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CARITAS AND DIAKONIA AS PERSPECTIVES ON THE DIACONATE

In the history of the Church, two concepts, *diakonia* and *caritas*, have been intimately linked to the diaconate. However, neither of them is self-evidently sufficient to define what a deacon is. In the framework of the Anglo-Nordic Diaconal Research Project (ANDREP) there are, not least in the Nordic context, mainly two problems to be observed, and they will be addressed later in this paper: the first is that, since the nineteenth century, *diakonia* has sometimes become identified with *caritas*; the second problem is derived from first, combined with the eighteenth century idea of a functionally grounded ministry, according to which even the ordained diaconate is viewed as the sum of charitable tasks performed.

On the one hand, modern research shows that the term deacon has been used, at different periods of time, in a variety of ways, not always even related to what is meant by *caritas* or *diakonia* today. One example of this is the post-Reformation Church of Sweden pastoral diaconate, which continued up to the 1630s.¹

¹ Brodd, Sven-Erik, The Deacon in the Church of Sweden, in Borgegård, G. and Hall, C. (eds.), *The Ministry of the Deacon. 1. Anglican-Lutheran Perspectives*, Uppsala 1999, pp.101f, hereafter referred to as MOD1.

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On the other hand, what is associated today with *diakonia* or *caritas* has long been present in the life of the Church without any specific reference to these terms. It was not until the nineteenth century that 'diaconal work' and its equivalents were known in the Nordic countries. In the canonical regulations there was no overall description or terminology such as charity or diaconal work, but each field of social care was presented separately, under headings such as 'On hospitals', 'On poor-relief' (Swedish '*Fattig Vård*', Norwegian '*fattigpleie*'). This is evident from research done both in Norway² and Sweden³. A cross-section of history also shows that the term *diakonia* and derivations thereof are not really known through the Middle Ages up to the birth of Protestant interpretations of the term in the nineteenth century. The word used before that was *caritas*.⁴

In spite of this, in many ecclesial traditions the diaconate is defined on the basis of various interpretations of *diakonia* as charity, in a wide meaning of that word. Very often charity and diaconal work have become identical in meaning with the common meaning of social care.⁵ This problem seems not to be present in the English speaking world, where it is true that char-

² Aukrust, Knut, 'Prest, prost, enkemann, fattigmann ...'. *En studie av kirkelig sosialt arbeid i Norge fram mot 1914*, (A Study in Ecclesial Social Work in Norway up to 1914), Diss. Oslo 1989.

³ Gellerstam, Göran, *Från fattigvård till församlingsvård. Utvecklingslinjer inom fattigvård och diakoni i Sverige 1871 - omkring 1895*, (From Poor Relief to Congregational Care. Developments in Poor Relief and Diaconia in Sweden 1871 to circa 1885), Diss. Lund 1971.

⁴ Brodd, Sven-Erik, Diaconia through Church History. Five Ecclesiological Models, in *The Theology of Diaconia*, Grönqvist, Vivi-Ann (ed.), Uppsala 1999, pp. 5-26 (Samariterhemmet's skriftserie 2)

⁵ This is obvious in most of what has been written about the diaconate in the Nordic national churches. For references, see MOD1.

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diakonia or church without until the nineteenth century were regulations such as charities as presented, 'On poor-law' (1834). This is Sweden³. A *diakonia* and the Middle Ages the term in Latin was *caritas*.⁴

diaconate is defined as charity and diaconal work in the community not to be confused with that char-

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in the Nordic

ity is a term for social care of one sort or another, but where it has gradually become secularised and is also used today for social activities outside the churches.

It should also be noted, that when the '*diakonia*' or 'diaconal work' (in any meaning of those words) of the Church of England is presented abroad, there seems to be no idea, or only an extremely vague one, of the interrelationship between the ordained diaconate and *caritas*.⁶ So, if there are tendencies to identify *caritas* and *diakonia* when defining the diaconate in the Nordic context, the inability to relate the deacon to *caritas* in the Church of England tends to expose an ecclesiological deficit as far as recognising the ordained deacon as an integrative part of the structure of the Church of Christ is concerned. This idea will be developed in the following pages.

There are two fundamental problems of terminology that must initially be observed and that also partly have to do with language. The first problem is that the concepts *diakonia*, and diaconal work (activities etc.) are sometimes used as synonyms, and sometimes given different meanings. It is possible to distinguish between *diakonia* (the Greek term) and diaconal work. The former is, in this paper, a fundamentally theological

⁶ See e.g. Badger, Ruth, *Diakonisch-soziale Arbeit in der Church of England – zur Situation und Position*, (Diaconal-social work in the Church of England), in Strohm, Theodor (ed.), *Diakonie in Europa. Ein internationaler und ökumenischer Forschungsaustausch*, Heidelberg 1997, pp. 196-212. There is a good overview of the situation in Pelser, Hans Otto, *The Anglican Way – Zur Spiritualität und Tradition der Anglikanischen Kirche*, (The Anglican Way – On the Spirituality and Tradition of the Anglican Church) in Pompey, Heinrich (ed.), *Caritas – Das menschliche Gesicht des Glaubens. Ökumenische und internationale Anstöße einer Diakoniethologie*, Würzburg 1997, pp. 201-215.

concept; the latter is a description of an activity. The second problem deals with *caritas* and its assumed translation into the words 'charity' and 'caritative' ('*karitativ*'). It is also possible to distinguish between *caritas* as a fundamentally theological concept and charity, which will be seen below as influenced also by another concept (*charis*). Charity therefore is used in this text as denoting a form of activity. The dilemma is well illustrated by the Roman Catholic *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons*, which speaks about '*diakonia of charity*'.⁷ There is a similar expression, rather common in the Church of Sweden, '*karitativ diakoni*' or 'charitable diacony'.⁸

The idea of a 'charitable diaconate', which is very popular in many Protestant circles and in some Roman Catholic, will be challenged, in this paper, by two complicating factors, namely that the deacon during most of the history of the church has been associated with 'liturgy' and that the deacon has been ordained. This latter factor raises the question of whether the deacon becomes a deacon by what he or she does (function) or by what he or she is (ordination).

The thesis put forward here is that *caritas* and *diakonia* respectively, belong to two different conceptual circles. *Caritas*

⁷ Congregation for Catholic Education/Congregation for the Clergy, *Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons/Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons*, Vatican City 1998, pp. 101ff.

⁸ The term 'deacony' is rather odd in English but is common in the Finnish translations of *diakonia*/diaconal work, etc., into English, see e.g. Ryökäs, Riikka, Introduction, *Spiritus (Practice) – Lux (Research) – Caritas (Education). The International Congress in Deacony, Lahti, Finland, 23 to 27 Sept. 1998*, Lahti 1998, p. 8. It is obviously an attempt to translate into English a term, which only exists in the German-speaking areas.

is a translation of the Greek word *agape* into Latin. *Caritas/agape* has to do with a fundamental attitude in each personal, Christian life as the response to the One who is love. *Diakonia* is not identical with that; it is a structure in the Church, realised through various ministries (ordained or licensed in one way or another), organisations of poor relief, sharing between local churches, and so on. Thus, *caritas* cannot be made exclusively the basis for the diaconate. By comparison, *diakonia* offers the basis for ministerial structures generally, and specifically for the office of deacon.

The purpose of this paper is to indicate that, from a biblical theological perspective, *diakonia* and *caritas* are not synonymous, that the ordained diaconate should not be defined solely from either the one or the other, and charitable and diaconal functions should not be made the foundation of the diaconate.

