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AN ESCALATING PHENOMENON :
THE DIACONATE FROM AN ECUMENICAL
PERSPECTIVE

The quest for a constructive clarification of the concept of *diakonia* has been on the international ecumenical agenda almost since the formation of the World Council of Churches.¹ The special ministry called the diaconate has, however, not been dealt with in the same way. Whereas *diakonia* – in all its varieties of meanings – has been dealt with formally in the ecumenical field, the diaconate has taken on another role: it has rarely been the content of ecumenical conversations, but it has become central to them through a diffusion of ideas among and between the churches. There have been numerous attempts at working ecumenically with an increasing understanding of diaconal ministry.² The statement made some ten years ago, that ‘prompted by the Lima text, various churches, including

¹ Brodd, Sven-Erik, *Kyrka och diakoni. Något om förhållandet mellan ecklesiologi och diakoni inom Kyrkornas Världsråd*, in: *Att mänskliggöra tillvaron. Festskrift till Anne-Marie Thunberg*, Nora 1993, pp. 47–64; Robra, Martin, Theological and Biblical Reflection on Diakonia. A Survey of Discussion within the World Council of Churches, *The Ecumenical Review* 46 (1994), pp. 276–286.

² For an overview, see Olson, Jeannine, *One Ministry, Many Roles. Deacons and Deaconesses through the Centuries*, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1992.

some united churches, are now examining a renewed form of diaconate',³ seems today to be somewhat of an understatement. The diaconate is an escalating phenomenon.

The Protestant movement of deacons and especially deaconesses was actually one of the first ecumenical movements. Through contacts and the diffusion of ideas, churches in various Lutheran-Melanchthonian traditions were put into relationship with one another in a way earlier unknown in their history. Through the *Kaiserswerther Generalkonferenz und Verband*, which was founded in 1861 and still has about 100 member organisations in many countries, the deaconess movement was established as an international and ecumenical phenomenon. It also came to include members of Reformed traditions. In 1923 the *Internationale Verein für Innere Mission und Diakonie* was founded. Notable among its founders was the Swedish Archbishop Nathan Söderblom.⁴ The German influence was very strong, and after the Second World War DIAKONIA, The World Federation of Diaconal Associations and Diaconal Communities, was founded.⁵ The work done in those organisations is, of

³ Black, Alan W., Unity, Renewal and Participation in United and Uniting Churches, in: *Living Today Towards Visible Unity. The Fifth International Consultation of United and Uniting Churches*, ed. Thomas F. Best, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1988 (48-69), p.65.

⁴ Söderblom, Nathan, Predigt (bei dem Abschlussgottesdienst für die Kontinentale Konferenz für Innere Mission und Diakonie in München 10 Sept 1922), in: *Erste Kontinentale Konferenz für Innere Mission und Diakonie 1922*, Berlin 1923, pp. 69-74.

⁵ On DIAKONIA, see Bengtzon, Inga M, Diakonia. II The Organisation of DIAKONIA, in: *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, Geneva/Grand Rapids 1991, 280; Felgentreff, Ruth, DIAKONIA. Von Utrecht bis Bethel 1946-1975, Bethel 1975; *Kyrkorna och diakonien. Några ekumeniska och Internationella Perspektiv/The Churches and the Diaconate in Ecumenical and International Perspective. Festschrift till diakonissan Inga Bengtzon*, ed. Gerd Svensson, Uppsala 1985.

course, an expression of ecumenical dialogue and ecumenical sharing. It is significant, however, that the ecumenical impact made by the diaconate was not a result of ecumenical dialogues, which had hardly been invented at the time: it arose out of the diffusion of ideas mentioned above.

DIAKONIA is organised world-wide into regions which have their own regional activities. World Assemblies are organised every three years.⁶ In 1996 DIAKONIA published a statement entitled *The Nature of Diaconal Ministry*, which is important because of the wide representation of the Federation's membership. Other examples of ecumenical associations of deacons are The European Conference of Deacons, which was founded by deacons from Scandinavia, Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands, and The International Diaconate Centre, based in Freiburg and Rottenburg in Germany, which sets up ecumenical encounters aimed at promoting a better understanding of the diaconate. Anglican associations of deacons include the North America Association for the Diaconate (NAAD), with membership in USA and Canada, and the Diaconal Association of the Church of England (DACE), to which the English contribution to this volume refers. There is as yet no organisation of deacons which covers the whole of the Anglican Communion.

The interconnectedness of deacons all over the world, with similar organisations, ways of co-operating and programmes of meetings and conferences, transcends confessional borders. It is

⁶ See DIAKONIA. *Challenge and Response*, Frankfurt am Main 1977 for a review of the organisation's work between 1947 and 1996.

this ability to transcend divisions which makes the diaconate one of the most important sources of ecumenical potential today.

Since the growth of diaconal movements during the nineteenth century, various types of deacon have been introduced into different churches. The discussion which has arisen out of this, the wrestling with problems and the creative theological imagination which was engendered by it, may be traced through the development of rites for ordination, consecration, installation, or whatever term was used for the making of deacons in the churches concerned.⁷ It is also possible to follow the growth of the diaconate by reviewing its integration into the different churches by means of canonical regulation.

From the 1960s there is a discernible and growing interest in ecumenical perspectives on the diaconate, not so much from the concept of charity which must be responsibly undertaken, but from the understanding that the diaconate is an office in the church. This latter understanding led to the diaconate's being clearly connected to the debate about the so-called threefold ministry. Here, of course, the development during the Second Vatican Council and its remodelling of the church's ordained ministry⁸ has been important to all churches, particularly because the Roman Catholic Church was the first church to implement the results of historical and systematic theological in-

⁷ Eckerdal, Lars, 'Genom bön och handpåläggning'. *Vignings-jämte installations-handlingar – liturgiska utvecklingslinjer*, Stockholm 1985 (SOU 1985:48).

⁸ Fjordevik, Christer, *Ad experimentum. En observation och analys av Andra Vatikan-koncilietts diakonatreform med särskild hänsyn till det förnyade diakonatets identitets- och legitimitetsproblematik*, Lund: Arcus Förlag, 1998.

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sights from the scholarly world. It became necessary to rethink the ordained ministry against the background of its ongoing identification a) with the universality and particularity of the church in all times, and b) with the developments and conditions of modern times (*aggiornamento*), as well as with new knowledge about the content of Scripture and its interpretation both in the modern and the early Church.

The Ecclesiological Basis of Ideas on the Diaconate in the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order Commission

In the World Council of Churches (WCC), the question of the diaconate was first raised in relation to the interconnectedness of *diakonia* and ecclesiology. Discussion about ordained ministry in the WCC has, however, been dominated by the problem of recognition of ministries and therefore by questions related to the offices of presbyter and bishop. However, this situation has slowly been changing since the beginning of the 1960s.

