



PROPHETIC DIAKONIA: “FOR THE HEALING OF THE WORLD”

Report

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THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION



What is expressed in this publication reflects the views of the authors
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Preface

An international consultation sponsored by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in November 2002, in Johannesburg, South Africa focusing on “Prophetic Diakonia—For the Healing of the World” brought together from the seven LWF regions approximately 100 people with expertise in various fields of diakonia.

The 1998 global consultation on “Churches in Mission,” held in Nairobi, Kenya, had recommended that the departments for Mission and Development (DMD) and World Service (DWS) hold a global consultation on diakonia. The LWF Council, at its meeting in June 2000, in Turku, Finland, approved a recommendation from the Program Committee for World Service that DWS take the lead in the implementation of a global consultation on diakonia.

The purpose of the consultation was to deepen the understanding of the various expressions of national and international diakonia today in the calling and identity of the church, and within the context of contemporary society. The challenge to the consultation was to explore new ways of understanding and practicing diakonia in response to the critical issues threatening human life and the future of humankind.

The expected outcome of the consultation was to reconfirm diakonia as a constitutive dimension of the identity and mission of the church, and to articulate a renewed understanding of prophetic diakonia leading to more effective diaconal responses to the critical challenges facing church and society. The consultation reflected on the different expressions of diakonia as practiced in national and international settings by churches around the world

International diakonia (including development and humanitarian responses)

Classic diaconal institutions (e.g., hospitals, orphanages, etc)

The work of deacons/deaconesses in various churches, organizations and agencies

Social services agencies and programs

Advocacy initiatives (e.g., Office for International Affairs and Human Rights).

The consultation focused on diaconal involvement addressing different kinds of suffering, and highlighted the prophetic role of diakonia which emphasizes a struggle against injustice. The theme related closely to the Assembly theme and thus provides a substantive contribution to the work of the Assembly.

The consultation was jointly prepared and organized by three departments: DWS, DMD and Theology and Studies (DTS). The exposure of participants to field programs prior to the consultation meant that the deliberations were firmly grounded in practical experience.

In this way the LWF tries to face up to a whole range of both timely and fundamental challenges at different levels. The consultation

Deliberately singled out three major problems the world needs to come to terms with—poverty, violence and HIV/AIDS—and undertook to explore their inherent social dynamics, including their contextual implications.

Shared strategies which the member churches of the LWF have and intend to pursue in order creatively to respond to these problems in a way that bears witness to God’s faithfulness to all of creation.

Understood this response as the ministry of diakonia which the church is called upon by God to carry out in the midst of a broken world.

While the consultation did not come up with clear-cut and exhaustive solutions, at least two perspectives emerged that deserve to be identified and further pursued:

While acknowledging the continuing need for the classical, charity-oriented work of diakonia, the need resolutely to move beyond this pattern was emphasized time and again. The need to embrace a more “prophetic” approach which dares to uncover the root causes of poverty, violence and HIV/AIDS, to confront critically those who benefit from the prevailing structures and to work toward societal conditions conducive to justice, reconciliation and peace was stressed. Such a shift would come at a high price: by taking the liberating and transforming power of the gospel seriously and following the example of Jesus who provoked violent resistance against his life of service that challenged the prevailing power structures, diakonia would become vulnerable and expose itself to suffering.

Within the Lutheran tradition there has always been consensus that preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments are the decisive marks of the church. Even though the love of one’s neighbor has been considered an indispensable fruit of justifying faith, its meaning for the understanding of the church has not always been clear. This ambiguity has been further aggravated by current trends to separate diaconal institutions from the churches, so that they might more successfully compete in the global social market. In light of past ecumenical insights the consultation however came to recognize diakonia as a core element of what the church is all about. In other words, a church that refuses to bear witness to God’s love for all creation not only in terms of preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments but also in carrying out its diaconal ministry as a key component of its vocation, is no longer the church of Jesus Christ. This issue is similar to past discussions about the meaning of “mission” for the church, in which the LWF reappropriated mission as an essential and indispensable heart of the church’s vocation. Rereading the Scriptures and the

Lutheran confessional writings in light of new challenges and experiences leads to a reexamination of our understanding of the church in the Lutheran tradition, and to considering diakonia as a mark of the church alongside the classical ones.

As is the case with many ecumenical meetings, worshipping was one of the highlights of this consultation. Every day began with creative worship, designed and led by Rev. Lusmarina Garcia Campos from Brazil, related to the topic about to be discussed on that day, and drawing the participants into the challenges at issue at a more experiential and emotional level by way of moving testimonies, hymns and dramas. In order to provide at least a glimpse of these services, the opening litanies of three of them are included in this report.