The outline of this paper should be presented briefly. It is divided into five main sections, in the following order:

- (1) The first thesis is that, as mentioned above, *caritas* and *diakonia* essentially belong to two different conceptual circles. *Caritas* is viewed from the semantic range of *agape*, which denotes the love of Christ reflected and realised anew in the personal life of the Christian. The keyword here is *personal*. I also hint at the fact that the Latin *caritas* originates in *carus* but has been associated with another Latin word, *charis*, which complicates the history of ideas. I will, of course, come back to what it means. *Diakonia*, however,

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- (2) The second thesis is that the most obvious place in which *caritas* and *diakonia* meet and are integrated, is liturgy, and especially so in the eucharistic liturgy.
- (3) The third thesis is directly related to the ordained diaconate. On the basis of ordination, the diaconate becomes ecclesologically a structure of the Church. The diaconate, thus, originates not from *caritas* and is certainly not accurately described as a sum of charitable functions. The deacon, however, exercises charity because it belongs to the functions of the ordained diaconate.
- (4) The fourth thesis is an attempt to draw conclusions from what has earlier been briefly elaborated: the tasks of the deacon originate from what she or he is through ordination. They must necessarily include that factor which integrates *diakonia* and *caritas*, namely liturgy. Since both *diakonia* and *caritas* are associated with social work, the 'liturgy after the liturgy', which traditionally is called charity is also a function of the deacon. Both liturgy and charity are inherently bearing witness to the world, reflecting the Church as a sacrament to the world, and therefore the third function of the deacon is teaching.
- (5) Against this background, the conclusion is presented as a short discussion about the legitimacy and identity of a deacon, which were two of the main problems raised during the work of ANDREP Phase one.

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Already at this point it is proper to remind the reader of the fact that *diakonia* in the international debate has a variety of connotations, usually connected to another concept, for example 'international *diakonia*' and 'political *diakonia*'.⁹ It is rather remarkable to note that the diaconate never seems to be mentioned in this context. It looks as if the deacon's ministry has nothing to do with these descriptions of '*diakonia*'.

Another concept, which should be commented on here, and which is already mentioned, is structure. It originates in the fact that the Church must be capable of being identified universally, in the midst of all the contexts in which she is planted. She must also be capable of being recognised through all centuries. Otherwise mission would be impossible and the Church could not be a sign and effective instrument for Christ in the world, that is, she could not be the Body of Christ. Without identifiable structures the Church as the people of God would not be distinct among other peoples.

Structures are thus those necessary forms and phenomena, which together build up the Church. This is not the place to develop the theology of structures, the structural ecclesiology, but obviously the ecumenical discussion about the *pleroma*, the fullness of the Church, falls into this sphere.¹⁰

⁹ Brodd, Sven-Erik, *Kyrka och diakoni. Något om förhållandet mellan ecklesiologi och diakoni inom Kyrkornas Världsråd*, (The Church and *Diakonia*: Perspectives on the relationship between ecclesiology and *diakonia* in the World Council of Churches), 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*, *Ecumenical Review* 46 (1994), pp. 276-286.

¹⁰ Brodd, Sven-Erik, *Diakonaten: Från ecklesiologi till pastoral praxis*, (The Diaconate: From Ecclesiology to Pastoral Practice), Uppsala 1992, pp. 8off.

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CARITAS AND DIAKONIA FROM A BIBLICAL POINT OF VIEW

In discussion about the ministry of the deacon, the terms *diakonia* and *caritas* (in various languages) are used rather superficially. It seems today as if they are regarded as synonyms, with *caritas* used in Roman Catholic and *diakonia* in Protestant contexts.¹¹ I have questioned that in previous work.¹² The terms are used to cover a wide range of meanings, which have a sort of common denominator, namely 'care' of some sort. Tentatively, I would like here to discuss a possible model for understanding the concepts of *caritas* and *diakonia*, which has the ability to bring them together by means of a liturgical theology.

There are, however, at present, two fundamental problems concerning how *caritas*, and *diakonia* when identified with *caritas*, are exercised:

¹¹ Pompey, Heinrich, *Caritas – Das menschliche Gesicht des Glaubens. Ökumenische, internationale, interreligiöse und interdiziplinäre Anstöße einer Diakoniethologie*, (*Caritas – the Human Face of Faith. Ecumenical, International, Inter-religious, and Interdisciplinary Impulses to a Theology of Diaconia*) in Pompey, H. (ed.), *Caritas – Das menschliche Gesicht des Glaubens. Ökumenische und internationale Anstöße einer Diakoniethologie*, Würzburg 1997, pp. 9–18; Stein, Jürgen, Profil und Kooperationsfähigkeit, oder: Wann schliessen Diakonie und Caritas sich zusammen? (Profile and Ability of Cooperation, or: When will *diakonia* and *caritas* unite?), in *Diakonie der Versöhnung. Ethische Reflexion und soziale Arbeit in ökumenischer Verantwortung. Festschrift für Theodor Strohm*, Stuttgart 1998, pp. 252–262.

¹² Brodd, Sven-Erik, Word and Action. *Diakonia* from a Theological Perspective, in *People's Need – People's Search – Ours Response*, Papers of the DRAE-Conference in Uppsala, Sweden, 1999, Samariterhemmet's Skriftserie nr 3, Uppsala 1999; Brodd, Sven-Erik, *Diakonia* through Church History. Five Ecclesiological Models, in *The Theology of Diakonia*, Samariterhemmet's skriftserie nr 2, Uppsala 1999, pp. 5–26; Brodd, Sven-Erik, Wort und Tat – Diakonie aus einer theologischen und ekklesiologischen Perspektive, (Word and Action. Diaconia from a theological and ecclesiological Perspective) *Diakonie an der Schwelle zum neuen Jahrtausend. Ökumenische Beiträge zur weltweiten interdisziplinären Verständigung*, Heidelberg 2000, pp. 188–210.

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(1) The personal character of *caritas* becomes quite clear in a study of the history of the Church. *Caritas* has been carried out by individual believers or associations of believers. In Church history, charity (the exercise of *caritas*) has been employed by monastic and religious orders, guilds, societies, and associations. All of these could be characterised as the sum of their members. The problem, though, seems to be, that the nineteenth century ideology of associations implies that the fellowship gets its identity through the individual members. In classical Christian faith, the individual got his or her identity through the fellowship of which that person was a part.

(2) Today diaconal/charitable work has a distinctive ‘voluntary’ character.¹³ Volunteering is itself a set of values, which constitutes the so-called voluntarism. It is basically a political concept implying that specific deeds transcend the sphere of those deeds that are self evidently required by any person of good will. What is voluntary is a matter of free choice. Payment of taxes, for example, is not voluntary but contributions to a charitable society are. The issue then is: if *diakonia* is an ecclesiological structure, then what is voluntary or not in diaconal work must be very precisely defined. Since ‘diaconal work’ during the nineteenth century became part of the voluntary sector in church and society, it was also privatised in the sense that it ceased to be or be seen to be the corporate work of the

¹³ See for example Ellis, Susan J. and Noyes, Katherine H., *By The People. A History of Americans as Volunteers*, San Francisco 1990.

Church, and became the work of self-motivated individual Christians or Christian organisations.

It becomes ecclesiologicaly problematic if the ordained diaconate is drawn into the sphere of voluntarism. It could tentatively be said that *caritas/agape* is always *personal* and thereby differs from *diakonia*, which is *structural* in the Holy Scriptures. When *diakonia* is individualised, it is related to an office of some kind and thereby not to anything 'voluntary'.

Understanding *caritas* as *agape*, a personal gift of God

There are good reasons for questioning the use of *caritas* as synonymous with *diakonia*, a comparison worthwhile irrespective of the problem of the 'charitable diaconate'. The Latin word *caritas* is derived from another Latin word, namely *carus*, which means beloved, dear or precious. Since the seventh century, it has been used to translate the Greek noun *caris*, which means basically grace, and therefore, for example, the English spelling of charity derives from the mediaeval *charitas*. However, in the Vulgate and in the Latin Fathers, the Greek *agape* seems to have been correctly translated as *caritas* throughout. This means from a Biblical theological point of view that when dealing with *caritas* it should be given the content of *agape*, which is basically the love of God the Father (1 John 4:7), which through Jesus Christ (1 John 4:9) is at work through the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5) in and by the Church (Galatians 5:6).