In the Faith and Order World Conference in Montreal in 1963, the growing tendency to ordain women to office in the church was noted. What occurred in Montreal was a departure from a split ecclesiology, in which the ordained ministry and the laity were not held together in the discourse, in favour of an ecclesiology which stressed the participation of the whole people of God and took into account the totality of ministry within the church, including the 'special ministry'. This special ministry was seen as founded not just in the functions which had to be

performed, but in the being of the Church. It was therefore possible in Montreal to conclude that churches which had not formally inherited the threefold pattern of ministry of bishop, priest and deacon, nevertheless possessed similar instruments, because the very nature of the church forced these into being.⁹

In 1964 a specific Faith and Order consultation on *The Ministry of Deacons* was held. The texts from the conference noted that there are in the New Testament two concepts of *diakonia*, a broad concept referring to the ministry of the entire church, and a more specific concept pointing to a special diaconal ministry. Here the christological-ecclesiological impulse from Montreal was further elaborated. Christ is the deacon and, by analogy with that, the church is also a diaconal body. The whole church can therefore be described as a *diakonia*. The 1964 consultation also stressed the interconnectedness between liturgy and *diakonia*, and between the church's character as *diakonia* and the necessity of diaconal work (charitable work) in the church and through the church. One of the purposes of having deacons is to have ministers who are not just instruments but who are, by virtue of ordination, also signs of what the church is. It is therefore desirable that deacons perform both charitable and liturgical tasks, especially in the Eucharist because the Table of the Lord is always connected with service to the world.¹⁰ The Faith and Order paper drawn up in 1971 in Louvain gives examples

⁹ The Fourth World Conference of Faith and Order. Montreal 1963. Report edited by P.C. Rodger and L. Vischer, London: SCM Press, 1964, p. 66.

¹⁰ *The Ministry of Deacons*, Geneva 1965 (World Council Studies No. 2).

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of the liturgical tasks of the deacon, for example the task of taking the pre-consecrated elements to the sick and to prisoners.¹¹

In 1965 a new consultation was undertaken by the Faith and Order Commission, this time on the subject of *The Diaconess*. It built partly on the 1964 consultation, in the sense that it brought *diakonia* and *leitourgia* together within ecclesiology and supplemented the tasks of the deacon with the responsibility of witnessing (*martyria*).¹²

The real breakthrough for discussion about the diaconate in the framework of the WCC was however the so-called Lima document of the Faith and Order Commission, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (BEM), published in 1982. Here the diaconate is given a place in the structure of the threefold ministry. The development of the text from the Faith and Order meeting in Louvain in 1971 via Accra in 1974 (*One Baptism, One Eucharist and one Mutually Recognised Ministry*) to the publication of the BEM text, is characterised by the departure from the idea of a mono-presbyterate towards a more flexible understanding of ordained ministry. It is also evident that in the BEM text the wide range of possible ministries mentioned in the Accra

¹¹ *The Eucharist in Ecumenical Thought*, in: Faith and Order. Louvain 1971. Study Reports and Documents, Geneva 1971 (Faith and Order Paper No. 59), p. 76.

¹² *Die Diakonisse. Ein Dienst der Frau in der heutigen Welt*, Genf 1966 (Studien des Ökumenischen Rates Nr. 4). The World Council of Churches had previously instituted the programme of 'life and work of women in the church', which resulted in a book dealing extensively with deaconesses, i.e. Bliss, Kathleen, *The Service and Status of Women in the Churches*, with a Foreword by W.A. Vissert't Hooft, London: SCM Press. 1952.

document, which had resulted from the influence of a greater consideration of the role of tradition, and which was already established in the Montreal texts of 1963, has been replaced by a concentration on the threefold ministry. This development was criticised in many Protestant responses to BEM but some ten years later a comparative study of the responses to the document and the actual developments in the responding churches showed that even those churches which had given the most critical responses were moving towards the BEM position.¹³

It should, however, be noted that in the responses to BEM the diaconate was not a major issue.¹⁴

In the report of section III of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order in Santiago da Compostela in 1993, there is once more a demand for 'consideration of the role and significance of the diaconate'. The report states that 'this could enrich our understanding and practice of ministry in general, as well as opening a new path in our dialogue'.¹⁵ The Faith and Order Commission took no action on this.

¹³ Andren, Åke, *Diakonater i världens kyrkor i dag. Kyrkornas svar på BEM-dokumentets ämbetsstruktur i den fortsatta utvecklingen*, Uppsala 1994 (Tro & Tanke 1994:7).

¹⁴ Dorris, Tom, *Deacons. Ecumenical Problem or Possibility? Official Church Responses to BEM as they touch on the Diaconate*, Mid-Stream Jan. 1990. McKee, Elsie Anne, *Diakonia in the Classical Reformed Tradition and Today*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans. 1989, pp.94-100.

¹⁵ *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia*. Official Report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, eds. Thomas F. Best and Günther Gassmann, Geneva 1994, p. 250. (Faith and Order Paper no.166)

The Diaconate in Anglican-Lutheran Dialogues

The Church of Sweden is in a rather curious position. Since the 1920s it has been in communion with the Church of England and since 1947 it has been a member-church in the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). In international conversations between the LWF and the Anglican Communion this has led to a situation in which the Church of Sweden has been involved, together with other churches in Lutheran-Melanchthonian traditions in conversations designed to achieve what it had in fact already achieved in 1920. This has been particularly evident when the dialogue has been dealing with ordained ministry, especially the historic succession of the episcopate.

In the conversations between the Church of England and the Church of Sweden, which resulted in inter-communion in the 1920s and led to mutual participation in the ordinations of bishops (by laying-on of hands), the diaconate was also mentioned.¹⁶ The commission set up by the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1911, declared that no conformity existed between the Church of England and the Church of Sweden concerning the diaconate. This should, however, not be seen as a hindrance to an agreement: the commission also called attention to the possibility of a restoration of the threefold ministry according to the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, article VII.¹⁷ By this

¹⁶ Söderblom, Nathan, *Dokument till frågan om nattvardsgemenskap med Englands kyrka*, Kyrkohistorisk Årsskrift 23 (1923), pp. 355-381.

¹⁷ *The Church of England and the Church of Sweden*. Report of the Commission Appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury in Pursuance of Resolution 74 of the Lambeth Conference of 1908 on the Relation of the Anglican Communion to the Church of Sweden, London 1911, pp.10f.

the commission indicated the possibility of, at least, supplementing the existing Mother House system in Sweden with an ordained ministry, maybe a transitional diaconate, the only one mentioned as existing in the Church of England at that time.¹⁸

The answer from the Swedish bishops was a complex one, not only in relation to ordained ministry but also from a general point of view. The bishops were evidently influenced by the liberal theology then current and its negative understanding of canon law. They were also heavily influenced by the New Testament scholarship and phenomenology of religion in vogue at the turn of the century. The bishops' answer is worth reading as one of the most characteristic ecumenical documents of the period. The answer on the diaconate was this:

In our Church we do not now possess any order exactly corresponding to the Anglican Diaconate. For a number of years, however, we have had among us a male Diaconate for the service of charity among the sick, the infirm, the poor, the lost, thus of the same character as the Diaconate of women, which is older and more amply developed among us. In Resolution 49 of the Lambeth Conference, this Diaconate is said to be the primitive one in the Christian Church, a statement which is undoubtedly true according to Acts VI. No need of, or wish for a Diaconate as an introduction to the Ministry has been expressed in our Church.¹⁹

¹⁸ In the conversations between the Church of England and the Church of Sweden, there is no reference to the order of deaconesses which had been introduced in the Church of England during the nineteenth century and which at the time of the conversations was being debated in England. See Hall, Christine, *The Diaconate in the Church of England. Three kinds of deacon?*, in: *Diakonater i olika kyrkotraditioner*, Uppsala 1995, (33-44) pp. 38f. (Nordisk Ekumenisk Skriftserie 27)

¹⁹ *To the Conference of Bishops in the Anglican Communion*, Kyrkohistorisk Årsskrift 23 (1923), p. 379.

