly and unambiguously with the deacon's liturgical

<sup>27</sup> This is the case, for example, on the question of whether Norwegian deacons should wear the diaconal stole. Twice authorized by the Synod of Bishops of the Church of Norway, this is still a matter on which the General Synod now expects to pronounce.

<sup>28</sup> This will be operative from the end of 2000, and parishes may opt to use them from Advent Sunday onwards. Texts are available in book form and may also be downloaded from [www.cofe.anglican.org/commonworship](http://www.cofe.anglican.org/commonworship).

ministry. The *Notes* cite some of the elements, which have 'in some traditions' formed part of the deacon's liturgy<sup>29</sup> but they do not advocate a holistic diaconal liturgical ministry. Instead, they take a functionalist view of ordained ministry and suggest that the 'deacon's liturgical ministry provides an appropriate model for the ministry of an assisting priest, a Reader,<sup>30</sup> or other episcopally authorized minister in a leadership ministry that complements that of the president'.<sup>31</sup>

ANDREP Phase 1 research suggested that

The major weakness of the diaconate's position within the Church of England lies in the fact that few people in key positions seem to be aware of what is happening ecumenically or to understand the significance of the worldwide ecumenical developments which have been taking place over the last fifty years.<sup>32</sup>

A series of ecumenical meetings of deacons at St George's House, Windsor, led Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) to consult their members about the possibility of setting up an ecumenical working party on the diaconate. In the summer of 1999, just before *The Ministry of the Deacon, vol. 1* was published, CTBI reported an overwhelmingly enthusiastic response<sup>33</sup> from their member churches, and it was hoped that a working party would be set up by early 2000, which would have given

<sup>29</sup> *The Order for the Celebration of Holy Communion*, p. 158.

<sup>30</sup> The Reader is a lay minister in the Church of England, whose ministry is covered by canon E4 of the *Canons of the Church of England*.

<sup>31</sup> *The Order for the Celebration of Holy Communion*, p. 158.

<sup>32</sup> See MOD1, p. 242.

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the Church of England the opportunity to dialogue with a wide variety of churches in which the diaconate is strong or in which there is growing interest in it, including the Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, which, in England as elsewhere, is currently developing a new formation programme for Permanent Deacons, in response to the Vatican's *Basic Norms* of 1998. For quite a number of churches that expressed an interest in working together towards an understanding of the diaconate, the time seemed right for such an ecumenical involvement. However, the plans for this working party have been abandoned, and apparently the change of plan is connected with the Church of England's desire to complete its own study of the diaconate before engaging in an ecumenical debate. The Church of England's own working party is due to complete its work in 2001, and it plans to present its report to an ecumenical gathering of invited key people in April of that year, prior to taking it to General Synod. Finally, in due course, the Church of England's Liturgical Commission will turn its attention to the revision of the Ordinal. This also will give further scope for incorporating the insights of recent research and ecumenical developments on the diaconate, or deciding not to incorporate them.

### THE DEACON IN LITURGY AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

In order for the significance of the liturgical-social axis of the deacon's ministry to be more clearly recognised in the churches in which ANDREP has undertaken research, two factors are

necessary. First and fundamentally, a greater understanding of the significance of ordination itself is needed. In the case of the deacon, many churches worldwide appear to be on a road of convergence in that general direction, but progress is slow and everywhere there is evidence that the ethos of the BEM document of 1982<sup>34</sup> has not yet been universally received. Secondly and following on from the ordination issue, 'utility' is likely to be a criterion on which deacons continue to be judged, however inadequate, in ecclesial terms, that criterion may be. The deacon's liturgical ministry needs therefore to be recognised as of equal value and usefulness, when compared with the social action in which deacons engage and which, where it is strong, is in general highly valued. What is ultimately needed is recognition of the integrity of diaconal ministry in liturgy and social engagement, and a realisation of what this integration signifies for the church as a whole.

### Reorientation towards the Kingdom

Whatever the regulation and practice of individual parishes or churches, the integrity of the deacon's liturgical and social ministry is discernible in the liturgical action of the Eucharist. Here the deacon orientates the worshipping community to the demands of the Gospel, which they will all continue to try to meet in their social engagement outside the liturgy. By carrying the Gospel book during the introit procession, the deacon acts as a reminder that the Gospel makes demands, that repentance,

<sup>34</sup> *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111, Geneva 1982.