Written texts were not available for two of the main presentations: Angela Thoko Didiza, Minister for Agriculture and Land Affairs/South Africa, delivered the keynote address. Lisandro Orlov from Argentina addressed the topic: “The World Provokes Us—HIV/AIDS.”¹

May the consultation itself and the documents compiled in this report stimulate us as Lutheran churches to carry out our diaconal responsibility in a way that enhances the credibility of our witness in a world that is so desperately in need of healing.

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Geneva, June 2003

Notes

¹ On this topic, see also the various initiatives occurring under the LWF Action Plan on HIV/AIDS.

A Letter from the Global Consultation “Prophetic Diakonia: For the Healing of the World”

7 November, 2002

Sisters and brothers in faith, especially LWF member churches and their diaconal ministries: we greet you in the name of Jesus Christ, the deacon *par excellence*, who came to serve and not to be served!

From November 3-7, 2002, under the auspices of the three departments of the Lutheran World Federation, over 80 of us from Lutheran churches throughout the world have gathered in Johannesburg South Africa for a global consultation on diakonia. As we met under the theme, “Prophetic Diakonia: for the Healing of the World,” we anticipated the 2003 Winnipeg Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, where we expect some of the following concerns to be pursued further, as well as within our own churches and diaconal ministries.

Participants in our consultation are involved in a wide and diverse range of diaconal work: international relief and development work, domestic diaconal or social ministry work, diaconal institutions, deaconesses and deacons, pastors and lay members of local congregations, church-related public policy advocates, and those who teach in educational institutions.

We acknowledge with gratitude the many kinds of diaconal work that the church has carried out through the centuries, and which necessarily continue in our own day. This work is now challenged to move toward more prophetic forms of diakonia. Inspired by Jesus and the prophets who confronted those in power and called for changes in unjust structures and practices, we pray that God may empower us to help transform all that leads to hu-

man greed, violence, injustice and exclusion. We want to share with you our findings and invite you to consider the implications in your particular context.

Diakonia and its prophetic calling: theological perspectives

Diakonia is central to what it means to be the church. As a core component of the gospel, diakonia is not an option but an essential part of discipleship. Diakonia reaches out to all persons, who are created in God’s image. While diakonia begins as unconditional service to the neighbor in need, it leads inevitably to social change that restores, reforms and transforms.

We are shaped to serve others through worship, where we celebrate God’s gifts of grace in the Word, in water, in bread and wine, and glimpse the fulfillment of God’s promise. In this broken world where sin and injustice abound, God in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit shapes us as a gathered community. Thus, we become agents of grace, hands and feet of Christ for the healing of the world.

All Christians are called through baptism to live out diakonia through what they do and how they live in their daily lives in the world. This is the first and most fundamental expression of diakonia. More organized expressions of diakonia occur at the congregational level, as well as through those who are specifically set apart for diaconal ministry. More specialized forms of diaconal work are organized to carry out what individuals or congregations are unable to do on their own.

Because of the holistic mission of God, diakonia is deeply interrelated with *kerygma* (proclamation of the Word) and *koinonia* (sharing at the table). Diakonia is witnessing through deeds. It is rooted in the sharing of the body and blood of Christ in Holy Communion. The mutual sharing inherent in the communion of the church can transform the unjust power relations that often are present in diaconal work, such as between “wealthy givers” and “poor recipients.” In diakonia, those served and those serving are both transformed. At the

same time, we insist that the purpose of diakonia is not to proselytize.

Diakonia is more than the strong serving the weak, which can lead to paternalistic assumptions and practices, and imply that some churches are unable to engage in diakonia because of their lack of resources or expertise. We challenge this assumption. Diakonia is part of the calling of all churches and all Christians in the world.

We must challenge all theological interpretations that do not take seriously the suffering in the world, a world afflicted with poverty, violence and HIV/AIDS. As Lutheran churches, we are to be shaped by a theology of the cross, which compels us to identify with and for the suffering rather than the successful. A theology of the cross calls things what they really are, moving beyond politeness and pretense, breaking the silence and taking the risk of speaking truth to power, even when this threatens the established order and results in hardship or persecution. This is at the heart of the prophetic diaconal calling.

Poverty, violence and HIV/AIDS provoke the church

Poverty, violence and HIV/AIDS are three of the major issues in our day that churches cannot ignore. They provoke us to move into more prophetic expressions of diakonia. There are many ways in which the LWF, member churches and related organizations, as well as the ecumenical movement as a whole have been analyzing and addressing these challenges.¹ Rather than repeating analyses and commitments already set forth in these documents, here we cite a few of the major points we discerned in these areas.