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The text is interesting because it juxtaposes a permanent charitable diaconate, which was at that time without liturgical functions, with a transitional one which was mainly liturgical in character. The meaning of the ordination to the diaconate in the Church of Sweden then was not clear. Deacons and deaconesses were ordained according to different rites, but this was not elaborated in the dialogue because both parties obviously found the diaconate of no significant importance. This outlook has characterised the Anglican-Lutheran dialogue until recent times.

The *Pullach Report* from the 1973 international Anglican-Lutheran dialogue does not mention the diaconate, notwithstanding the fact that it deals with questions about both the social responsibility of the church and the ordained ministry.²⁰

In 1987 the *Niagara Report*.²¹ was launched. This was one of the most significant Anglican-Lutheran ecumenical texts. It did not identify ordained ministry with the mono-presbyterate; it depicted the office of bishop as a sign of apostolicity, continuity and catholicity. The office of bishop is exercised in collegiality with other ministries, ordained or lay. In spite of that and despite the fact that bishops and deacons formed a sort of two-fold

²⁰ *Anglican-Lutheran International Conversations*. The Report of the Conversations 1970-1972 authorized by the Lambeth Conference and the Lutheran World Federation, London: Paulist Press 1973. Also published in: *Growth in Agreement. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level*, eds. Meyer, H and Vischer, L. New York/Geneva: World Council of Churches. 1984.

²¹ *The Niagara Report*. Report of the Anglican-Lutheran Consultation on Episkopé, Niagara Falls, September 1987, published by the Anglican-Lutheran Continuation Committee, London/Geneva 1988.

ministry in the early church, the diaconate is not mentioned in the report. The attitude mirrored in the Swedish-English negotiations in the beginning of this century obviously still had currency. At the same time, however, a strong development took place in churches standing in the Lutheran-Melanchthonian traditions.²²

In 'Lutheran' churches various types of diaconate are to be found, most of them rooted in the nineteenth century German tradition. In spite of the fact that these churches have drifted apart as far as their views on ordained ministry are concerned, there has been no discussions under the auspices of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) about the nature of the diaconate in Lutheranism. There is room for speculation as to why this is the case. One assumption could be that the diaconate has not been included in the ordained ministry and therefore deacons and deaconesses have played a less important role in theological reflection. Although the diaconate has not been dealt with in the LWF, the offices of presbyter and bishop have. In one of the documents on these ministries, produced by an LWF consultation in Cartigny, Switzerland, in 1992, there is a footnote remarking on this.

²² Andréén, Åke, *Diakonattet i världens kyrkor i dag. Kyrkornas svar på BEM-dokumentets ämbetsstruktur och den fortsatta utvecklingen*, Uppsala 1994 (Tro & Tanke 1994:7).

The relation of this 'office of word and sacrament' to a diaconate is an issue we have not discussed. The Lutheran World Federation needs to address the nature of the diaconate, ordained or unordained, in its continuing discussion of the nature of ministry.²³

What had happened was that theologians from the churches in Finland and Sweden maintained that it was not really possible to understand ordained ministry without taking into account the ministry of deacons. What is not in the printed report is a letter sent to the leadership of the LWF. This stated:

During our discussions on Women in the Ordained Ministry and on the nature of Episcopal Ministry we, the participants in the Consultation on Ordained Ministry convened by the Lutheran World Federation, have again and again noted the vast diversity among our churches of the types of diaconal ministry and how it is ordered. These discussions have indicated the need to assemble accurate information on these ministries from our member churches and then to plan a study of diaconal ministry which would both assist them in dealing with this important area of the ministry of the church more effectively and be useful in ecumenical dialogue on ecclesiology and ministry with other Christian World Communions. This study should be done in consultation with the ecumenical partners of the LWF who share the problem and concern.

This could then be deliberated by the LWF Standing Committee for Ecumenical Affairs in June 1994. After that the Anglican-

²³ *Ministry : Women. Bishops*. Report of an International Consultation Cartigny, Switzerland, 1992, Geneva 1993, p.5. (LWF Studies)

Lutheran International Commission was given the task to take up the question of the diaconate.

When the diaconate appears as a permanent order in churches which are not clear about the theology of deacons, it moves from a voluntary function in the church to the core of ecclesiology. The ordained deacon becomes a sign and instrument of what is fundamental to the church and is drawn into the sphere of word and sacrament. This creates a degree of confusion because it demands the rethinking of traditional views, not least in Lutheranism. In the document which was the basis for the negotiations during the meeting with the Ecumenical Committee of the LWF, as mentioned above, it says:

Lutherans, Anglicans, and others have been engaged in recent decades in intense discussions among themselves and with each other about the nature of ministry, both the ministry of the entire people of God and the ministry of specific ordained ministries. Central to most discussions has been a vision of all ministry as diaconal, as service in the broadest sense of the word. Discussion of ministry has led to extensive convergence and consensus among us on doctrine and practice in many areas. Within our churches and in our churches, however, perplexity remains about the possibilities and place of the diaconate, a ministry distinct from episcopacy and that of a priest or pastor, but also distinct from the universal ministry of all the baptized.²⁴

²⁴ *The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity: An Anglican-Lutheran Study*, AGENDA, LWF Standing Committee for Ecumenical Affairs, Geneva, Switzerland, 22-24 June 1994, Exhibit 5.1.

The result of this was the commission given to the Anglican Lutheran International Commission to place the diaconate on their agenda. After two meetings, in West Wickham (UK), from 25 to 29 April, 1995,²⁵ and later in Hanover, from 5 to 11 October 1995, the document *The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity* was published under the auspices of the LWF and the Anglican Consultative Council.²⁶ This was the first time in the history of ecumenical dialogues at large, in which the diaconate had been the exclusive object of the dialogue. Obviously the questions in the report centred around two things, namely the praxis in some Lutheran churches of a lay diaconate with a sort of semi-ordination and the Anglican transitional diaconate. The text revolves around the ecclesiological themes of *diakonia*, *leitourgia* and *martyria*, in the framework of the church as *koinonia*. The Anglican-Lutheran International Commission seems to favour an ordained diaconate and the basis for this is an ecumenical openness: 'The renewal of the Church's diaconate at this time presents a unique opportunity for a deepened unity and joint endeavour in the life and mission of the Anglican and Lutheran, as well as other churches.' (§ 73)

In 1992, the same year as the consultation in Cartigny, *The Porvoo Common Statement* was agreed. It was later adopted by the Anglican churches in Great Britain and Ireland and by

²⁵ The papers presented at West Wickham are available in: *The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity*. Preparatory papers for the Hanover meeting, edited by the Anglican Consultative Council, London 1995.