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sacrifice and judgment precede entry to the Kingdom. The deacon introduces the penitential rite, inviting the church to confession of sin and to repentance. There are echoes here of the beginning of the Good News, 'Repent, the Kingdom of heaven is at hand'. There is a connection between orientation (turning towards the east, towards the light) and metanoia, the repentance or 'turning around' of the first Gospel demand (Mark 1:1). This 'turning' to which the deacon invites the congregation was perhaps better acted out when the entire assembly faced East and before the overuse of electric light at all times had robbed the Christian community of any real experience or dread of darkness. There is little doubt that modern-day liturgical settings very much reduce the impact that the image of Christ as the true light originally possessed, though this may be somewhat restored when lights are carried with the Gospel into the centre of the congregation for the proclamation of the Gospel at the Eucharist.

The proclamation of the Gospel and the hearing of the Word is a moment of judgment and discernment, the dividing of the wheat from the tares, and the concluding words 'This is the Gospel of the Lord' demand a response from the community, which it will give then in the words, 'Praise to you, O Christ' and will follow up in attending to the preaching of the word, in the sermon, and in making the confession of faith, in the Creed, which follow.

The community, which has heard the Gospel and professed its unity in faith, is then invited by the deacon to address itself to its obligations under the Gospel by praying the Prayer of Inter-

cession, which is voiced by the deacon. The diaconal action involved here is fundamental to the deacon's whole ministry of liturgy and social engagement. It is the whole creation, *kosmos*, which God has reconciled to himself in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:19). St. Paul gives some vivid images of the whole creation groaning, as it waits for fulfilment (Romans 8:22). Addressing his hearers as 'my little children', he describes himself as 'being in labour' until Christ is formed in them (Galatians 4:19). It is the apostolic work of the deacon, both in the Eucharist and beyond it, to give expression to the longing for fulfilment for which the whole creation waits and to work for that fulfilment. Furthermore, if it is of the nature of the Church's ministry to 'sustain for creation the hope of the *eschata*',<sup>35</sup> the deacon appropriately carries out this work by voicing the needs of the world in the intercessory prayer, incorporating the petitions of the local community, giving a voice to those who are on the margins and assisting the assembly to exercise its own will and understanding in relation to the will of God for all creation. In practical terms, it is the type of work they do which has made deacons and still makes them likely to be the ones who have a wider view of the needs of the local community than other ministers. This is the reason often given to explain why the task of voicing the Prayer of Intercession was originally given to them. In pastoral and social terms, there are many people who cannot speak or are prevented from speaking for themselves and who need the deacon's voice of prophecy and challenge to the Church and society on their behalf. Deacons should also

<sup>35</sup> Zizioulas, J., *Being as Communion*, Crestwood 1985, p. 211.

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<sup>36</sup> See Ly  
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be expected in the modern world to be aware of dimensions of concern that go far beyond the local community's experience, embracing global issues of social transformation and ecology. Yet, however wide their areas of concern may be, fundamentally, it is deacons' relationship to the Kingdom, whose language is prayer and whose signs are the lame walking, the dumb speaking, the deaf hearing, the lepers being cleansed and the poor having the Gospel preached to them, which makes them the appropriate ministers for the task of voicing the intercessory prayer. Articulated with the joy and promise of the Kingdom in view, this prayer becomes more than a catalogue of needs, because, through it, the whole Christian community focuses on life as more than engagement with a list of overwhelming social problems, local or global, and thus opens itself to the eschatological dimension of the Kingdom.

The Prayer of Intercession is followed usually by the Peace, though there are other positions in the Eucharist where this may occur, and the exhortation 'Let us offer one another a sign of peace', also involves a reorientation: the deacon invites the community to be reconciled before approaching the altar to take part in the Holy Communion. Then follows the offering of bread and wine, the community's gifts, which the deacon receives and prepares, laying the table and presenting these gifts to the president, on behalf of the whole assembly, for offering and consecration.<sup>36</sup> It falls to the deacon, during the Eucharistic Prayer to address the congregation with the words 'Great is the

<sup>36</sup> See Lynn, A., Finding Images, in Hall, C (ed.), *The Deacon's Ministry*, Leominster 1991, pp. 103-122 for an account of the imagery involved in this.

mystery of faith', thus introducing the acclamation with its reminder of the Kingdom: 'Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again.'