Poverty

The extreme and extensive poverty in our world is a scandal. While recognizing the global structural divide between the rich and the poor, we should address the root causes of poverty wherever they are found. Churches are called to participate in the

struggles of the poor to overcome poverty and to pursue alternatives that will lead to greater justice. Those who benefit at the expense of and by the exploitation of the poor must be named, confronted and brought to justice.

The current development paradigm that seeks to “reduce poverty” must be reconsidered to become more justice-oriented. Poverty is a symptom of the deeper problems of injustice, greed and the massive accumulation of wealth, encouraged by the neo-liberal paradigm and implemented through multilateral corporations and institutions.

We recognize that the poor and the rich are among and within us as churches. The Lutheran communion is composed of those who themselves are poor, sick or marginalized. We are invited to name and claim those gifts and possibilities we have for diaconal work, no matter how materially impoverished we might be. Churches in situations of poverty have a truth to share with churches in more affluent situations. As churches, we are called together to renew the hope of those who are poor, to listen and work in partnership with each other so that the full potential of human beings might be realized.

Those of us who are rich in material terms need to learn how to relinquish power, and realize how radical God’s grace is. Those who live in poverty are far more than recipients of “our” help or service, especially if this is done in order to assuage our guilt or perpetuate paternalistic if not implicitly violent relationships. Those of us who are poor, in turn, should claim our God-given rights to life and livelihood.

Violence

We confess that the church has too often overlooked, tolerated and legitimized patterns and practices of violence—such as domestic violence—including through some of its theology and how power is structured in the churches. Some church leaders have been perpetrators of violence inside the churches, or have aligned themselves with the perpetrators rather than the victims.

A culture of silence regarding violence, and the injustices that underlie it, jeopardizes the churches' prophetic voice and needs to be challenged. An appropriate role of churches is to confront perpetrators of violence, seeking to bring them to repentance, in order to transform and accompany the process of reconciliation and healing.

In situations of violence and in working with victims of violence, churches should plan, implement and accompany processes of conflict management and promote non-violent methods of resolving conflicts. The churches' proactive efforts to build peace involve working together with other faiths, organizations and movements in civil society.

Cultural values and practices that propagate or encourage violence must be rejected, and those that can contribute to bridge building and peace encouraged; tolerance and attitudes that honor cultural differences in a spirit of mutual respect must be nurtured.

We call on each other to find ways to resist an imperial culture that invades our world through the media, and spreads consumerism, individualism, worship of those who are young, rich and strong, and tolerates violence as a means of solving problems. This culture is in open contradiction to Christian values of love, inclusiveness, community and peace-building.

HIV/AIDS

The church is living with HIV/AIDS; there are many living with HIV/AIDS in our midst. We must break the culture of silence that overlooks this painful reality in the body of Christ. Cultural beliefs, practices, and traditions must be challenged whenever they lead to the spread of HIV/AIDS. There is a dynamic interaction between HIV/AIDS, poverty and violence. This includes the structural violence of gender inequality.

Rather than with fearful or moralistic approaches, the church must reach out pastorally, with unqualified acceptance of those affected by HIV/AIDS. We must break out of our comfort zones to accompany those affected, in ways that con-

stantly safeguard and promote their rights and self-esteem.

Public policy advocacy is important in relation to HIV/AIDS, such as challenging the cost and access to drugs produced by large companies. In doing so, we should work in partnership with other churches and organizations, such as through the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA).

Special attention and sensitivity must be given to how women, youth and children are affected by HIV/AIDS, to all modes of transmission, to the promotion of effective means of prevention (e.g., abstinence, faithfulness, use of condoms, sterilized needles, clean blood supply), and to how to discuss sexuality and sexual ethics among all age groups.

Some implications for how we carry out diakonia

As agents of transformation, healing and reconciliation, the church must engage with people who are marginalized, such as those who live with HIV/AIDS, live in poverty, or are affected by violence. Our approach should be characterized by compassion, mutuality and an eagerness to understand and further the struggles of those who seek justice. Christ is the source of the church's hope for abundant life for all, but structures and practices can sometimes impede that hope from being realized. Such cases call for change.

Structures

In order to be effective and credible agents of prophetic diakonia, all levels of the church regularly need to assess internal structures and governance models for the sake of transparency and accountability. Member churches and their diaconal ministries should structure diakonia so that it is effective, visible and credible. Mutual accountability is necessary between church "headquarters" and diaconal organizations. Churches should strengthen the capacity of specialized diaconal ministries to work in areas where there is no member church. International diaconal alliances should

create forums where organizations from the different streams of diakonia can share visions, best practices and priorities, building synergy for diaconal ministry.