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The etymology of Isidore of Seville (d. 633) derives *caritas* from *charis*, and if this derivation is taken, the stress will obviously be put on what is given by grace. The most frequent translation of *charis* is probably 'favour'. Fundamentally it has to do with the favour of God bestowed upon women and men (Luke 2:40) and especially the favour of God, which justifies all, i.e. the unmerited gifts of salvation (Romans 3:24 et al. mult.). This gave to concepts such as 'mercy' and 'benevolence' a central hermeneutical role, when *charis* was applied to social conditions, well known from the system of beggars and givers during mediaeval times and criticised by many reformers of various kinds during the sixteenth century.¹⁴ A system of donations to the Church, in its extreme forms, systematised into the shape of excessive indulgencies, and the formation, for example, of mendicant orders, explores the theological significance of charity.

This social system was also criticised by the Enlightenment, during the eighteenth century, by which time it had taken root again. From the middle of the nineteenth century, social reformers attacked the voluntary charitable work in the churches. They saw it as humiliating people, leaving them to the mercy of the rich, preserving unjust social systems and without any capacity to promote social justice and welfare. It is clear that *charis/charity* was identified with diaconal work. The concept of *charis*, not *carus*, was the predominant hermeneutical key. This is one of the reasons why charity (*caritas*) must be reinterpreted from the perspective of *agape*.

¹⁴ Lindberg, Carter, *Beyond Charity: Reformation Initiatives for the Poor*, Minneapolis, Minn. 1993.

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One of the problems with the charitable diaconate is the danger of *its* being outdated by the fact that it is grounded in nineteenth century ideas of charity. If, according to those, *diakonia* is interpreted as deeds of love (*kärleksgärningar*), deeds of mercy (*barmhärlighetsgärningar*), this obviously implies a strong emphasis on the donor- receiver perception. That also presupposes a social hierarchy within the church.¹⁵ In the modern debate this gave rise, in Sweden at least, to a massive critique from the Social Democrats and Liberals when building the welfare state.

One possible re-interpretation of charity starts from fundamental theology. The *caritaslagape* described in biblical theology as an essential characteristic of the triune God (1 John 4:8), received in faith by the Church (1 Corinthians 8:3), motivates action. This love is individual-centred or personal but not individualistic. Christian persons reflect the mercy of God in mutual charity and love for their neighbour. There is in the concept of *caritas* an element of personal sacrifice for one another. Therefore *caritas* is both a gift (1 John 4:10) and a task or even a command (Math 22:37-40). This *caritas* is the mark of each Christian (John 13:34f). By exercising *caritas*, i.e. charity in this particular meaning, each Christian bears witness to the Church as the community of those who are given love and practise it.

¹⁵ Meland, Roar, *The Deacon in the Church of Norway*, MOD1, pp. 64f.

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The Church as the Body of Christ, as a collective person, also exercises *caritas* (Ephesians 4), thereby becoming a kind of sacrament to the world, a sign and instrument of the divine love. In this case, the Church is built up (*oikodome*) by loving and caring believers, not by structures and offices. These are secondary, supporting the *agape* of the individual persons and those persons who join together with others to practice it in *koinonia*. There is a necessary interdependence in ecclesiology between love (*agape*) and fellowship (*koinonia*). The one cannot exist without the other.

Diakonia as an ecclesial structure related to an office

One of the meanings of *diakonia* and *diakoneo* is ministry, in the Gospels predominantly service at table (Mark 1:31, par., Matthew 22:13, et al.).¹⁶ This is fundamental for the theological understanding of *diakonia* in the New Testament, since all the ministries in the Church are rooted in the mystical body of Christ and constitute thereby an organic unity (1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12). Insofar as the Church by its nature is the New Covenant, it is founded in the first Eucharist. All ministries in the Church are servants of that New Covenant (2 Corinthians 3:6), and it is therefore inappropriate to regard the diaconate in this perspective as a sort of more 'humble' or inferior ministry.¹⁷

¹⁶ For a critical and nuanced discussion of this, see Collins, John, *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources*, Oxford 1990.

¹⁷ See Collins, John N., *Are All Christians Ministers?*, Dublin 1992, pp. 86ff, 102-108. Collins even coins the term 'servant myth' about the idea of the deacon as a sort of inferior servant in the New Testament. For a more thorough scholarly work on this, see Collins, John N., *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources*, Oxford 1990.

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Usually the term *diakonia* and its equivalents are translated as 'service'. It is possible to qualify this concept by putting it into the framework of sharing (*koinonia*),¹⁸ though the use of concepts like 'service of love' (Liebesdienst, kärlekstjänst etc.) as descriptions of *diakonia* is questionable. From the ecclesiological perspective, the Church as such is a community of love (*agape*), which is basic for *koinonia* and takes shape in sharing of various kinds (1 Thessalonians 3:12, Ephesians 4:16). From this perspective, and only from this perspective, deacons exercise a ministry of love, together with the whole Church. There is no evidence from the biblical point of view that the deacon's ministry is a ministry of love because they take care of the poor. That is a nineteenth century idea.¹⁹ In the New Testament there are various expressions of mutuality characterising *diakonia*, and these expressions seem to be dominant, not any specific form of 'love'. Love is, of course, the essence of Christian life, but it is not necessary to highlight it in relation to *diakonia* as a sort of specific trait. Nor does there seem to be a reference in the New Testament where *diakonia* denotes a specific love for the neighbour, though it provides structures for love.

The diaconate has traditionally been viewed as a subordinate ministry, though there does not appear to be any support for that in the New Testament. In the Fathers, there seems to be

¹⁸ There is another field of motifs in which the word *diakoneo* is used, and which it is not possible to integrate into the use of it in this context. It has to do with the humiliation and sacrifice of Christ, obviously relating to motifs like the Suffering Servant.

¹⁹ See e.g. Gärtner, Bertil, *Diakoni och diakonat i Nya Testamentet*, (Diaconia and diaconate in the New Testament), in *Tjänsten åt nästan. 1969 års diakonitrednings betänkande*, Stockholm 1972, pp. 14-27.

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some limited support for it in one respect only, namely in the use of the terms *diakoneo* and *diakonos* in the sense of 'co-worker' (2 Corinthians 6:1; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8-12). This would fit into the understanding of an intimate relationship between the content of sharing (*koinonia*) and the content of service (*diakonia*). This is also possible to pursue in regard to other passages in the New Testament. Servanthood in the New Covenant implies a *participation*, a sharing in, the New Covenant (2 Corinthians 3:6). Servants of justice are at the same time sharing justice (2 Corinthians 11:15) and the same could be said about servants of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:23 et al.), servants of the Gospel (Ephesians 3:7 et al.), servants of the *ekklesia* (Colossians 1:25). It is probably also from the perspective of co-worker that the relation between the deacon and the bishop must be seen (1 Timothy 3:1f, 3:8f; 1 Clement 42:1f; Ignatius ad Magn. 2:1,6:1, Ignatius Ad Trall. 3:1). In the light of *koinonia*, the deacon *participates* in the office of the bishop. Subordination is not an *intrinsic* characteristic of the deacon: however, under certain circumstances, it is a practical application or consequence of *koinonia*.

Sharing (*koinonia*), as the context which gives *diakonia* its meaning, can be found expressed in a variety of ways, for example sharing of spiritual and material resources in the *ekklesia* (Mark 15:41b, Luke 8:3, 1 Peter 4:10f).²⁰ There are also several indications that *diakonia* implies a sharing of resources between

²⁰ For the concept of *koinonia* as sharing, see Reumann, John, *Koinonia in Scripture: Survey of Biblical texts*, in *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia: Official Report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order*, Geneva 1994, pp. 37-69.

local churches (Hebrews 6:10; Romans 15:25, 31; 2 Corinthians 8:19; Acts 11:29, 12:25) and a sharing of the Gospel in Mission (2 Corinthians 3:3; 1 Peter 1:12; 2 Timothy 4:11; Acts 6:4, 20:24, 21:19 etc.).