With the administration of the Holy Communion, the circle of diaconal liturgy is completed, from the reception of the gifts to the feeding of the assembly. The deacon gathers and consumes what is left over from the eucharistic banquet, the food intended for those who could not or did not come to take part and for Christ's own who do not yet know him. After the post-Communion prayer and the blessing, the people are dismissed in a final exhortation, in which the deacon re-orientates the assembly again to the demands of the Gospel which has been proclaimed and urges them to go out in Christ's name and be(come) what the whole Church is, a sign and instrument of the reign of God.

The deacon's liturgy moves the Church on to its final destination in the Kingdom. In a very real sense, it is always true that to say 'the deacon does this or the deacon does that' is not to imply that at that same moment everyone else is only watching. The deacon's ministry is primarily a ministry which relates and which draws others into relationship and spurs them on to action. The deacon moves, acts and speaks with and for the whole assembly, including the other clergy, drawing the life of the community prior to the liturgy into the heart of the ongoing eucharistic action, and dismissing the worshippers to take the dynamic life of the Eucharist with them into every area of social engagement.

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## Rehabilitating Liturgy

The title at the head of this main section might equally well have been *The Deacon in Worship and Social Engagement*, but the word *liturgy* has been used because its etymology preserves the dual meaning of worship and work (*leitourgia*), which is instructive in the context of a discussion of the deacon's liturgical ministry and the relatedness of that to the diaconal ministry of social engagement. What follows here focuses on the ministry of the deacon in the Eucharist, which is actually called *The Liturgy* in the Orthodox Churches, to whose theology reference will be made. It is hoped to identify the fundamental sign that is latent in the deacon's liturgy, and thence to understand the ecclesiological significance of the liturgical acts that the deacon carries out. In a task-orientated age, it is important to establish the link between what the deacon does and who the deacon is in relation to the whole Christian community, when it assembles for its *work* in the Eucharist.

The New Testament portrays the Church as *ekklesia*, that is, as a gathering, as a people 'called out of darkness into his marvellous light'<sup>37</sup>. The gathering or calling out is initially related to the purpose of the worship of God. This primary purpose of adoration is expressed in the Orthodox tradition in terms of the anticipated ultimate goal, in which the purpose of the Church is recognized not only as the gathering of human beings but as the 'gathering together of heaven and earth and all creation in Christ'.<sup>38</sup> When the question of the deacon's liturgical ministry

<sup>37</sup> I Peter, 2:9.

<sup>38</sup> See Schmemmann, A., *The Eucharist*, Crestwood, 1987, p.19.

is approached from such a cosmic perception of the nature of the Church, it follows logically that deacons exercise a significant ministry in eucharistic worship. They are designated by the Church both to signify to the Christian community something about its own servant nature, *diakonia*, and also to relate to the whole Christian people, ordained and lay, in a way which bears witness, *marturia*, to the way Christ himself relates to his Body the Church and the way in which he expects the Christian community to reach out to the marginalized and the powerless. The triad of worship, witness and service (*leitourgia, marturia, diakonia*) is an important one to hold together. It says something fundamental about the Church itself, as well as, consequently, about the significance of her ordained ministers.

In recent discussion among deacons and others, in several church contexts, the question of the deacon's liturgical ministry has been raised from two main directions: (1) from the perspective of the nature of the Church<sup>39</sup> itself and (2) from the perspective of the wide acceptance in some churches of the deacon's ministry as an agent of change in society.

From the perspective of the deacon's social engagement, the deacon's ministry can be seen to be useful and worthy, or even heroic, given the overwhelming need in which so much of the world's societies live. From this perspective, the Church may be required to respond in the name of altruism, as an organisation

<sup>39</sup> See Brodd, Sven-Erik, MOD I, p.97ff.