Leaders

Leadership at all levels is essential—leaders who equip all Christians to take up their call to serve. Professionals should not use their expertise in ways that treat those they serve as passive recipients or clients. Churches should initiate and strengthen education for diakonia. As a ministry, it should be fully integrated into the church’s ordained, consecrated and commissioned ministries, as a reflection of the fundamental significance of diakonia for the being of the church.

In most local congregational settings, women far more than men have responded to the call to engage in carrying out diaconal work. Attention should be given to how diakonia has become engendered, and how more men and women might be encouraged to become fuller participants in diakonia.

Alliances

Although diakonia has explicitly Christian grounds, we also recognize that God is active throughout creation and not only through the church. Building strategic alliances is crucial. We must work with other partners ecumenically, with those of other faiths, with governments and intergovernmental organizations (e.g., the United Nations), and with others in civil society, especially for the purpose of supporting, encouraging and advocating for those who are vulnerable. Important civil society partners include community-based and faith-based organizations and other peoples’ movements. Churches should acknowledge these potential partners and, whenever appropriate and feasible, work with them for more effective results.

The church’s complex relationships with governments, especially with regard to diaconal work, require careful examination. In some countries, much of the church’s diaconal work is financed with government funds. In other countries, governments are either unable or unwilling to provide for the basic needs and rights of their people, and expect churches and other

organizations to fill in the gap. Furthermore, in some multi-faith or secular contexts, governments may discriminate against churches and even openly oppose the churches’ diaconal work. Attention needs to be given to the decreasing power and resources of governments, especially under the influence of neo-liberal economic globalization.

With regard to governments, churches need to serve as a conscience, challenging patterns of corruption and insisting that governments carry out their appropriate, God-given responsibility to provide for the basic needs and the political, economic, social and cultural rights of their people. Churches should become more proactively involved in challenging, changing and shaping public policies toward these ends. At the same time, churches should keep a critical distance from government so as not to be coopted.

In partnership with their national and international diaconal organizations, churches need to become better advocates for those living in poverty, misery and oppression. The future lies in networking with and among those affected by poverty, violence and HIV/AIDS, and in organizing advocacy at national and international levels, including through our connections as a communion of churches. Churches should more boldly raise their public voice to advocate for global mechanisms to protect the social, economic, cultural and political rights of the vulnerable in all societies. At the same time, churches need to continue supporting poor communities and marginalized people with all available resources and appropriate professional expertise.

We invite you to join us in these commitments and efforts!

To respond to this letter, or for further information on the consultation and its follow-up, contact the DWS: cf@lutheranworld.org.

Notes

¹ Examples include, *A Call to Participate in Transforming Economic Globalization* and *Guiding Principles for Sustainable Development. Churches Say NO to Violence Against Women* raises awareness and addresses one crucial dimension of violence. *Compassion, Conversion, Care: Responding as Churches to the HIV/AIDS Pandemic* is a broad-based action plan of the LWF.

Diakonia as Understood and Lived Out in (Select) LWF Member Churches

Since diakonia is a constitutive element of the church moving beyond the traditional Lutheran doctrine of the church, diakonia should be considered as a nota ecclesiae besides the preaching of the gospel and administration of the sacraments. While the traditional understanding of diaconal work—reacting to situations of human need and striving to alleviate the immediate suffering—must be maintained diakonia needs to take seriously its prophetic call and denounce structures of injustice and oppression and work toward their transformation thus pointing to the reign of God.

A background paper

The Department for Theology and Studies (DTS) asked the Church of Sweden Research Department to draft a paper, based on responses requested from member churches in 2001. The Nordic Ecumenical Council has functioned as the administrative base for the project. Rev. Tiit Pädam, The Theological Institute of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, has done most of the work. Rev. Dr. Sven Thidevall, Uppsala University, has among other things contributed the example from the Church of Sweden. Rev. Dr. Kajsa Ahlstrand, Church of Sweden Research Department, has coordinated the work.

Preamble

The aim of this background paper is to provide a common starting point for the reflection on diakonia for the participants in the consultation

on prophetic diakonia. The intent is not to create a comprehensive theology of diakonia, but it is hoped this modest paper will contribute to continuing dialogue on the meaning and challenge of prophetic diakonia.

This paper draws on material provided by some of the member churches (all were invited to send material in 2001). We have also benefited from the book, *Between Vision and Reality: Lutheran Churches in Transition*, LWF Documentation 47/2001 and *Into the Third Millennium: Together in God's Mission*, Report of the LWF consultation "Churches in Mission," Nairobi, 1998. Material has also been added from the general theological discussion about diakonia.