THE EUCHARISTIC LITURGY AS AN INTEGRATING FACTOR OF *DIAKONIA* AND *CARITAS*

If the concepts of love (*agape*) and service (*diakonia*) are to be developed today, it is obvious that this hermeneutical process needs tools of interpretation. 'Love' and 'service' have too many connotations to be understandable without explanation. The ordained deacon has traditionally an important task in this respect. It is the duty of the ordained deacon, in his or her capacity as a part of the teaching office of the Church, to interpret and explain to the faithful the consequences and implications of the personal *agape* and the structures of *diakonia*.

The early Church exercised benevolence in an extensive way. It was partly connected to the meal called *agape*. It is a challenge to think of the *agape* as *coena caritatis* and to explore the consequences of that for the discussion on the nature of a liturgical diaconate. The meal of love was supervised and headed by the bishops and deacons (or, in some local churches, the college of presbyters). This seems to be the unique point in which *agape*/*caritas* and *diakonia* meet.²¹ It is clear that the eucharistic meal

²¹ Tjørhom. Ola, *Kirken – Troens Mor. Et økumenisk bidrag til en luthersk ekklesiologi*, (The Church – The Mother of Faith), Oslo 1999, pp. 173f.

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(to which the *agape* meal was in some way attached) was the centre of the local *ekklesia*.²² Today the *agape* meal is totally integrated into the eucharistic celebration. One of the expressions of *caritas* in this Sunday event was the creation of a sharing, socially responsible community (1 Corinthians 11:17-34). This idea could be developed but suffice it to say here that it indicates the intimate connection between liturgy, sharing and ministry in the early Church.

In 1996, the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission presented a report in which it was said that 'the liturgy provides the context for understanding the church's diaconal ministry'.²³ If it is true that *diakonia* is structural in essence, it is realised in the exercise of *agape*, which is founded in the Eucharist. This theological motif of *agape* understood as being founded in the life and work of Christ and structured and visible through the *diakonia* of the eucharistic community, was expressed as follows in *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (1982):

Solidarity in the eucharistic communion of the body of Christ and responsible care of Christians for one another and the world find specific expression in the liturgies: in the mutual forgiveness of sins; the sign of peace; intercession for all; the eating and drinking together; the taking of the elements to the sick and those in prison or the celebration of the Eucharist with them.

²² Roloff, Jürgen, *Die Kirche im Neuen Testament*, (the Church in the New Testament) Göttingen 1993.

²³ *The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity*. The Hanover Report of the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission. Published for the Anglican Consultative Council and the Lutheran World Federation, London-Geneva, 1996, § 21.

All these manifestations of love in the Eucharist are directly related to Christ's own testimony as a servant, in whose servanthood Christians themselves participate. As God in Christ has entered into the human situation, so eucharistic liturgy is near to the concrete and particular situations of men and women. In the early Church, the ministry of deacons and deaconesses gave expression in a special way to this aspect of the Eucharist. The place of such ministry between the table and the needy properly testifies to the redeeming presence of Christ in the world.²⁴

The Church is the *koinonia* founded in the triune God, the communion in which and by which the Gifts of God in creation and redemption are shared. The central expression and instrument for this is the Eucharist, the New Covenant in Christ's blood. This covenant/communion has given sharing the form of *diakonia* which has as its deepest motif the *agape* of God, the outpouring love of God made evident for the believers in Christ's sacrifice in the Eucharist, extended to everyday life in the 'liturgy after the liturgy'.²⁵

Earlier in this paper, a distinction was made between *caritas* as personal, and *diakonia* as structural concepts, which could be made more intelligible when understood from the perspective of the Eucharist. Focusing the *agape* character of the whole sacramental meal mentioned above, it has a personal trait without which it is not understandable. The sacrament involves a

²⁴ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. III, Geneva 1982, Eucharist § 21, p.14.

²⁵ Bria, Ion, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy. Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective*, Geneva 1996.

personal encounter between Christ and Christians. Christians, however, are not a sum of individuals but a corporate person, incorporated by means of Baptism into the mystical Body of Christ. That all implies structures, and *diakonia* is integrated in the eucharistic sharing, giving form to the social life of the Church. By interpreting *diakonia* as a structure of the Church by means of *agape*, and by putting the understanding of *diakonia* from this perspective into the framework of the Eucharist, it is not possible to give either *caritas* or *diakonia* a meaning that avoids the eschatological dimension. From the perspective of the Church, therefore, neither charity nor charitable work can be interpreted from a merely sociological or secularised perspective. The eschatological perspective, founded in the Eucharist, gives no room for a functional or predominantly sociological view of charity and diaconal work, if they are derived from either *caritas* or *diakonia*.²⁶

CHARITY AS CONSTITUTIVE OF, OR FUNCTION OF, THE DIACONATE

It is time to turn directly to the question of how what has been said hitherto relates to the perception of the ordained diaconate. The term charity is here used in accordance with what was earlier mentioned as the implementation of *caritas* in the life of the Church. In this context, usually in all traditions influenced

²⁶ On the importance of the eschatological meaning of *diakonia* and the consequences of it for the perception of what a deacon is, see Hall, Christine, *The Liturgical-Social Axis of the Deacon's Ministry: Sign and Instrument of the Kingdom of God*, in this volume, pp. 71-106

by the German nineteenth century tradition, the meanings of charity and 'diacony' (charitable work) coincide.

Both charity and 'diacony' have been used in a twofold way, either as constitutive for the ministry of ordained deacons, or, at the very least, as one main description of the functions of the diaconate. This twofold way may be briefly set out as follows:

- (a) The idea of a diaconate constituted by *caritas* or *diakonia*, interpreted as if they coincided, would briefly be outlined like this: To the extent that the diaconate is described exclusively through its charitable or diaconal functions ('diacony'), whatever is meant by that, the diaconate is defined by these functions and is thus founded in these two concepts. A deacon is then exclusively defined by 'diacony' or charity, both of which are interpreted as activities in the church. In many traditions influenced from Germany, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, the two concepts are held together as 'charitable diacony' (*karitative Diakonie, karitativ diakoni*). In this way *caritas* implemented as charity, in the nineteenth century meaning of the word, will be constitutive of what a deacon is. This is the basis for a functionalistic view of the ministry of deacons. He or she will be what he or she is because of the functions performed, more or less in analogy with a social worker.
- (b) When the diaconate is not constituted by charity or 'diacony' but has charitable or diaconal functions, the pattern

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will be different. If the deacon is attributed charitable work or diaconal work as a part of his or her ministry, then there are also other elements to consider when defining the diaconate. *Caritas* or *diakonia* are both fundamental elements in the theology of the diaconate, but charity and 'diacony' only define the ministry of deacons indirectly and certainly not in an exclusive way. The understanding of the deacon is deduced from ecclesiology, not inductively from certain actions undertaken. The foundation of the diaconate in this case is usually ordination.

In Western traditions there are two types of ordained deacons, those who are transitional deacons, mostly of a liturgical and pastoral character, and those who are permanent deacons. It seems as if the last group is defined by concepts of *diakonia* and *caritas* while the transitional deacons are not. Presumably this historical fact could contribute to the discussion about the relationship between *caritas* and *diakonia* and the concept of deacons' ordination.

One of the problems present in the debate about the diaconate concerns the general understanding of functions and tasks in church life ('getting a job done') in relation to what takes shape through an irreversible act of God, for example an office established by ordination. Like the words *apostolos* or *episkopos*, the word *diakonos* also seems to have a double connotation in the New Testament. *Apostolos* and *episkopos* can imply either a person who exercises apostolicity or *episkope* in one way or another, or a person who has the office of apostle or bishop.