²⁶ *The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity*. The Hanover Report of The Anglican-Lutheran International Commission, London: Anglican Communion Publications, 1996.

the churches in Lutheran-Melanchthonian traditions in Scandinavia and the Baltic states, with the exception of Denmark and Latvia. It involves more than 40 million members of these churches. The Porvoo communion of churches also implies a full mutual recognition and inter-change of episcopally ordained priests, deacons, and bishops. Very much of what the statement says about ecclesiology is of course also relevant for what *diakonia* is, but it is never developed. The diaconate is mentioned as a part of the threefold ministry, which in principle is accepted according to the BEM definition, as an expression of the unity of the church and as a means to achieve this given unity. There is however no theology about the diaconate in the document, probably because the diaconate in the churches which were involved differed too much. Nevertheless, at the end of the text the signatory churches pledged themselves 'to work towards a common understanding of diaconal ministry'.²⁷ It is also clear in the Porvoo document that it is only episcopally ordained deacons who are included in the mutual recognition of deacons.

The Lutheran-Episcopal dialogue in the United States has been preoccupied with the problem of the threefold ministry, to which the diaconate also belongs. The dialogue has mainly concentrated on the office of the bishop in apostolic succession. In the proposed concordat between the Evangelical-Lutheran

²⁷ The Porvoo Common Statement § 58, in: *Together in Mission and Ministry. The Porvoo Common statement with Essays on Church and Ministry in Northern Europe*. Conversations between The British and Irish Anglican Churches and the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran Churches, London: Church House Publications. 1993.

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Church in America (ELCA) and the Episcopal Church in the United States of America (ECUSA) there is a model for the reconciliation of the ministries of bishops and priests/pastors, which does not include the diaconate. The reason is that the diaconate in ELCA is a lay ministry introduced by the ELCA Church Assembly in 1995. The method used in this dialogue seems to be the same as that introduced in the conversations between the Church of England and the Church of Sweden earlier this century, namely to exclude the diaconate from the agreement. There is, however, one difference, namely that both lay diaconal ministers and deacons can work together under certain circumstances.

Some functions of ordained deacons in the Episcopal Church and of consecrated diaconal ministers and deaconesses in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in America can be shared insofar as they are called to be agents of the church in meeting needs, hopes, and concerns within church and society.²⁸ The concordat does not however require 'the ordination of deacons, deaconesses, or diaconal ministers' in ELCA.²⁹

In Canada the situation is different. The Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Canada has lay diaconal ministers but not deacons. In the proposal for fellowship with the Anglican Church of

²⁸ *Called to Common Mission*. A Lutheran Proposal for a Revision of the Concordat of Agreement [November 1998] § 8.

²⁹ *Called to Common Mission*. A Lutheran Proposal for a Revision of the Concordat of Agreement [November 1998] § 9. Cf. Concordat of Agreement § 8 in: *Toward Full Communion and Concordat of Agreement*. Lutheran-Episcopal Dialogue, Series III, eds. William A. Norgren and William G. Rusch, Minneapolis/Cincinnati 1991, p.101.

Canada, the *Waterloo Declaration* (1997)³⁰ uses the same model as the Porvoo Common Statement, saying that the churches on the one hand will welcome 'ministers ordained in either of the churches to the office of bishop, priest/pastor or deacon to serve ... in that ministry in the receiving church without re-ordination' and on the other hand 'to work towards a common understanding of diaconal ministry'.

In the recently opened Anglican-Lutheran Dialogue in Africa, the diaconate will be one of the subjects dealt with.³¹

The Diaconate in Bilateral Ecumenical Dialogues : Some Themes.

The diaconate has not been dealt with very frequently in ecumenical dialogues, which is surprising, given the fact that it has increasingly become a focus of the debate about ministry within the churches themselves. What follows is an attempt to give some examples from the discussion in bilateral dialogues and to indicate changes of emphasis and current concerns.

The lack of discussion on the diaconate in the bilateral dialogues is sometimes surprising. In the Lutheran-Roman Catholic document relating to the ordained ministry, the diaconate is not

³⁰ *Called to Full Communion* (The Waterloo Declaration). Proposed Text to be considered by the National Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada in Waterloo, Ontario, in the year 2001, June 23, 1997.

³¹ Report of the African Anglican-Lutheran Consultation, Kempton Park, Johannesburg, RSA, 17-18 December 1997.

mentioned at all, though the triad *martyria, leitourgia* and *diakonia* is used as an ecclesiological pattern for the ministry of the whole people of God (§13).³² The *Malta report* (1973)³³ is actually the only place in which the diaconate is mentioned in any of the international Lutheran-Roman Catholic documents, including the *Ministry in the Church* (1981).

In the Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue, however, the diaconate has at least been mentioned, though not elaborated upon. The *Canterbury Statement* says that, though deacons are differently empowered by comparison with bishops and priests, they are 'associated with bishops and presbyters in the ministry of word and sacrament, and assist in oversight' (§9) It is also agreed that deacons are episcopally ordained (§16)³⁴

This difference in attitude between Lutherans and Anglicans in dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church on a world-wide level is striking. A comparison of the churches in Lutheran-Melanchthonian traditions shows that they differ very much among themselves, and what follows below may only be applied to the international dialogue between the Roman Catholic

³² *Das geistliche Amt in der Kirche*, Gemeinsame römisch-katholische/evangelisch-lutherische Kommission, Paderborn/Frankfurt am Main 1981. English translation in: *Growth in Agreement. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level*, eds. Harding Meyer and Lukas Vischer, New York/Geneva: Paulist Press/World Council for Churches. 1984, pp. 248-275.

³³ *The Gospel and the Church*. Report of the Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission 1972 (The Malta Report), in: *Growth in Agreement. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level*, eds. Harding Meyer and Lukas Vischer, New York/Geneva: Paulist Press/World Council for Churches. 1984.

³⁴ *Ministry and Ordination* (Canterbury Statement 1973), in *Growth in Agreement. Reports and Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level*, New York/Geneva: Paulist Press/World Council for Churches. 1984, pp. 78-84.

Church and the Lutheran World Federation. In any case, in spite of their great numbers, the deacons and deaconesses serving in diaconal ministries in Lutheranism have not been given sufficient theological significance to be included in the dialogues.

If this situation is compared with the Consultation of Church Union in the United States (COCU), involving nine Protestant Churches (1985),³⁵ the result is astonishing. In *The COCU Consensus* (1985) the ministries of bishops, presbyters and deacons are well elaborated (§§ 57–63).³⁶ *Churches in Covenant Union* (1989)³⁷ states that in the shared life of the uniting churches the diaconal ministers would be identified as deacons (IV. The Elements of Covenanting, §30), even though it was impossible at the time to reconcile the various existing forms of diaconal ministries (V. The Process of Covenanting, § 10).