As was reflected both in the material from the churches and in the general theological discussion, Lutheran churches are uncertain in their understanding of diakonia. This uncertainty manifests itself in the vast diversity of diaconal activities without a common cohesive vision. We find that many activities are called "diaconal," from proclamation of the gospel to charity or defense of human rights. In addition, there are the ethnic character and cultural-specific traditions in many Lutheran churches. This raises the issue of openness to all those in need, regardless of ethnic or other boundaries. The problem is especially acute when resources are limited. It is never possible to serve all; prioritizing must always take place, consciously or unconsciously. The setting of priorities is therefore always an ethical and theological challenge for every church.

The call to diakonia includes a call to identify with the individual and structural needs of "the widows, the fatherless and the stranger." To indulge in diaconal work without having a clear understanding of the needs of the powerless, obscures the churches' call to diakonia. At the same time it reminds us of the need for institutional repentance for some of the ways in which diakonia has been pursued.

The concept of diakonia

Diakonia is a Greek word, used in the New Testament, but not in a uniform way. Sometimes diakonia

refers to specific material services to aid a particular person in need (Mk 15:41; 2 Tim 1:18). In other instances it means serving at the tables (Mk 1:3; Acts 6:2). In some cases it refers to the distribution of funds to people in need (2 Cor 8:19, Rom 15:25).

Diakonia can also be described as a congregation’s specific ministry, alongside other gifts and callings in the church. Here, diaconal work is seen as part of the church’s vocation (Rom 12:7). This is emphasized in the story about Jesus washing the feet of his followers; service to others is an inalienable part of discipleship (Mk 10:45). Paul also describes salvation as God’s diakonia through Christ (2 Cor 3:7-9) and as a diakonia of reconciliation through his messengers (2 Cor 5:18-20).

Jesus proclaimed the reign of God in his very being as well as in his words and actions. If the reign of God infiltrates the world, it not only creates faith in the hearts of people, but also changes the structures of this world. In this process of change, the people involved become messengers, agents or servants of God.

Diakonia has a large variety of connotations and meanings in contemporary theology. Although it is a word used in the New Testament, present-day reflection on diakonia cannot be derived directly from the biblical usage of the term. In this paper, we make a distinction between diakonia and diaconal work. We understand diakonia as the ecclesiastically substantial feature, an expression of the church’s essence. Diaconal work is the way in which diakonia in a specific time and context is practised.

Diakonia thus is a theological concept that presumes an ecclesial structure. It must be embodied or incarnated. Diaconal work is the praxis, the embodiment of diakonia. The church can never be reduced to its diaconal work but diakonia, embodied in different ways in different situations according to the specific needs of the context, is always a part of the life of the church.

All Lutheran churches do not use the term “diaconal work.” Other words and terms for diaconal work used by the LWF member churches are: visible social services; deaconry; diaconate; social ministry; Lutheran community care; justice and advocacy work; the church outside the church; social work; charity; caritas; rehabilitation work; mission activ-

ity; social mission; urban mission; welfare work; health work; the prophetic action of transformation; world service; the church’s face in society; Christ’s serving hands here and now;

These concepts translate into different ways of structuring diakonia

Through an ordained or consecrated ministry

As a way for the congregation to express solidarity with the poor and vulnerable

As charity work carried out by individuals acting out of Christian motivations

As a concrete expression of piety

As carried out by diaconal institutions, sometimes only loosely connected to the church structures.

On this basis, there can be some consensus in the churches’ understanding of diakonia. However, questions such as the following need to be considered:

Does diakonia have the same meaning when it is used in different socio-political and cultural contexts, or even in similar historical, political and cultural contexts?

What is the relationship between pastoral work and diaconal work? Between *diakonia* and *koinonia*?

What is the relationship between concrete diaconal work in a church and that church’s theological reflection and analysis?

Diakonia and the *notae ecclesiae*

Diakonia expresses an essential feature of the church. It is the church’s practical and theological answer to God’s call to serve creation and hu-

mankind. It is also a way for the churches to respond to the challenges in society.

There is an ongoing debate in Lutheran theology as to whether or not diakonia belongs to the *notae ecclesiae*, one of the distinguishing marks of the church. Traditionally, diakonia has not been regarded as one of the distinguishing marks of the church equivalent to the preaching of the Word and the administering of the Sacraments. Nonetheless, Luther spoke of the *Taten der Liebe* (works of love) as being one of the marks of the church. Diakonia in the sense discussed here must be regarded as an inseparable part of the mission of the church in the world.

The main problem for the churches is not in what sense diakonia is one of the *notae ecclesiae*. The ecclesiological problem arises when certain activities performed by the churches become criteria for the identity of the church. The church is a pointer to the reign of God, and in that sense, has many dimensions: diaconal, sacramental, prophetic, eschatological and spiritual. The church is more than a social service agency, and diaconal work must always be seen as integrated with the overall mission of the church in the world.