This distinction has often been overlooked. In theological discussions this has caused some problems. These problems have been obvious in the debate about the relationship between *presbyteros* and *episkopos* in the New Testament. In the absence of the distinction mentioned, the idea has been nourished, ever since St Jerome, that 'from the beginning' presbyter and bishop was one and the same office.²⁷ The same ambiguity can be applied to *diakonos*. The term *diakonia* can denote both the service at large in the *ekklesia* (Ephesians 4:11ff) or characterise a specific office (Acts 1:17; Romans 11:13/apostle; Colossians 4:17/undefined ministry; 2 Timothy 4:5/ *episkopos*). Among these specific offices there are also deacons (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8ff).

Taking into account the ambiguity already mentioned and the necessity of distinctions, there are two possibilities of defining the diaconate. One departs from the perspective of 'function', in this case usually the charitable tasks, and the other one from the perspective of 'office'. The first one has been associated with Lutheran-Melanchthonian traditions, the second one with the Anglican position. That view needs to be nuanced in a radical way.

In the light of this, it seems appropriate to contrast the idea of the diaconate, as constituted by the sum of charitable work

²⁷ Brodd, Sven-Erik, Superintendenten som ersättning för och komplement till biskopsämbetet i svenska kyrkan 1539-1631, (The Superintendent as Substitute for – and Complementary to the Office of Bishop in the Church of Sweden 1539-1631), in *Reformationens etablering och konsolidering i de nordiska länderna 1540-1610*, Oslo, 1990, pp. 21-64; Brodd, Sven-Erik, Biskopsämbetet i kyrkoordningen 1571, (The Office of Bishop in the Church Ordinance of 1571), in *Kyrkohistorisk Årsskrift* 89 (1989), pp. 91-109.

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A diaconate defined by functions summarised as charity

The idea that deacons have responsibility for social welfare in the local church is known from the early Church. However, theologians and churchmen in the nineteenth century Protestant traditions turned this fact around, maintaining that the social and spiritual need of the people, who were at that time actually baptised and members of the national churches, needed firm action. In accordance with mediaeval terminology, that action was called charity (*caritas*), i.e. deeds of mercy or deeds of love. Often the overall description of it takes its name from the German movement called *Innere Mission* (domestic mission). Another term in use was a form of the word *diakonia*, adapted to the local language (in German: *Diakonie*, in the Scandinavian languages: *diakoni*). At that time 'diacony' was interpreted as merciful service, loving service or just service for the poor. The need for a ministry that undertook charitable work led to the introduction of deacons and deaconesses. They were partly modelled on the Roman Catholic orders of charity, partly on the then developing interpretation of deacons in the New Testament. Also in the latter case, the very common identification of *diakonia* in the New Testament as loving, humble service, affected the understanding of what a deacon/deaconess should be. Deacons and deaconesses became therefore organised in such a way that charitable functions defined their ministry.

The term 'charitable diaconate' is stamped by nineteenth century German theology even to the extent that 'charitable' becomes nothing but a bad translation of the German concept 'karitativ'. The functions of these deacons and deaconesses are mainly determined by their models, the charitable orders in the Roman Catholic tradition. The deaconesses were inaugurated for life, mostly by means of vows of chastity, obedience, and poverty. The German-influenced charitable diaconate was the centre of the so-called Mother House system. The deacons and deaconesses were taken up into the communion of brothers or sisters, sometimes by a semi-ordination including laying-on-of-hands.

The interpretation of the concept of charity (*caritas*) was, as was 'diacony' and 'inner mission', vast and inclusive. It covered not only social service but also teaching and evangelism of various kinds. This is obvious in the Nordic national churches, but the phenomenon is also known in England.²⁸ The difference is, however, that the maintenance of the transitional diaconate made it impossible to define the deacon solely from the concept of charity, although that was the case when deaconesses were introduced into the Church of England.²⁹

²⁸ Hall, Christine, *The Deacon in the Church of England*, MOD I, pp. 181-247, esp. 190ff. On English influences on the development of a charitable understanding of deaconesses in Sweden, see Koivunen Bylund, Tuulikki, "Frukta icke allenast tro". *Ebba Boström och Samariterhemmet 1882-1902*, ('Fear not fear, only believe'. Ebba Boström and Samariterhemmet 1882-1902), Stockholm 1994, pp. 49-72. On charitable sisterhoods in the Church of England, see Anson, Peter F., *The Call of the Cloister: Religious Communities and Kindred Bodies in the Anglican Communion*, Campbell, A.W. (rev.ed.), London 1964 (lit.).

²⁹ Hall, Christine, *The Diaconate in the Church of England*, *Diakonater i olika kyrkotraditioner*, Uppsala 1995, 33-44; *The Ministry of Women. A Report by a Committee Appointed by his Grace the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury*, London 1919 contains several investigations still of interest today.

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It seems, from the perspective of the Nordic debate about the diaconate, that the functional position (a diaconate as the sum of tasks assigned to it) is easily combined with a quest for a specific spirituality (humbleness, loving care, self-sacrifice) and tends to underline the character of an inferior ministry. In comparison, for example, with the Roman Catholic hierarchical system, the inferiority *in praxis*, easily observable in the Nordic Folk churches, is absolute and not relational, i.e. a form of subordination.

It is obvious that the concept of a 'charitable diaconate' has also played a role in the power game or even power struggle in the debate about the diaconate in the Nordic countries. Charity has been given a connotation of love in the meaning of self-sacrifice or even self-effacement, which is associated with a romantic apprehension of the deaconesses attached to the nineteenth century Mother House system. Charity thus has been associated with humble service. Therefore those in the debate who are against the ordination of deacons stress the functional aspects of the diaconate, interpreting it as the sum of charitable tasks, performed without any claim to power. Otherwise it would become a threat to the power of the priests and a challenge to the power of the laity.

If the charitable character attributed to the diaconate can be used as an argument for the diaconate as an ordained ministry, from the perspective of an ecclesiology in which *diakonia* is a mark of the Church, it can also in some Lutheran quarters be used as an argument against the perception of the diaconate as

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an ordained ministry. The background for this is the Lutheran teaching on the two realms or two kingdoms, according to which ordained ministry is the Ministry of the Gospel, which includes Word and Sacrament, while social services belong to the realm of the Law. It is therefore not a proclamation in deeds but an answer to the proclamation of the Gospel. Thus, the diaconate cannot be a part of the Ministry of the proclamation of the Gospel. This view is not very frequently expressed, but it does exist.³⁰

From the definition made of *caritas* and the underlining of the content of the original Greek word *agape* as the predominant expression of Christian love, charity, as the way of implementation of that, is always personal. In order not to be individualised, not to be privatised and isolated from the organism, which is the Church, it requires structures.

Ordination as criterion for what a deacon is

The ecclesiological structuring factor of the ministry of the Church is ordination. That is the dividing line between those who have been irreversibly given the gifts of the Holy Spirit for life, by the prayers of the Church and the laying-on-of-hands and themselves presented as a gift to the Church, those who have been accepted by the Church for leadership and edification

³⁰ Wingren, Gustaf, *Diakonins teologi: goda gärningar eller gudagärningar*, (The Theology of Diaconia: Good deeds or divine deeds), in *Lunds stiftsbok 1991/2*, pp. 39–47; Østnor, Lars, *Kirkens tjenester med særlig henblikk på diakontjenesten*, (The Ministries in the Church Especially in Regard to the Ministry of Deacons), Oslo 1978.

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of the Christian life, and those who have not. That, of course, does not imply that the Holy Spirit is not given to all other persons in Baptism and Confirmation and through other means, but ordination has different aims.

When defining an office in the church, there are historical layers, which must be taken into account.³¹ First there is *the functional view*, inherited from the Enlightenment, when the practice was to estimate the value and from that the idea of an office on the basis of its usefulness. A great deal of the discussion on the diaconate is stamped by this, because the practice was taken over by the pietistic and evangelical movements during the nineteenth century. Secondly, there is the idea of *profession*, also born during the nineteenth century and still affecting the debate about the diaconate. Especially in some Nordic national churches, education for the diaconate is grounded in specialist competence of some sort, for example, in competence as a social worker, in Sweden, or in competence as a nurse, in Finland.³² The question is how deeply that affects the deacon's identity.³³

³¹ Brodd, Sven-Erik, 'Ett prästerskap som frambär andliga offer'. Perspektiv på prästens spiritualitet, (A Priesthood which Brings Spiritual Sacrifices. Perspective on the Ministerial Priesthood). *Prästupbildningen möter framtiden. Rapport från en konferens om utbildningen till präst samt prästens identitet och spiritualitet*, ed. Per Hansson et al., Uppsala 2000, pp.39-43.