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of people who live not for themselves but 'for others'.<sup>40</sup> However, and perhaps surprisingly, from the perspective of the nature of the Church, the ministry of the deacon in the liturgy is not merely useful or altruistic, it is essential, in order that, in turn, what this ministry signifies may be seen to be being fulfilled. In order for such an assertion to gain any sort of acceptance, much of course depends on the way the significance of the deacon – and of any other ordained minister for that matter – is understood in a given Christian community.

In ecumenical discussion, there is evidence that the orders of bishop, deacon and priest are increasingly being seen as particular 'signs' of what is true of the Church as a whole. The Hanover Report is one such example, when, with reference to the earlier BEM document, it says, 'Through *leitourgia*, *martyria* and *diakonia*, persons designated as God's gift to the Church become symbols of Christ and his Church (BEM, Ministry, 12,15)'.<sup>41</sup>

Where worshipping communities become skilled in reading the language of sign, it becomes easier to understand the relevance of ordaining deacons and/or giving them an appropriate liturg-

<sup>40</sup> Readers may like to note that the idea of the 'Church for others' has been predominantly used in the WCC to underline the importance of the role of the Church in the world (v. *The Church for Others and the Church for the World: a Quest for Structures for Missionary Congregations*, Geneva 1967). This later came to be complemented by the depiction of the Church in sacramental categories (v. Limouris, Gennadios (ed.), *Church, Kingdom, World: The Church as Mystery and Prophetic Sign*, Geneva 1986.)

<sup>41</sup> *The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity*, Hanover Report of the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission, London-Geneva 1996, para. 25.

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ical ministry<sup>42</sup>. Conversely, inability to read such language may either cause or maintain a situation in which the deacon's ministry is undertaken separately from the worshipping life of the Christian body, to such an extent that the work that many deacons do is not easily perceived as a work of the Church at all<sup>43</sup>. The development and wide acceptance of the deacon's engagement in society thus raises the question, which has been voiced in the Church of Sweden and in other places for some time and which may be formulated as follows: 'How can the deacon's social ministry, which in many churches has a publicly known and widely recognized place, be given its true meaning, if the deacon has no place (i.e. 'means' nothing) in the community of the Church, when it assembles for the Eucharist?'<sup>44</sup> The converse question may also be asked, 'How may the liturgical ministry of the deacon be given its true meaning, if the deacon has no social engagement?' Both these questions are brought into sharp focus by the view cited above, that 'there should be no ministry in the church which does not have a function in the church's worship' and which does not manifest the indivisible unity of liturgy and service to one's neighbour'.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Similarly, the 'sign' of the episcopate needs to be clearly read, to avoid the bishop being viewed as an outsider to the parish, who is needed only for certain functions, such as administering Confirmation or inducting a new parish priest, or other tasks which bishops normally carry out in different churches, and which can all too easily be seen out of the context of the bishop's whole relationship with the parishes and the diocese.

<sup>43</sup> For examples of this, see reports from the Church of Norway and the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland, in MOD I, pp. 59-95 and 141-178.

<sup>44</sup> This question is taken from an unpublished paper given by Deacon Ninni Smedberg to the Ecumenical Consultation on the diaconate, St. George's House, Windsor, 1996.

<sup>45</sup> Report of a Ministry Committee of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland, quoted in MOD I, p. 168.



A small number of works has been written to date on the deacon's liturgical ministry, and they largely confine themselves to describing the liturgical tasks that the deacon is expected to undertake in the Eucharist. Other research and writing has concentrated on identifying the fundamental nature of the deacon's social ministry and establishing good practice for *diakonia*. There is a great need for some future research to concentrate simultaneously on both the liturgical and social aspects of the deacon's ministry, as they relate to each other. It is arguable that the one cannot be understood without the other, and if this is the case, perhaps the one cannot actually be what it is without the other.

### The Ministry of the Deacon in the Eucharist

The integrative link between the work of worship at the altar and work for the world draws its validity from a view of the Eucharist that is well expressed by a number of Orthodox theologians, for example S. Harakas, who writes:

The Eucharist is an ethical reality. It is the manifestation of the Kingdom of God. It draws the Christian into the experience of communion with God as a living reality. ... The Eucharist as essential to the living experience of the Church is consequently essential to the Church's ethical life. The Eucharist is one of the major ways by which the ethical life of Christians may be made actual in practice.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Harakas, S.S., *Living the Faith: the Praxis of Eastern Orthodox Ethics*, Minneapolis 1992, p.20.