An understanding of diakonia as primarily charity work, as mentioned by some of the LWF member churches, has deep historical roots. Diaconal institutions founded centuries ago in Germany provided long-lasting models for diaconal work. Because of the socio-political conditions of that time, combined with the professionalism of those institutions, their selfless ideas and the expansion of mission, they became models that spread to many parts of the world.

There are questions regarding the relationship between diakonia and the church's identity. Should the diaconal ministry and work be limited to the church or should it include and serve all creation? This question has been problematic for many churches. Many churches consider diaconal work to originate from the example and compassion of Jesus. The task of the church is to follow him in word and deed. The church therefore is the starting point for diaconal work, but not its end. If possible, churches should serve everyone. Since resources are always limited not everyone can be

served. In these situations, being faithful to God's mission means to prioritize in a theologically and ethically conscious and responsible way. Some churches have made the choice to channel their resources primarily to their own members, whereas others have other criteria than membership when deciding which groups or individuals should be included in their diaconal work. The starting point here is the whole world as created by God and for which the church bears responsibility.

How, if at all, does diakonia relate to the ministry of the church? Diakonia and the ordained diaconate are linked to each other. Both are based on ecclesiology and receive their specific meaning and content through the church. Diaconal work is more than charity arising from feelings of compassion, but is a conscious choice to follow the example and calling of Jesus. The diaconate is a reminder to the church and to the world of that calling. But at the same time, it is also an expression of the nature of the church as the body of Christ. In the diaconate, diakonia becomes a concrete activity. In diaconal work it becomes clear that it is a part of a collective ministry, as are other parts of the ordained ministry. This creates a link between the diaconate as the expression of the essence of the church and communion between the members of the church.

Diakonia in action

In some societies where the churches' diaconal work is integrated into the public welfare system, a rift is developing between diaconal work within the church itself and independent diaconal institutions offering public welfare services. This tendency is rapidly strengthened by the growing importance of the market economy as a model also for public institutions. Post-Cold-War globalization with its neo-liberal bias thus influences public welfare systems in many countries. As a result, in some countries the churches' diaconal work begins to compete with other institutions providing welfare services on the "welfare market." Diaconal work becomes a form of enterprise which no longer relies on the church as guaranteeing its existence.

Instead, activities related to diakonia become subject to market forces and business in general. In this new situation, diaconal work is measured in terms of economic efficiency and profitability. Diaconal work, while formally and rhetorically linked to the church, risks becoming separated from the other dimensions of the church. The relationship between diakonia and *koinonia* is challenged by this development, a challenge that the churches must address theologically as well as practically: What should be the relationship between diakonia and the altar?

Changes have also occurred in terms of who carries out diaconal work. Traditionally, those involved in diaconal work have either been voluntary workers or deaconesses and deacons who have devoted themselves to and been trained to perform this work, or persons who belong to the diaconate of the church. At the same time, many churches that previously did not have an ordained diaconate have begun to create a diaconal ministry. In some churches, the new concept of “diaconate coworkers” has been introduced. These changes together with changes in the public social systems have caused a paradigm shift. The new paradigms place new demands on the churches and their diaconal work. In order to meet these new challenges, diaconal work is expanding into new areas, such as cultural diakonia, environmental diakonia, political diakonia and advocacy work.

The shift in paradigms and the changing demands placed on the diaconal work of the church bring about theological and practical challenges, primarily in three areas:

Can we, in theological terms, speak of diakonia as one of the distinguishing marks of the church in a situation where the churches themselves provide only a small part of the resources (human and financial) actually used for diaconal work? Many churches openly admit that they are unable to finance or provide staff for diaconal work on their own. When the resources come from others, there is a risk that diaconal work is separated from the other functions of the church.

How should diaconal work be financed? Almost all of the diaconal work carried out by Lutheran churches today is characterized by dependency on assistance from sources outside the church. This dependency is reflected both in areas targeted by churches with greater resources for diaconal work and in the demands placed on the churches receiving assistance. This is true of the developed countries as well as of those countries whose state and social structures are still developing. In both cases, much diaconal work is financed, directly or indirectly, with the help of humanitarian organizations or tax revenues. Globalization has *inter alia* led to structures becoming intertwined with one another, leaving the churches less say in the matter. At the same time, the churches rarely develop independent resource-producing institutions.