The shift caused by the BEM document gave the dialogues their characteristic style. There are differences of approach between the texts published before 1982 (which are in any case very few) and those published after that. The content and form of

³⁵ African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, the Episcopal Church, International Council of Community Churches, Presbyterian Church (USA), United Church of Christ, and United Methodist Church. The scheme of uniting churches goes back to a proposal by Eugene Carson Blake 1961. On Blake, see van der Bent et al in: *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, Geneva/Grand Rapids 1991, pp. 107f. Blake, E. C. A Proposal Toward the Reunion of Christ's Church, in: *The Challenge to Reunion*, eds. Robert McAfee Brown and David H. Scott, New York 1963, pp.271–283.

³⁶ The COCU Consensus, in: *Growing Consensus. Church Dialogues in the United States 1962–1991*, eds. Joseph A Burgess and Jeffrey Gros, FSC, New York: Paulist Press. 1995.

³⁷ Churches in Covenant Union, in: *Growing Consensus. Church Dialogues in the United States 1962–1991*. Full reference as above.

the dialogues can mainly be described according to the following themes: a) a movement away from debate about church order towards an increasing ecclesiological awareness. b) a critique of the medieval mono-presbyterate in favour of a diversified ordained ministry. c) an emphasis on the epiclectic character of ordination. d) a recognition of the diaconate within the threefold ministry as a fundamental structure in the church. e) the deacon as a bridge between liturgy and diaconal work. f) the demand for a renewal of the diaconate.

a. A movement away from debate about church order towards an increasing ecclesiological awareness.

Since the early 1970s, the majority of bilateral dialogues follow a certain pattern which implies that the deliberations about ordained ministry presuppose a particular Christology or latterly a Trinitarian theology and an ecclesiology derived from either or both of them. Also it seems as if there is an established common understanding that it is possible, by means of some distinctions, to find a basic but not fully developed theological structure behind the institutional forms of ordained ministry. Therefore it seems plausible to say that ordained ministry which was dealt with as a question of church order in the Faith and Order meeting in Lausanne (1927) now belongs to the dynamics of ecclesiology.³⁸ The Anglican-Roman Catholic document on ministry and ordination, the *Canterbury Statement* (1973),

³⁸ Kelley, Gerhard, *The Recognition of Ministries: a Shift in Ecumenical Thinking, One in Christ* 30 (1994), pp. 10-21.

says for example, 'All ministries are used by the Holy Spirit for the building up of the Church to be his reconciling community for the glory of God and the salvation of men.' (§5)³⁹ The Anglican-Reformed dialogue *God's Reign and our Unity* (1984)⁴⁰ says that on the face of it, the structure of ordained ministry in the Anglican and Reformed traditions differs markedly, but if one penetrates the traditions further, there exists a common ministerial structure (§91). This is, of course, due to the fact that theology has been given priority as normative over against canonical history. The normative nature of the threefold ministry remains but the ecclesiological structures open up towards a greater flexibility within the limits of the given history.

b. The critique of the mediaeval mono-presbyterate in favour of a diversified ordained ministry.

During the medieval period the priesthood was looked upon as the full office in the church. Deacons were ordained ministers who were on the way to priesthood, though a few remained deacons all their lives. Bishops were regarded as having an extra power added to the presbyteral powers, but were not thought of as a sacramental ministry *per se*. This is evident not only from the mediaeval expositions of the sacraments but also

³⁹ Ministry and Ordination (Canterbury Statement 1973), in: *Growth in Agreement. Reports and Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level*, New York/Geneva: Paulist Press/World Council of Churches. 1984, pp. 78-84.

⁴⁰ *God's Reign and Our Unity*. The Report of the Anglican-Reformed International Commission, London/Edinburgh 1984.

from the Council of Trent.⁴¹ This model has been criticised and even changed in episcopally ordered churches. During the last few decades the stronger emphasis placed on the theology of ordained ministry has a consensual background in the view presented by the Anglican-Reformed dialogue (*God's Reign and Our Unity*, 1984), already mentioned, where it is stated that the ordained ministry must reflect and realise the ministry of Christ as it mirrors the nature of the Holy Trinity. The ordained ministry must therefore not only be personal but also collegial and corporate (§92). This means that ordained ministry in the church can be realised in various forms as long as they express its corporate, collegial and personal character. It also safeguards against earlier attempts to find absolute forms for the ordained ministry in the New Testament. The method is deductive, rooted in incarnation and in the Holy Trinity.

However, there remains in the ecumenical dialogues a constantly repeated assurance that the threefold ministry is not to be found in the New Testament.⁴² In most dialogues this is taken as the pretext for putting forward ideas for structural flexibility. The common basic assumption, of course, is that the New Testament structures of the church have a normative meaning.

⁴¹ Brodd, Sven-Erik, Episcopacy as the Fundamental and Communal Ministry in the Church. Some Preliminary Remarks, in: *Anglican-Lutheran Consultation: Episcopé in Relation to the Ministry of the Church Today, Niagara Falls, Canada, 24 Sept-3 Oct 1987*. Papers of the Consultation, The Anglican Consultative Council/The Lutheran World Federation, London-Geneva 1988, pp. 164-176.

⁴² *Towards Closer Fellowship*. Report of the Dialogue between Reformed Churches and Disciples of Christ, Geneva 1988 (Studies from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches 11) § 30; *God's Reign and Our Unity*. The Report of the Anglican-Reformed International Commission, London/Edinburgh 1984, §91.

This is especially evident in inter-Protestant dialogues. The dialogue between the Lutheran World Federation and the World Methodist Council (1984) stated: 'Since the New Testament presents diverse forms of ministry, we hold that no particular form of ordained ministry or church order is prescribed by the New Testament as necessary for the church.(§37)⁴³ The text from the Episcopal-Lutheran dialogue in the USA says that the diaconate in both churches is 'in need of continuing exploration, renewal and reform, which they pledge themselves to undertake in consultation with one another'.⁴⁴ In the Anglican-Roman Catholic *Canterbury Statement* (1973) the self evident observation is made that the formation of the New Testament canon was an ongoing process and the same applies to the development of the ordained ministry in its form of bishop priest and deacon (§6). In fact the ordained ministry, the biblical canon and the liturgy, especially Baptism and the Eucharist, seem to have emerged both in a parallel and in an interdependent way. The Anglican-Lutheran Dialogue in Canada refers to the Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue, saying that: 'a gradual evolution of church structure gave rise to the threefold ministry of bishops, presbyters and deacons. Like the canon of Scripture, this development "required a longer period than the apostolic

⁴³ *The Church. Community of Grace*. Final Report of the Joint Commission between the Lutheran World Federation and the World Methodist Council 1979-1984, Geneva/Lake Junaluska NC, 1984.