³² Pohjolainen, Terttu, The Deacon in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland, MOD1, pp.141-180.

³³ Ryökäs, Esko, *Diakonianäkemyksemme. Tutkimus eri diakonianäkemysten esiintymisestä diakonian viranhaltijoiden, teologien ja luottamushenkilöiden keskuudessa vuonna 1989*, Tampere 1990; Bäckström Anders, et. al., *För att tjäna. En studie av diakoniuppfattningar hos kyrkliga befattningshavare*, Uppsala 1994 (Svenska kyrkans utredningar 1994:1). A summary of the two studies in Ryökäs, Understanding 'Diakonia'. Four Concepts of Diakonia in two Nordic Countries, *Spiritus (Practice) – Lux (Research) – Caritas (Education). The International Congress in Deacony, Lahti, Finland, 23-27 Sept. 1998*, Lahti 1998, pp. 197-205.

If the diaconate is a profession, it is easier to handle if it is a lay ministry categorised by an overall description of a series of tasks, summarised under the label of charity. If it is an ordained ministry, a person will remain a deacon whatever employment he or she might have. Lastly, there is *the role*, an idea taken over from psychology. This may be the most dangerous concept applied to an ordained ministry because it gives the convincing impression that ordination has no effect and that the deacon plays a role, which is not integrated into his or her personality.

It is obviously possible to distinguish between ordained deacons, who get their authorisation by ordination, and non-ordained diaconal ministers, who get their authorisation through an appointment. One could distinguish between persons who are ordained and are therefore given certain functions and those who by appointment become something because of what they do. An ordained deacon becomes a deacon by ordination, and ordination gives him or her the competence to exercise the ministry. The deacon remains deacon irrespective of what type of position he or she holds. A diaconal minister ceases to be a diaconal minister when he or she is not exercising a diaconal ministry of any kind.

If this view is held, something must necessarily be said about ordination. In an approach to the question of *caritas* and *diakonia* in relation to the diaconate, the meaning of ordination must be taken into account. There are two main concepts of ordination: one late mediaeval, today represented, for example, by some Lutheran-Melanchthonian traditions, which stress the

canonical importance of ordination, as a pattern of empowering. It can also be found in Anglican theology. This could be called the juridical concept. The other concept has been rediscovered from the Early Church and stresses the meaning of ordination as the prayer for – and reception of – special spiritual gifts, ultimately the Holy Spirit itself. This concept underlines the importance of the *epiclesis* in the ordination. Where the first concept underlines the transference of power in ordination, the second focuses on the gifts given in ordination.³⁴

It is obvious that the debate about the diaconate in the Nordic national churches is stamped by the dispute about whether deacons should be a part of the ordained ministry or not in the sense of an equivalent to priest or bishop.³⁵ The position taken also affects the view on the relation between charity and the diaconate. One example of this may be found in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, where the General Synod appointed a committee, which published its report in 1975. It stated that the diaconate in the Finnish national church in practice was perceived as a lay ministry for charitable tasks without catechetical or liturgical functions. The lay identity become obvious on the one hand because of the lack of a clear understanding of the ordination or blessing of the deacons/deaconesses and on the other due to the evident professional identity they had.

³⁴ Brodd, Sven-Erik, *Biskopsämbetet som ecklesiologiskt problem*, (The Office of Bishop as an ecclesiological Problem), in *Biskopsämbetet i de nordiska Folkkyrkorna ur ett ekumeniskt perspektiv*, Uppsala 1994, pp. 80–99.

³⁵ See e.g. Olsen, Ghita, *Den teologiske debat om diakonatet i de nordiske folkekirker* (The Theological Debate on the Diaconate in the Nordic National Churches), thesis presented to the Faculty of Theology, University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen 2000.

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Subsequently, since the 1970s, committees have presented the diaconate as an ordained ministry, and charity is usually not seen as the sole mark of that office. The fact that it is interpreted as an office in the church thus widens the scope and interrelates it to other offices, normally those of bishop and presbyter. The question arises as to what the implications of ordination are. One is obviously that the deacon should take part in the (eucharistic) liturgy.

So, if *diakonia* is an ecclesiological structure it is concretised contextually and made effective by means of certain tools, which could be categorized as organs for *diakonia* or organisations for it (*organon*, in Greek, means tool). That means that *diakonia* as a structure of the Church can be organised differently at different times during the history of the Church and at present in various parts of the world. One of the ecumenical questions today is whether the diaconate itself is a structure or an *organon*, and whether it is necessary, in order for the Church to be fully Church or not. What is commonly agreed, in both Anglican and Lutheran-Melanchthonian traditions, is that ordination itself is not optional for the meaning of *organon*. It is ecclesologically significant and universal in character. Therefore ordination is a structure in the Church. Thus, an ordained deacon is a structure in the Church and in some traditions the diaconate is interpreted in sacramental categories.

In summary, ordination changes the perspective from what a deacon should do, to who a deacon is. The question then is not primarily what is the work of a deacon but which are the gifts

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given to the deacon. Already in the letter to Timothy, the bishop of the Church in Thessaloniki, this is the main perspective: 'Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the council of elders laid their hands upon you.' (1 Tim 4:15) It is rather astonishing to notice that this perspective both in the Nordic Churches and in the Church of England is so conspicuously absent.

A THREEFOLD DIACONATE

If it does not seem possible to define the diaconate either directly from the concept of *caritas* or indirectly from its derivative, namely charity, and if it can be presumed that the ordained diaconate is an ecclesiological structure, what does that imply for the understanding of the diaconate and the tasks of the deacon? If one then adds to this that the eucharistic liturgy seems to be the effective bond between *caritas* and *diakonia*, what consequences should be drawn from that?

In the Church of England it seems as if the pastoral tasks of deacons³⁶ correspond with the development in the Nordic national churches. There are also liturgical tasks and teaching assigned to the deacon.³⁷ At the same time, it seems, there is a growing awareness of the classical view of the deacon as the one who provides for people in need, which is associated with a charitable diaconate.

³⁶ Bardwell, Elaine, The Pastoral role of the Deacon, in Hall, C. (ed.), *The Deacon's Ministry*, Leominster 1992, pp. 45-66.

³⁷ Burnham, Andrew, The Liturgical Ministry of a Deacon, in Hall, C., (ed.) *The Deacon's Ministry*, Leominster 1992, pp. 67-88; Cullen, The Educational Ministry of Deacons, in *The Deacon's Ministry*, pp. 89-102.

In the Nordic context, stamped by the idea of a 'charitable diaconate', the scope has broadened in recent years. The effects have shown in a double way: first, deacons have been assigned tasks which cannot be described as charitable in the nineteenth century meaning of the word. The new profile is more pastoral in character, including pastoral care, liturgy, administration, education, etc. There have also been proposals to integrate into the ordained diaconate cantors, catechists and some other ministries.

Both in official texts, reports from various committees and commissions, and in the debate, it seems, there is a contradiction in the Nordic churches, on the one hand between the commonly held idea that the diaconate is identified by charity, and on the other hand what is called a 'broad based diaconate'. In some cases, the diaconate is viewed as a sign and instrument for *diakonia*, identified as *caritas*, which theologically is a mark of the whole church. This confusion of *caritas* and *diakonia* prevents a necessary elaboration of the inner relation between the two. In praxis this also complicates the reflection on the diaconate. Even if the diaconate were named a 'charitable diaconate' that is not supported by the actual situation, because of the multitude of tasks assigned to deacons. The problem is that these tasks are not theologically integrated from the perspective of the meaning of *caritas* or *diakonia*.