It was in the 1980s, as Harakas goes on to show, that Orthodox theologians began to use the expression 'the liturgy after the Liturgy', conveying by that the insight that

In each culture the eucharistic dynamics lead to a "liturgy after the Liturgy", i.e. a liturgical use of the material world, a transformation of human association in society to *koinonia*, of consumerism into an ascetic attitude towards creation and the restoration of human dignity. Thus, through "liturgy after Liturgy", the Church, witnessing to the cosmic dimension of the salvation event, puts into practice, daily and existentially, its missionary vocation.<sup>47</sup>

The deacon is the minister who, both in the Liturgy of the Eucharist and in the 'liturgy after Liturgy' is the sign of the continuing 'eucharistic dynamic' through which the Holy Spirit incites the whole Church to live its apostolic life in witness to Christ and in the context of its fulfilment in the Kingdom, so that the 'Christian community of repentant and redeemed believers, constituted by the work of the Holy Spirit,' 'may become the fullness of the Body of Christ in history, a sign and sacrament of the Kingdom of God among the nations'.<sup>48</sup> Like the Church itself, the figure of the deacon is both christologically and pneumatologically fashioned. An analysis of the ministry which the deacon came to exercise in the Eucharist from the second century onwards, makes it possible to see how that minis-

<sup>47</sup> Harakas, quoting Bria, I (ed.), *Martyria/Mission: The Witness of the Orthodox Churches Today*, Geneva 1980, pp. 66-71.

<sup>48</sup> Kinnamon, Michael (ed.), *Report of Signs of the Spirit*, the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Canberra, Australia, 7-20 Feb. 1991, Geneva-Grand Rapids 1991, p. 254.

try embodies the relationship between Christ, the Church and the Kingdom and identifies the deacon as the servant of them all. Interestingly, no modern exponents of the deacon's ministry seem to have suggested that the deacon should be used in any radically new way in the Eucharist. Faced by a ministry which it has not really been able to recognise for what it is, the churches have tended either to adhere to the old ways and liturgical practices, with no greater understanding of them, but simply for want of anything better, or to abandon the liturgical use of deacons altogether. Experience shows that in the latter case, the ministry of the deacon does not just cease to be: it is fragmented and taken over by priests or lay ministers, thus losing its unity and the impact of its sign and message. Many deacons ordained in the last decade in the Church of England know the cost of trying to recover the diaconal ministry and to piece it together again. They know the cost of having to live as 'split personalities', because there is little recognition of the way in which the social and liturgical aspects of their ministry are integrally bound up. They know the difficulty of explaining why they are the appropriate liturgical minister, rather than an assistant priest, Reader or other authorised minister, in situations where their social role has not been allowed visibly to develop. As one deacon has commented: 'Priests are seen as being able to preside and indeed expected by their parish to preside at the Eucharist, because of the nature of their parochial work. Likewise, without a liturgical ministry, a deacon can surely be little more than a social worker, albeit a Christian one'.

### **Traditional Liturgical Functions and their Significance**

The acts and functions traditionally assigned to the deacon in the Eucharist and preserved with local variations in a number of churches today, provide evidence of the importance that was from earliest times attached to the deacon's social ministry. They follow here, expressed in the terminology of the Church of England's new *Order for the Celebration of Holy Communion*:

#### **The Gathering**

- Welcoming members of the congregation as they arrive
- Receiving petitions to be included in the Prayer of Intercession
- Carrying the Gospel book in the introit procession
- Introducing the Prayers of Penitence

#### **The Liturgy of the Word**

- Proclaiming the Gospel
- Preaching
- Reading the Prayer of Intercession

#### **The Liturgy of the Sacrament**

##### **The Peace**

- Inviting the assembly to exchange the Peace

##### **Preparation of the Table and Taking the bread and wine**

- Receiving the community's gifts of bread and wine and water

- Preparing the altar and inviting the President to approach it
- Presenting the gifts to be offered
- Censing the other clergy and people