⁴⁴ *Called to Common Mission*. A Lutheran Proposal for a Revision of the Concordat of Agreement [November 1998] § 9. Cf. Concordat of Agreement § 8 in: *Toward Full Communion and Concordat of Agreement*. Lutheran-Episcopal Dialogue, Series III, eds. William A. Norgren and William G. Rusch, Minneapolis/Cincinnati: Augsburg Press/Forward Movement Publications. 1991, p.101.

age". Thereafter it became universal in the Christian Church until the Reformation'.⁴⁵ What is needed are models for the reconciliation of different traditions. The Lutheran-Roman Catholic document on the Church and the Gospel, the *Malta Report* (1972), deals with the question by suggesting that the historical changes the ordained ministry has undergone make it possible to recognise a continuing structure for that ministry. 'Although the ministerial office belongs constitutively to the church and has a continuing basic structure, still it is possible for concrete forms of office, which were necessary and important at a specific time for the proper carrying out of the church's mission, to be of little or no value in other situations.' This leads to the possibility that restructuring can be undertaken and that 'old structures, as, for example, the office of deacon can be renewed'. (§56)⁴⁶ In spite of the critique of the mono-presbyterate and the adoption of the theology of collegiality, the servant role in relation not just to the bishop but also to the priest, is stressed in some documents. It relates, principally, to the documents of the Second Vatican Council which stressed the traditional Latin subordination of the diaconate, though this was partly balanced by the doctrine of collegiality. The Roman Catholic-Orthodox document on faith, sacrament and the unity of the church

⁴⁵ *Reports and Recommendations*, April 1986. Canadian Lutheran-Anglican Dialogue, Toronto/Winnipeg 1986, p. 25.

⁴⁶ *The Gospel and the Church*. Report of the Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission 1972 (The Malta Report), in: *Growth in Agreement. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level*, eds. Meyer, H. & Vischer, L. New York/Geneva: Paulist Press/World Council of Churches. 1984.

(1987),⁴⁷ says that: 'the diaconate is exercised in service of the bishop and priest in liturgy, evangelization and *caritas*' (§43), an equivalent expression of *leitourgia*, *martyria* and *diakonia*. The same one-sidedness can be found in the above mentioned Reformed-Anglican dialogue report (1984) which says that the local pastor must be surrounded by a group of elders and deacons (§94). There are traces of the same attitude in the dialogues, hinting at a principle for handling the diaconate in such a way that the concept of priest/pastor retains its position as point of departure, if not the norm, for any deliberations about the diaconate.

Despite the critique against the so-called mono-presbyterate, which is still deeply rooted in many Protestant traditions today, the diaconate has been of secondary importance, compared to the episcopate and the priesthood, in the dialogues. There seem to be several reasons for this. The focus on ordained ministry has been put on power and ordination. Such a combination is not the natural point of departure for a modern theology of the diaconate. Another reason is that many, if not all, Christian traditions display a degree of uncertainty when they have to explain what a deacon is. It is only in the last twenty years or so that the diaconate has increasingly come more into focus.

⁴⁷ *Glaube, Sakrament und Einheit der Kirche*. Dokument der gemischten Internationalen Kommission für den theologischen Dialog zwischen der Römisch-Katholischen Kirche und der Orthodoxen Kirche, verabschiedet in Cassano delle Murge (Bari) am 16. Juni 1987, in *Dokumente wachsender Übereinstimmung. Sämtliche Berichte und Konsenstexte interkonfessioneller Gespräche auf Weltebene, Bd II 1982-1990*, Paderborn/Frankfurt am Main: Bonifatius/Otto Lembeck. 1992.

The bilateral dialogues raise critical questions for the churches regarding the practice of having a transitional order on the way to a more 'perfect' one, namely priesthood. Critical questions could also be put to churches which do not ordain deacons or which, if they do ordain them, do not have a clear teaching about what they are doing and about the content of their ordination (or equivalent concepts). In both cases the critique is directed against the late mediaeval concept of ordained ministry, retained in the Latin tradition either by making the diaconate a transitional way into the 'full' ministry of the church (by 'full' ministry meaning not that of the bishop but that of the pastor/priest) or by abolishing it as an ordained ministry, thus elevating the priesthood as the exclusive ministry, sometimes given the power of oversight and thence the title of bishop.

c. Emphasis on the epicleptic character of ordination

The change in emphasis in the theology of the diaconate from a canonical and institutional view to an understanding which is rooted in ecclesiology, has led to a displacement of emphases in views on ordination. There has been a move away from emphasis on authorisation and the transmission of (exclusive) power to a stronger epicleptic emphasis. According to the Reformed-Anglican dialogue (*God's Reign and Our Unity*, 1984), ordination is not just the transmission of power and authority. It is first and foremost a prayer to the Father for the gifts of the Spirit to be bestowed on the ordinand (§90).

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'The act of ordination by the laying-on of hands of those appointed to do so is at one and the same time invocation of the Holy Spirit (*epiklesis*); sacramental sign; acknowledgement of gifts and commitment.'⁴⁸ In The *Porvoo Common Statement*, mentioned above, the connection between the invocation of the Holy Spirit and the gifts given in ordination, is clearly expressed (§ 41).

d. Recognition of the diaconate within the threefold ministry as a fundamental structure in the church.

Despite the remaining emphasis on the mono-presbyterate there was, after BEM (1982), a predominant emphasis on the threefold ministry in the ecumenical dialogues. In Protestant traditions this has led to the opening up of the possibility of more than one ordained ministry.⁴⁹ Before BEM, emphasis on function and need dominated Protestant attitudes. Ordained ministry was rooted in the need to have a functioning ministry for preaching and administration of the sacraments. Since the late eighteenth century, it had been customary to see the ordained ministry as arising out of the needs of the church, an influence on ecclesiastical thinking dating from the Enlightenment. As soon as the threefold ministry is grounded in ecclesiology and the Church recognised as *martyria*, *diakonia* and *leitourgia*, it be-

⁴⁸ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Geneva 1982, Ministry § 41. (Faith and Order Paper no. 111)

⁴⁹ André, Åke, *Diakonater i världens kyrkor i dag. Kyrkornas svar på BEM-dokumentets ämbetsstruktur i den fortsatta utvecklingen*, Uppsala 1994, (Tro & Tanke 1994:7).

comes possible to deduce from that a threefold ministry which is not functional but instrumental. It is then the nature of the Church rather than a perceived need which determines the nature and form of ordained ministry.

It is obvious that ecclesiology develops under the influence of ecumenical dialogues and of the changing societies in which the churches live. The threefold structuring principle (*leitourgia*, *martyria* and *diakonia*) plays an important role. Therefore, according to a Faith and Order text from the Commission meeting in Syria (1995), the church is 'called to live as a celebrating (*leitourgia*), witnessing (*martyria*) and serving (*diakonia*) communion'.⁵⁰ In the Anglican-Lutheran dialogue document *Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity* (1996) this is elaborated:

There are some offices in the church which enact and bring into focus central aspects of the mission of the entire church and also form the identity of the person involved. This description applies particularly to ordained ministries. [...] Through *leitourgia*, *martyria*, and *diakonia* persons designated as God's gifts to the church become symbols of Christ and his church (BEM, Ministry, 12,15). (§25)

The basis for the theology of collegiality is the one ordained ministry, which is diversified in various ways. God is one in three persons, the church is one and should live in reconciled diversity, the ordained ministry is one but includes three orders.