The fundamental problem, as I interpret it, is the lack of distinction between what the diaconate is and the tasks that are assigned to it. This is demonstrated in *The Ministry of the*

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Deacon (1999), the first volume from the Anglo-Nordic Diaconal Research Project (ANDREP). The deacons in Sweden, Norway, and Finland work in counselling, administration, public relations, have liturgical tasks related to the Eucharist and otherwise, teaching, nursing, pastoral tasks of various kinds, etc. This is also the case in the Lutheran national church in Iceland, which like the Church of Sweden ordains deacons to the threefold ministry of bishop, deacon and priest.³⁸

The charitable character of the diaconate, which is stressed in all Nordic national churches, is, as mentioned, contradicted or at least challenged by the idea of an 'enlarged diaconate' or a 'broad based diaconate'. In Finland in 1993, for example, a committee proposed that youth leaders, children's teachers and eventually church musicians should be ordained deacons.³⁹ In 1997, a report of the 'Committee on the Diaconate in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland', proposed an enlarged diaconate, consisting of three different 'orders'. What are common for all are the liturgical functions.⁴⁰

In 1983 a report, '*Vigd till Tjänst*' (Ordained to Service) commissioned by the then 'Church of Sweden Commission on Dia-

³⁸ Olsen, pp. 56f.

³⁹ Olsen, pp. 29-40.

⁴⁰ This becomes clear, because the ordination rite should, according to the committee, consist of an *ordinarium*, common to all three orders, and a *proprium* for each of them. The orders in the diaconate should be stamped by their tasks, namely diaconal work, teaching and church music. *Tillsammans i kyrkans ämbete. Betänkande avgivet av den diakonatskommitté som Evangelisk-lutherska kyrkan i Finland tillsatte år 1994*, Helsinki 1997. The 1999 Conference of Bishops approved the proposal but lifted out the musicians. That means, of course, a greater possibility of retaining an ecclesologically rooted view on the diaconate that is in a broad sense charitable.

konia', presented its view on the diaconate: Anchored in the liturgy and the charitable ministry of the Church, deacons have the task to identify the needs, recognise the wants and initiate the responsible actions of the congregation.⁴¹ The committee identified the tasks of the diaconate as administrative, charitable, and liturgical.⁴² In other words, the term 'charitable' is given a double meaning: It denotes the office as such (charitable ministry) but it also defines one of the main tasks of that office (charity). In the first case charitable seems to be a synonym for diaconal. This idea of a diaconate, which transcends the idea of charitable function, reflects the theological problems raised by an all too narrow interpretation of charity.

In the process that preceded *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982), the idea of a broad based ministry, demonstrating flexibility and possible accommodation to the then actual needs of the Churches, was applied to the ordained ministry as such.⁴³ At the end a functional view of ordained ministry, based on what has to be done, proved to be almost impossible, because of the tension between changing needs and the need for continuity. The functional theory of ministry is according to its own self-understanding of efficiency always 'modern', always related to the agenda of the day and therefore modern and quickly enough outmoded. It therefore had to give way to the traditio-

⁴¹ *Vigd till Tjänst*. Betänkande av Svenska Kyrkans Diakoninämnds vigningsutredning, Stockholm 1983, p. 123.

⁴² *Vigd till Tjänst*. p. 131.

⁴³ This has also been a component of the Nordic debate about the diaconate. See, Andréén, Åke, *Diakonater i världens kyrkor i dag*. Kyrkornas svar på BEM-dokumentets ämbetsstruktur och den fortsatta utvecklingen, Uppsala 1994.

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⁴⁴ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* § 2.

nal threefold ministry of bishop, priest and deacon, even if it were 'in need of reform'.⁴⁴ This debate, which originated in the reflection on the threefold ministry, has continued, concentrating on the diaconate. The idea of a broad based, flexible diaconate seems to be worldwide and crossing all ecclesial frontiers. It has, as it seems, landed in a concept of the diaconate marked by charity, exercised through teaching in the broad sense of the word, and grounded in the eucharistic liturgy.

The following passages are intended to present the classical threefold ministry of the deacon as charitable, catechetical and liturgical. The idea is to relate these functions to a diaconate that is constituted by ordination and theologically founded in the ecclesiological significance of *caritas* and *diakonia*. (1) Charity, in a broad sense of the word, is a mark of the diaconate because today it seems unavoidable when defining what a deacon is. The testimony of the early Church and the Catholic tradition and the structural meaning of *diakonia* underline that. (2) Teaching is a manifestation of the deacon because it belongs to the ordained ministry, albeit in a diversified way. (3) Liturgy is depicted as the platform of the deacon because it is the centre of ecclesial life and the platform from which all activities are nurtured and from which the Church is sent into the 'world'.

⁴⁴ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111, Geneva 1982, Ministry § 24, p. 25.

Charity as a mark of the diaconate

It is possible, as we have seen, to distinguish two fundamentally different ways in which the diaconate and charity interrelate: (1) charity belongs to the functions of the diaconate, according to the catholic tradition, but charity does not exclusively define what a deacon is. Even if the responsibility for – and exercise of – functions related to the social welfare of the church were to characterise the diaconate in some local churches, social welfare must not necessarily be understood as charity in the nineteenth century meaning of the word. (2) Charity could, however, easily be identified as the *agape* motif realised through the ecclesiological structure of *diakonia*, exercised through stewardship, sharing of resources, administration and so on. This concept of charity, structured as *diakonia*, demands a ministry which fairly enough, should be called diaconate.

In this context, however, it is to be noted, that the charitable character of the diaconate, which implies responsibility for the sharing and distribution of the goods of the Church, and the intimate relationship between the deacons' distribution (not consecration, because then they *per definitionem* become priests) of the Eucharist, is an argument for restoring the power and competence which characterised the deacons of the early Church.

This way of defining the diaconate, not functionally, that is from charitable tasks that have to be done, but ecclesiologically, raises *diakonia* to the level of a mark (one of the possible *notae ecclesiae*) of the Church of Christ.⁴⁵ Usually this is done to-

⁴⁵ Foss, Øyvind, *Kirkens diakoni i bibelteologiska, historisk og etisk belysning* (The Diaconia of the Church from the Perspectives of Biblical Theology, History, and Ethics), Århus 1992, pp. 168ff.

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gether with the concepts of *martyria* and *leitourgia*, or *martyria* and *koinonia*.⁴⁶ Another way of dealing with the ecclesiological foundations for the diaconate is the reference to *kerygma*, *diakonia* and *koinonia* as necessary elements in defining what is church. The basis for all three is liturgy.⁴⁷ In this context, *caritas* seems to have that character of being a mark of the diaconate, something that identifies what a deacon is.

Teaching as the manifestation of the diaconate

In a pastoral letter from the Church of Sweden Conference of Bishops in 1990, the bishops write:⁴

From the earliest days the deacon also had tasks of teaching. This function of the diaconate has received a strengthened importance in our time when concern for people requires new efforts to enable them to know and grow in the Christian faith. ... In one sense the whole activity of the deacon is instruction in its implications for our common human life. ... The teaching task of the deacon is thus not limited to diaconal matters but concerns the whole Christian Faith and interpretation of life.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Brodd, Sven-Erik, *Diakonattet. Från ecklesiologi till pastoral praxis*, Uppsala 1992.

⁴⁷ See e.g. the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland committee which in 1993 presented the report *Utveckling av kyrkans ämbetsstruktur*, (Developments of the Structure of Office in the Church) cit. *Tillsammans i kyrkans ämbete*. (Together in the office of the Church) *Betänkande avgivet av den diakonatskommitté som Evangelisk-lutherska kyrkan i Finland tillsatte år 1994*, Helsinki 1997.

⁴⁸ *Bishop, Priest and Deacon in the Church of Sweden. A Letter from the Bishops Concerning the Ministry of the Church*, Uppsala 1990.