### **The Eucharistic Prayer**

- Acclamation
- Elevating the chalice at the final doxology
- Ensuring that the Sacrament is reserved for the Communion of the sick

### **The Giving of Communion**

- Giving the Holy Communion, usually from the chalice
- Ablutions and consuming any consecrated elements which remain

### **Dismissal**

- Dismissing the whole assembly
- Walking out beside the President in the final procession

### **From the Eucharist**

- Taking the Holy Communion to the sick (when the congregation leaves)

At the superficial level of activities undertaken, the deacon may be seen to be socialising with members of the congregation as they arrive, reading the Gospel and the Prayer of Intercession, acting as a server or steward by laying the table and clearing up afterwards, giving the directions which move the action on

(inviting the assembly to confession, to exchange the peace, to make the acclamation during the Eucharistic Prayer and to go in peace). Described in these terms, the deacon's actions may prompt the question 'Why does the Church need a deacon for this?' In a task-orientated age, which is also concerned to 'include' as many people as possible in a sole performer role at every possible point in the liturgical action, there is a temptation to divide the tasks between a large and fluctuating team of lay people or to allow one or a few individuals to undertake the same task repeatedly. Historians will claim that some tasks were assigned to the deacon for purely practical reasons (e.g. it has been suggested that the deacon reads the Gospel because in the Byzantine rite he was the only minister free to do so at that particular point in the Liturgy) and some are prone to argue that there is no task of the ordained ministry which is peculiar to it, though of course presidency remains peculiar to bishops and priests, and this practice is supported in the canon law of some churches and detailed, along with other actions thought to be integral to it, in the rubrics of service books. By contrast, the liturgical ministry of the deacon is not clearly designated or specified either in canon law or in rubrics. Nevertheless, when all this has been said, the Church has inherited to the present day a series of liturgical acts traditionally assigned as a whole to the deacon. Preserving them 'as a whole' is important, because, though their development may have been haphazard, these tasks have coherence and a rationale, which, in their turn, point below their surface to the latent ministry of the deacon which

is by its character a sign of the diaconate of Christ himself within his Body the Church.

It is in the context of Kingdom theology that the ministry of the deacon in the Eucharist is best understood. As the Church is the foretaste of the Kingdom, the figure of the deacon is the sign of that final reign of God, which is at one and the same time in our midst and still to come. This has implications both for the deacon's liturgical and social ministry and also for the relationship between the two. The idea that deacons are merely the assistants of priests<sup>49</sup> obscures their significance in relation to the Kingdom and turns the figure of the deacon into a shadow of its true self.

The Eucharist as a whole has a diaconal dynamic, in the sense that the Church is servant and agent of transformation and, at the same time, she is the sacrament of Christ, who is among the members of his Body the Church, as one who serves and as one whose service is constantly transforming them into his own glorious Body. Within that whole and from the deacon's traditional tasks and functions, the fundamental ministry of the deacon emerges. This ministry is to re-orientate the congregation: by proclaiming the Gospel anew, by articulating the Prayer of Intercession for the needs of the world, and by encouraging and enabling the congregation to face the demands of the Gospel and to live by its values.

### Integrating Liturgy and Social Ministry

The description of the Church's purpose as 'the gathering together of heaven and earth and all creation in Christ',<sup>50</sup> and the idea of the deacon in the Eucharist as the agent of the Kingdom, of which the Church is not the exact equivalent but the foretaste, finds its complement in the ministry of the deacon in the social sphere. There, as in the liturgy, the deacon is the minister who is concerned with people who are on the margins of society and/or on the fringe of the fellowship of the Church, concerned with the catechumen and the newly initiated, with care of the earth and the development of human society, with local and global peace and justice. The deacon's Kingdom-orientating voice of prophecy and challenge acts as a powerful advocate within the Christian community for those who have no voice: it challenges vested interest and complacency, and urges the Christian community to live its own serving and transforming ministry to the full in the world beyond the perceived borders of the Church, rather than confining itself only to setting up parish activities and resolving the life crises of its own members.<sup>51</sup>

If it is to do justice to the wide variety of types of ministry that deacons undertake in the various churches, the term 'social ministry' or 'ministry of social engagement' needs to be seen to include a wide variety of forms of diaconal activity, which may vary from time to time. An individual deacon may work in

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<sup>50</sup> Schmemann, p.19.