⁵⁰ *Minutes of the Meeting of the Faith and Order Standing Commission 5-12 January 1995, Aleppo, Syria*, Geneva 1995, p. 48. (Faith and Order Paper no. 170)

The Roman Catholic-Orthodox dialogue (1987), mentioned earlier, says that:

the ministry of the church is exercised through different functions which are carried out in mutual dependence according to which no one can substitute for the other. This is especially significant for the fundamental offices of bishop, priest and deacon, and for the functions of the laity. This inter-dependence takes shape in the Eucharistic gathering. (§31).⁵¹

e. The deacon as a bridge between liturgy and diaconal work.

What is notable throughout all the material, is that the diaconate or diaconal ministry is given a double meaning, which is both liturgical and charitable, irrespective of whether it is perceived as an ordained ministry or not. Even in churches which do not ordain deacons to the threefold ministry the deacon can very often be assigned liturgical tasks. The foundation is the idea that *diakonia* and liturgy belong together. *The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity* gives an extensive elaboration of the liturgical role of deacons and its foundation in ecclesiology (§§18–28) and the Roman Catholic-Orthodox dialogue report on faith, sacrament and the unity of the church (1987), states that the different ordained ministries in the celebration of the

⁵¹ *Glaube, Sakrament und Einheit der Kirche*. Dokument der gemischten Internationalen Kommission für den theologischen Dialog zwischen der Römisch-Katholischen Kirche und der Orthodoxen Kirche, verabschiedet in Cassano delle Murge (Bari) am 16. Juni 1987, in: *Dokumente wachsender Übereinstimmung. Sämtliche Berichte und Konsentexte interkonfessioneller Gespräche auf Weltebene, Bd II 1982–1990*, Paderborn/Frankfurt am Main, Bonifatius/Otto Lembeck, 1992.

Eucharist are one and that the differentiation mirrors their different tasks in the life of the congregation (§24). This corresponds not only with the development of a theology of collegiality but also with the tendency not to separate *diakonia* and liturgy into a 'liturgical' diaconate on the one hand and a 'charitable' diaconate on the other. This has also been put into practice in various churches. Thus churches which did not previously have deacons but have introduced the office, as the Uniting Church in Australia did in 1992,⁵² and churches which have had the nineteenth century type of diaconate, like the Church of Norway⁵³, have assigned liturgical tasks to their deacons. In churches like the Roman Catholic Church, with a transitional 'liturgical' diaconate, the introduction of the permanent order of deacon, has made 'works of charity' an important role for the diaconate.⁵⁴

f. The demand for a revitalisation and renewal of the diaconate.

Agreement that the diaconate is in need of theological and structural renewal is evident in the ecumenical dialogues. There also appears to be strong agreement on the importance of the diaconate in the life of the church. In the dialogue between the Church of Norway (Lutheran) and the Methodist church in

⁵² The Uniting Church in Australia was established in 1977 as a union of Methodist, Congregationalist, and Presbyterian Churches in Australia. *The Ministry of Deacon* [leaflet].

⁵³ *Comprehensive Diaconal Programme for the Church of Norway*, Oslo 1997.

⁵⁴ *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons*, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana. 1998, pp. 101-103.

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Norway, this is formulated as follows: 'Both our churches have a diaconal ministry which shall make visible the diaconal responsibility of the whole church. We recommend our churches to collaborate in the formation of this ministry.' (§37)⁵⁵

In the international dialogue between the Disciples of Christ and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (*Towards Closer Fellowship*) it was agreed that the Reformed Churches during the sixteenth century and the Disciples of Christ in the nineteenth century had kept the diaconate as an 'indispensable part of the ministry of the People of God and that this ministry should be revitalised'. (§34)

The renewal of the diaconate : an escalating phenomenon and an ecumenical opportunity

In many churches around the world, re-orientation, reconsideration and even introduction of the ordained diaconate is taking place. The national churches of Norway, Sweden and Finland, as well as England, could be mentioned here, though this is clearly a universal trend which very often leads to an actual convergence between churches of various traditions around the world.

There are, of course, various Protestant churches and traditions in which the diaconate is still either absent or organised in

⁵⁵ *Nådens felleskap*. Rapport fra samtalen mellom Metodistkirken i Norge og Den norske Kirke. Sluttrapport med forslag til avtale, Oslo: Kirkens Informasjonstjeneste. 1994.

accordance with the nineteenth century tradition. In many of these churches, especially Lutheran Churches such as The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and Die Vereinigte Evangelische Luthersche Kirche Deutschlands (VELKD) there is an ongoing debate on the diaconate and also proposals for structural changes in the church orders. In any case, this could be a sort of explanation why the diaconate still is missing in many dialogues. In all these churches however a basic structure of the ministries of *episkopé*, presbyterate and diaconate may be discerned, whether those who exercise these ministries are ordained or not, and whether they are called bishops, presbyters and deacons or not. Though it may seem as if these instruments are forcing their way in because of new ecclesiological insights, they were in fact already there. They have simply been made more evident because of the re-evaluation of the theology of the People of God. The rediscovery of the ecclesial threefold structure of *leitourgia*, *diakonia* and *martyria*⁵⁶ also paves the way for a theological convergence between churches which have the threefold ministry and those which do not. In this dialogue the deacon's ministry plays an important role.

The Anglican Churches have retained the threefold ministry of bishop, priest and deacon. The place of deacons in the church has not, however, always been clear. In 1974 a working party

⁵⁶ See e.g. the Leuenberg text Die Kirche Jesu Christi. Der reformatorische Beitrag zum ökumenischen Dialog über die kirchliche Einheit, in: *Wachsende Gemeinschaft in Zeugnis und Dienst Reformatorische Kirchen in Europa. Texte der 4. Vollversammlung der Leuenberger Kirchengemeinschaft in Wien, 3. bis 10. Mai 1994*, Frankfurt am Main 1995, (pp. 16-62) pp. 39ff.

in the Church of England proposed that the diaconate should be abolished.⁵⁷ In 1988 a new group revised that position and proposed that the transitional diaconate should be supplemented by the introduction of a permanent (distinctive) diaconate.⁵⁸ There is a similarity between the Anglican situation in the British Isles and the Protestant Churches in Germany, reflected in papers published by official working parties, namely the lack of incorporation of ecumenical experiences and arguments, either from ecumenical dialogues or from experience in other churches, into the ongoing process of change in the character and functions of the diaconate.

By contrast, in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in America⁵⁹ and the Anglican Church in Canada⁶⁰ ecumenical development has played a role in the reconsideration of the diaconate. The debate has certainly been influenced by various proposals for a Lutheran-Anglican church fellowship, and other ecumenical influences are noticeable.

⁵⁷ *Deacons in the Church*. A Report of a Working Party Established by the Advisory Council for the Church's Ministry, London 1974.