What is the relationship between charity and diakonia? Although these concepts are often used synonymously, there are important differences between them. Charity has several meanings in Christian theology. One meaning is that of God’s outpouring, selfless love. Another is our answer to God’s personal call to love that is both a gift and a duty for us. A third meaning is that of charitable activities, often based on feelings of compassion. Charity in this sense is often individualized: one privileged individual helping those who are less fortunate. Diakonia, however, is a theological and collective concept requiring an ecclesiastical structure. The expression of diakonia is to be found in diaconal work where charity may be one of the motives of the people involved but not the main substance of the work.

The shift in diaconal paradigms calls for serious theological reflection. Such reflection is already taking place in many churches. One such example is the Latin American discussion of the *diakonia comunitaria* (church-community based diakonia).

Prophetic diakonia

“Prophetic” reminds us of the Old Testament prophets. Prophecy as described in the Bible used the possibilities and cultural traditions of that time to describe the justice of God who favors the excluded and oppressed, and to condemn violations against God’s justice. Prophets spoke the truth to the people with a strength and power received from God, regardless of how their message was received. Prophecy today may not differ from that of biblical times in terms of its content, but the methods have changed. The speed and extent of communication determine the means to be used for sending messages. Prophecy is not limited to the messages of individuals, but can be wider, uniting people or groups of people. The set of topics is not limited to those close at hand, but are global.

In contemporary society, there are three clearly distinguishable dimensions to prophecy: (1) the socio-critical political dimension, concerning the unjust distribution of resources, social injustice and oppressive structures; (2) the dimension critical of cultural, ideological or “religious” values that devalue or instrumentalize human beings; and (3) the dimension of the whole of creation, insisting that the environment be preserved and that existing resources be used in ways that bear in mind the needs of both current and future generations. All three dimensions are united by the hope that God will preserve creation in accordance with God’s promises.

The diakonia of the church seeks to unite word and deed. In doing this, it will carry and convey the hope that God’s purposes go beyond what human beings decide and do.

Proactive and reactive diaconal work

Through the concepts “reactive” and “proactive,” the understanding of diakonia can be deepened. In many countries, people have, to a greater or lesser extent, delegated parts of their social responsibility for catastrophes, epidemics, unemployment, diseases, accidents, care for the elderly, child

care, etc. to secular public institutions. Churches on all continents report that they observe a weakening of such public institutions linked to the transformation of societies in the post-Cold War era—especially to the triumph of “economism” on a worldwide scale (economic globalization). This has led to ever-greater demands on diaconal work which is expected to fill the gaps that the crumbling welfare systems leave behind. This new situation requires churches not only to have “warm” hearts for people in need, but also “cool” heads to analyze the implications of this new situation and to find new ways of action.

Reactive diaconal work reacts to events and situations of human need and strives to alleviate the immediate suffering. It is the service of extinguishing fires that have already broken out. Such diaconal work has characterized Lutheran churches in recent centuries. Churches have actively participated in the rebuilding of societies after chaos, for example, creating social assistance centers, hospitals and schools. Through reactive diaconal work, churches react to natural disasters, wars or social problems, by offering help and support to the victims. It is relatively easy to seek human, economic and material resources for reactive diakonia. Here the need for assistance is clear, and the results are usually visible and tangible.

Charity belongs to reactive diaconal work and often reflects a paternalistic attitude, where knowledge as well as material resources are assumed to come from the donor. Reactive diakonia does not presuppose a specific confessional affiliation, but arises out of a general Christian commitment. The basis for reactive diakonia is the call to serve people in need; the model is the Good Samaritan. This motive leads toward transcending the limits of confessional affiliation and cooperating with all people of good will. Thus, secular NGOs and governments have found it possible to direct economic support to institutions carrying out reactive diaconal work.

Proactive diaconal work involves a somewhat different strategy or approach. Using the earlier image, it is the service of fire prevention. Its precondition is a vision, which encompasses the Christian vocation, awareness of the needs, knowledge

of the specific opportunities, and analysis of the situation in a broader perspective. Proactive diaconal work has many forms, such as cultural, environmental, political or advocacy work.

It is often difficult to find human and financial resources for proactive diaconal work, since proactive diaconal work does not typically yield visible results in the short term. It is difficult to predict the results. Contributions from secular NGOs and state institutions can be harder to obtain, because proactive diaconal work is likely to challenge such organizations.

It is evident that reactive and proactive diaconal work are intertwined. The religious and socio-political context often determines whether a particular diaconal initiative is considered as reactive or proactive. The same diaconal action, for example, adult literacy classes, may be labeled reactive in one socio-cultural context and proactive in another context. The reciprocal character of the reactive and proactive diaconal work is clearly expressed through descriptions of experiences of the churches and other institutions involved in the work. Whenever reactive diaconal work is taken seriously, it leads to the recognition of the limits of this kind of work. At the same time it might lead to consciousness of how urgently a qualitatively different proactive diaconal work is needed in that particular field. This in turn often gives birth to more reflective diaconal initiatives. Dom Helder Camara’s well-known statement “When I give bread to the poor, they call me a saint; but when I ask why people are poor, they call me a Communist” (in a different context his question would have labeled him “political troublemaker”) illustrates this kind of reflection.