<sup>51</sup> See Meland, R., in MOD1, pp. 93-94 for further points on this matter.



social work, health care, teaching or catechetical work, pastoral or parish work, at the point of delivery of a service to the community, or in a planning, advisory, management, educational or training capacity. In all these areas, there is the self-same connection with the bringing in of the Kingdom, which has been seen to characterise the liturgical ministry of the deacon. So obvious is this fact that it is difficult to understand how the two can be separated, as they so evidently are in the minds of those who talk disparagingly about a 'liturgical diaconate', which will rob the laity of their liturgical role. The deacon's liturgical ministry may well result in the reshaping of the liturgical role of lay people, to be more truly what it should be: it will definitely increase the demand both upon the laity and also upon all the clergy, as the whole body of the Church, to live more closely by the demands of the Kingdom. As such, it is unlikely to be an easy option.

One further point needs to be considered about the social ministry of the deacon. The signs of the Kingdom given in the Gospel are that the lame will walk, the deaf will hear, the dumb will speak, and so on. This has led many to take the practical view that when there is perfect peace, justice, equality, freedom from hunger and disease on earth, the Kingdom will have come. Nevertheless, it is equally obvious that not all the lame will walk and that healing is not necessarily synonymous with cure. The Church requires special ministers to undertake and facilitate its social ministry. They need ordination, a distinct gift of the Holy Spirit, because, as Yannaras puts it, 'in the Church, caring activity is a manifestation of truth and the actualization

of life, not altruism and utilitarian love for one another'.<sup>52</sup> Like other Orthodox theologians, Yannaras defines the deacon's gift as

to serve the dynamic extension of the Eucharist in the whole life of the eucharistic body, to transform the service of practical needs for survival into "true life" of a loving communion in accordance with the triadic pattern of life.<sup>53</sup>

Yannaras warns against a view of the church as an 'institution for the service of pious dispositions and emotional needs', because that view will lead us 'to use her caring work only in order to demonstrate the practical utility of the "institution", competing with the state social service organs and the utopian altruism of the moralists'. This is an important insight for any consideration of the diaconate today. In many places, deacons are being required to prove their mere utility and their cost effectiveness, in order to be accepted. Where social usefulness cannot be proven, they may become merely decorative in the liturgy, with a truncated role 'assisting the priest', and in churches where the liturgical ministry has fallen into disuse, where they are not required even to be decorative in the liturgy, their social ministry, though effective in practical terms, may lack ecclesial significance, sometimes to the point where it is argued by parish administrators, as it seems to have been in some Nordic contexts, that it would cost too much to include duty in the Sunday Eucharist in the deacon's job description.

<sup>52</sup> Yannaras, C., *Elements of Faith: an Introduction to Orthodox Theology*, Edinburgh 1991, p. 139.

<sup>53</sup> Yannaras, p. 139.

## CONCLUSION

In the development of ecumenical research, it is often the case that the first stage highlights what the participants have in common and the areas in which they differ. At the second stage, an attempt is made to explore the nature of the differences and to attempt to resolve them. This is where the going gets tough. The temptation is then to stop working on the difficulties, which are inevitably raised by divergent theological concepts and seemingly incompatible structures, and agree to take part in some common social action related to human concerns, which everyone can understand and work on together.<sup>54</sup> Work on the diaconate faces that same temptation. Deacons belong to an order which is socially active and whose members recognise each other and can collaborate in social action across church divides and theological differences, but this is not enough. The real challenge is to reach a common mind about the theological principles that underpin action. Phase 1 of ANDREP showed that there is a challenge to the churches universally to come to a common mind on the matter of the ordination of the deacon, on the relationship of the deacon to other ministers, ordained and lay, and on the liturgical and social elements of the ministry of the deacon and their fundamental unity in the service of the Kingdom. During phase two, this has been further considered, though clearly there is still much to challenge the churches to further reflection and ultimately to change in attitude and practice.

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<sup>54</sup> See Evans, G.R., *Method in Ecumenical Theology*, Cambridge 1996, pp. 1-16.

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