⁵⁸ *Deacons in the Ministry of the Church*. A Report to the House of Bishops of the General Synod of The Church of England, London 1988. On the discussion about the permanent diaconate in England, see *Order and Ministry*, ed. Christine Hall and Robert Hannaford, Gracewing 1996; *The Deacon's Ministry*, ed. Christine Hall, Gracewing 1991.

⁵⁹ *The Study of Ministry*. Study Edition. Report to the 1991 Churchwide Assembly, Chicago 1991; *Study of Ministry Report*, 1989-1991; Task force on the Study of Ministry, *Synopsis* 1988-1991.

⁶⁰ See e.g. *A Plan to Restore the Diaconate in the Anglican Church of Canada*. Committee on Ministry, Anglican Church of Canada, 1989, Toronto 1989.

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What seems to be common among the Nordic Folk churches, except the Church of Denmark⁶¹ in which just recently a group has been appointed to reconsider the diaconal ministry in that church, is a development from a quasi lay ministry or at least from an unclear ordination establishing a quasi office to a clearly ordained ministry. In the Church of Sweden there has recently been a development from an unclear canonical regulation to a canonically clear position for the deacon. In both the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland⁶² and the Church of Sweden⁶³ the unity of the church has been used as a factor in the argument, and references to ecumenical dialogues and to other churches have been used in the official preparatory materials for proposals and decisions by the General Synods. The pre-1982 documents took a comparative attitude to the experiences of other churches and what could be learnt from that. Since 1982 there have been direct references to ecumenical dialogues, principally to the Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry text, the implications of the Porvoo Common Statement and the Anglican-Lutheran document *'The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity'*.

⁶¹ The Danish debate on the diaconate also shows ecumenical influences. See Iversen, Hans Raun, *Hører sognemedhjælpere med til kristendommen?*, Præsteforeningens Blad 89 (1999), 50-58

⁶² *Tillsammans i kyrkans ämbete. Betänkande avgivet av den diakonatskommitté som evangelisk-lutherska kyrkan i Finland tillsatte år 1994*, Helsingfors 1997 (Suomen ev.lut.kirkon keskushallinto. Sarja A 1997:10), pp. 55-68, 86.

⁶³ *Tjänsten åt nästan. 1969 års diakoniutrednings betänkande*, Stockholm 1972, pp. 28-39, 121-130; *Vigd till tjänst. Betänkande av Svenska kyrkans diakoninämnds vigningsutredning*, Stockholm 1983; *Ämbete och tjänst. Ett diskussionsbetänkande från den av Svenska kyrkans centralstyrelse tillsatta utredningsgruppen för kompletterande utredning rörande det kyrkliga ämbetet*, Lund 1993; *Bekännelse, gudstjänst, kyrkomöte*, Svenska kyrkans framtida organisation, Stockholm 1998, 154-162 (Svenska kyrkans utredningar 1998:2).

In Germany, the country which gave birth to the nineteenth century idea of a charitable Mother House diaconate, sometimes with a quasi ordination (*Beauftragung, Einführung, etc.*), there is also in the Evangelical Church of Germany (Evangelische Kirche Deutschlands, a Lutheran-Reformed church fellowship) an ongoing discussion about whether the diaconate should be looked upon as an ordained ministry parallel with that of the pastor.⁶⁴ There is now an ongoing process⁶⁵ in the church fellowship which strongly supports the idea of changing the diaconal ministry into an ordained diaconate.⁶⁶ What is striking however in the German debate, compared with similar developments, is the almost total absence of references to other churches and to ecumenical documents.

This has also been noted in Germany itself.⁶⁷ One exception is provided by the Diakoniewissenschaftliches Institut at Heidelberg University. The Institute has published a volume whose contents act as a reminder of what has been done elsewhere in

⁶⁴ *Der evangelische Diakonat als geordnetes Amt der Kirche*. Ein Beitrag der Kammer für der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland. Herausgegeben vom Kirchenamt der EKD, Hannover 1996 (EKD Texte Nr. 58, 1996).

⁶⁵ Bericht über die Umsetzung der 7. Tagung der 8. Synode der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland Borkum – 1996, Beschluss der 2. Tagung der 9. Synode der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland in Wizlar, November 1997, Beschluss Nr. 18.

⁶⁶ The various diaconal associations and associations of Mother Houses and diaconal institutions etc., have commented extensively on the proposal for an ordained diaconate, equivalent to the office of pastor. See also the contributions in *Theologisches Gespräch zum evangelischen Diakonat*. Dokumentation einer Veranstaltung am 17. April 1997 im Kirchenamt der EKD, Hannover Juli 1997.

⁶⁷ Konferenz Theologisch-Religionspädagogischer Fachbereiche an Evangelischen Fachhochschulen, Anfragen zu 'Der evangelischen Diakonat als geordnetes Amt der Kirche – Ein Beitrag der Kammer für Theologie der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland', in: *Reader für das theologische Gespräch zum Evangelischen Diakonat*, am 17. April 1997 im Kirchenamt der EKD.

preparation for decisions about a renewal of the diaconate. It gives an overview of the situation both in individual churches and ecumenically.⁶⁸

In addition to the various dialogues noted above between different parts of the Anglican Communion and their ecumenical partners, it is evident that the Church of England has moved a long way since 1974. Not only has it now set up its own internal working party on the diaconate, with Roman Catholic and Methodist observers, but it is involved in the initiative undertaken by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), which is likely to lead to an ecumenical study of the diaconate beginning in 2000. In Britain and Ireland and elsewhere, recent developments in the Roman Catholic Church offer further ecumenical opportunity. The diaconate is relatively new (since the 1960s) to the Roman Catholic Church as a permanent ministry, though it has always been there as a stage to priesthood. In *Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons*, which is one of two documents on the diaconate recently circulated from Rome, each Episcopal Conference is asked to prepare its own *rationes institutionis diaconorum permanentium*. The preparation of national *rationes* provides an opportunity for ecumenical joint study and reflection. There are signs that this opportunity may well be taken in the CTBI venture. Finally,

⁶⁸ *Erneuerung des Diakonats als ökumenische Aufgabe*, Heidelberg 1996 (Diakoniewissenschaftliche Studien 7). The contributions: Strohm, Theodor, *Erneuerung des Diakonats als ökumenische Aufgabe – Einführung*, pp. 11–34; McKee, Elsie Anne, *Diakonie in der klassischen reformierten Tradition und heute*, pp. 35–147; Ahonen, Risto, *Die Entwicklung des diakonischen Amtes in den lutherischen Kirchen insbesondere Finnlands*, pp. 148–262.

after a long process of consultation, the members of the Methodist Diaconal Order of the Methodist Church of Great Britain have been recognised as ordained ministers alongside presbyters.

Renewal of the diaconate is evidently an ongoing phenomenon within churches of many traditions. On the basis of existing evidence, it also seems reasonable to conclude that, in the diaconal development which is affecting so much of world Christianity, a process of convergence may be discerned as the churches dialogue with each other.

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