The concept of love (*agape/caritas*) has been used as a tool for the integration of the diaconate into the ministry of the Word: to proclaim the Word of God includes both faith and love. Therefore the ministry of Word and Sacraments is the ministry of faith and love and consequently the diaconate should be integrated into that ministry. The tasks of the diaconate would then be focused on practical deeds of love, which are also manifested in the liturgy and in teaching.⁴⁹

The Church is made manifest in the world by Word and Sacrament and associated with them is an ordained ministry. But this church does not exist without that fundamental structure which in the tradition of the church is called *diakonia* and is a sign and instrument of God's *agape*. 'Diakonia, as the Church's ministry of sharing, healing and reconciliation, is of the very nature of the Church.'⁵⁰ The preaching of the deacon can, of course, be as general as among all types of preachers, but the teaching should be centred on that one focus. The reason for this is that the teaching authority of the deacon, given in ordination and by the authority of the bishop, manifests the Church as *diakonia*. The teaching of the deacon manifests the diaconate as an original office in the Church in its own right.

⁴⁹ This idea is set out by the Church of Finland Committee on the diaconate, which in 1997 presented its report *Tillsammans i kyrkans ämbete. Betänkande avgivet av den diakonatskommitté som Evangelisk-lutherska kyrkan i Finland tillsatte år 1994*, Helsinki 1997.

⁵⁰ Gill, David (ed.), *Gathered for Life*. Official Report of the Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Vancouver, Canada, 24 July – 10 August 1983, Geneva/Grand Rapids 1983, p. 62.

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⁵¹ *Tillsammans i* deacons into the t of 1999 says no debate during the heavily stressed. ordained in alb a: Brodd, Sven-Erik

Liturgy as platform for the diaconate

In 1976, the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland commission on ordained ministry stated that the diaconate is a sacramental reality that manifests the interconnection between liturgy and service. The latter is defined as catechetical and charitable tasks. It was even stated in the debate that a purely charitable diaconate, which does not embrace liturgical functions, cannot be a part of the one office of Word and Sacrament in the Church.⁵¹

Both the teaching and the charitable character of the diaconate relates, as mentioned above, to liturgy. This becomes obvious from what was said initially in this paper, that the Church is the New Covenant in the blood of Christ. This makes the Church a eucharistic fellowship. The sacrifice of Christ and his victory over all powers of destruction, sin, and condemnation and his sanctification and liberation of his people, is the content and meaning of the Holy Mass. This must be a lived reality in the 'liturgy after the liturgy', made present by the priesthood of all baptised believers and among those who take part in it. In that leitourgia, which is the worshipping church, the witness (martyria) to the Church as diakonia, is the important and original task of the deacon. This forms the platform for other tasks assigned to the deacon.

⁵¹ *Tillsammans i kyrkans ämbete*, pp. 38ff. In the Church of Sweden, which ordains deacons into the threefold ministry of bishop, deacon and priest, the Church Ordinance of 1999 says nothing about the liturgical functions of the diaconate, and in the debate during the 1999 General Synod, the charitable character of the diaconate was heavily stressed. In spite of that, there is a growing practice that deacons, who are ordained in alb and stole, are assigned the traditional role of the deacon in the liturgy. Brodd, Sven-Erik, *The Deacon in the Church of Sweden*, MODI, pp. 97-140.

CARITAS, DIAKONIA AND THE IDENTITY AND LEGITIMACY OF THE DEACON: A SUMMARY

The term identity of the deacon relates here to his or her self-perception, the term legitimacy to how the deacon is acknowledged and recognised in and by the Church.⁵² Existing discrepancies within the churches themselves and not necessarily between the churches, between how deacons perceive themselves and how others regard them, has very much to do with the focus on the concept of charity in the Nordic national churches. In the Church of England there is a discrepancy between the transitional deacons and their identity and legitimacy on the one hand and the permanent deacons on the other. For the permanent diaconate this leads to a lack of focus on what is fundamental for the diaconate in its own right. If the diaconate in the Nordic national churches is interpreted too much in accordance with the nineteenth century view of charity, the permanent diaconate in the Church of England has still not explored it in depth. The Second Vatican Council (Lumen Gentium 29) identified the threefold ministry of the deacon as 'diakonia of the liturgy, the word and of charity'.⁵³ This is a very relevant description of the diaconate that takes into account the comprehensive experience of the Church as expressed in its tradition. It seems to be a possible hermeneutical tool by which various

⁵² For this distinction and its application to the diaconate, see Fjordevik, Christer, *Ad experimentum. En observation och analys av Andra Vaticankonciliet's diakonat-reform med särskild hänsyn till det förnyade diakonatets identitets- och legitimitets-problematik*, Lund 1998.

⁵³ This has been developed in the *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons*, pp. 88–103.

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In this paper there is a tentative elaboration on how to regard the charitable element in the identity and legitimacy of the diaconate. I have tried to establish a fundamental difference between *caritas*/charity on the one hand and *diakonia*/diaconal work on the other. I have also hinted at the fact that *caritas* and charity on the one hand, and *diakonia* and diaconal work on the other, are not synonymous. After that I have argued for a description of *caritas/agape* as a concept with a personal connotation while *diakonia* is structural in character. They coincide in content in the Eucharist, which is communal, structured and personal. The Eucharist integrates the ecclesial structure and the personal relation to Christ and to the members of the Church.

From this basically ecclesiological perspective, I have rejected the idea of conceiving the diaconate as the sum of certain social tasks, usually labelled 'diacony'. What makes a deacon is ordination, which is an act of Christ through his Church ('grace alone'), not the sum of tasks ('works'). Therefore I introduced the distinction between the 'function' of the diaconate and its 'foundation'. Then, it is still important to retain 'charity' as an element in the perception of the diaconate. It is, however, not possible to maintain that an interpretation of *caritas* as love should result in an understanding of the diaconate *sui generis* as a subordinate order. Instead *caritas* is interpreted in the context of sharing and the deacon as the one who by administration of the goods of the Church responsibly takes part in that.

This leads, finally, to a tentative description of the main tasks of the diaconate, in its own right. Consequently I see the mark of the diaconate as charity, the platform for it as liturgy, and the teaching as the manifestation of the diaconate.

If the early Church is normative, in some sense of that word, it is meaningful to relate the fact that the Sunday Eucharist was the decisive criterion for what was a Christian church.⁵⁴ This is important also when the Churches discuss the legitimacy of deacons, especially if the existence and functions of the deacons are to make the *koinonia* more effective. Otherwise, the risk is that deacons become not signs and instruments of the Kingdom of God, but signs of an internal secularisation of the churches.

Internalisation of an identity depends on what today are called role models. There are two potential pitfalls, as I understand it. The first one is to take on the identity of a priest, because, in that case, the identity of the diaconate as an office in its own right disappears. The other one is to adopt the models presented by the nineteenth century concept of the diaconate, because, if that is done, deacon's identity is shaped by the situation 150 years ago. It is rather important therefore, to take into account the entire tradition of the Church, because one of the formative factors in shaping an identity is to listen to others and remove prejudices. The idea of the Counter Reformation theologian and Cardinal, Johannes Gropper (1503-1559), was that deacons

⁵⁴ Klinghardt, Matthias, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft. Soziologie und Liturgie frühchristlicher Mahlfeste*, Tübingen 1996, p. 521.

should be placed in the area of social-charitable work, but they should also be deeply grounded in their liturgical functions and be given catechetical tasks.⁵⁵ Three hundred years later, the Lutheran theologian Johann Konrad Wilhelm Löhe (1808–1872) tried to do exactly the same. Both failed in their efforts. Maybe it is time to bring them together?

⁵⁵ Filser, Hubert, *Ekklesiologie und Sakramentenlehre des Kardinals Johannes Gropper*. Eine Glaubenslehre zwischen Irenik und Kontroverstheologie im Zeitalter der Reformation, Münster 1995, p. 557f.

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