In many churches, there is little conscious attention to the relationship between reactive and proactive diaconal work. One factor that hampers such a discussion is the growing popularity of funding projects rather than ongoing diaconal work. Current structures outside the churches influence the diaconal work of the churches. Designated funds often favor short-term projects at the expense of processes of change and building of new structures. Because diakonia in itself has no guarantee of success but ultimately has to trust in God’s

mercy, the churches are obliged to risk failure, to react not only to obvious situations of need but also to engage in risky, long-term, proactive diaconal work. Our relationship to the world as individuals and churches is a continuous relationship, even if the forms change over time. God remains in our midst and the poor are always among us.

Short-term projects are not necessarily a bad thing. They can counterbalance stagnating systems. The risk is that the prevalence of short-term projects might shape our entire understanding of diakonia. If the diaconal work of a church loses its continuity and its prophetic dimension, it loses its identity. The alternative is continuity in diaconal work. Continuity is a necessary but not sufficient precondition for proactive diakonia. Theologically, if the goal is the reign of God, we need a long-term perspective.

So where are we today: diakonia as a force of transformation?

Diakonia is an inextricable part of the ecumenical obligation that all Christian churches share. Through diakonia, the identity and capacity of a specific church is broadened and its traditional and cultural patterns widened. In familiarizing ourselves with other diaconal cultures and expressions, we learn from each other new ways of fulfilling our common vocation to serve. Limited resources make painful choices unavoidable. The primary task of the church and its diakonia is not, however, to heal or save society. The primary task of diakonia is to live out the gospel of salvation and liberation, for all the people and all of creation in our own context.

Decision-making bodies in the majority of LWF member churches tend to be loyal to the dominant powers in society. This can lead to an increasing alienation between the churches and the people. Lutheran churches have traditionally been reliable allies in nation building, but less prone prophetically to criticize power structures. In this regard, the Lutheran tradition has much to learn from other

Christian traditions. The doctrine of the twofold reign of God has all too often been interpreted in ways that preclude the church's critical involvement in social and political issues. Prophetic diakonia may be a greater, even more important challenge to Lutheran churches than to some other church families. When Lutheran churches have been involved in prophetic diakonia, the theological inspiration often comes from theological traditions other than Lutheran. This was the case in Luther's homeland during the Nazi years when dialectical theology developed primarily in the Reformed tradition, but also shaped critical Lutheran theology. This is also the case in Latin America and elsewhere where Lutheran churches have learnt from and contributed to liberation theology with its Roman Catholic roots.

Today, many churches emphasize service as the central task in the area of diakonia. Important as this is, diaconal work may then be seen as a form of social charity, which has no essential connection with the church in its entirety. The areas of diaconal activity are then not presented on the basis of the church's theological self-understanding, but on the socio-political understandings currently prevailing in society. In this manner, one of the church's most vital forms of manifestation and service in the world runs the risk of becoming one among many other forms of social action or service. Diakonia has the potential for much more. If we are aware of its prophetic nature, and able to integrate diakonia with a prophetic vision, diaconal work moves beyond charity towards social transformation, pointing to the reign of God. As churches become more aware of diakonia's prophetic dimension, God's mission in the world will be furthered.

Embodied diakonia

The gospel of Jesus Christ must become incarnate in people's lives today. The call to diakonia—the call to serve—emanates from the gospel itself. Diakonia expresses one incarnational dimension of divine love through the diaconal work of the

church. How the call is answered will vary according to the context in which a church lives.

Embodied diakonia means human bodies—arms and legs, heads and hearts—willing to listen to the Word, letting themselves be led by God's Spirit, and acting accordingly. Therefore, a precondition for the incarnation of diakonia is resources: spiritual, institutional, human and material. Diakonia is thus embodied in people of good will and knowledge, supported by relevant institutional structures and sufficient finances, striving to implement the values of the reign of God in their own context. Each context must be addressed on its own terms. At the same time, the resources should be shared in such ways as to promote the common goal. This implies that in addition to the development of viable structures, careful choices are to be made between activities and in identifying groups and individuals in need. Furthermore, it is necessary to ascertain sustained availability of resources and to make conscious decisions concerning the fields to be supported. We must analyze the theological, moral and practical consequences when decisions are made to spend resources on certain issues or to reduce activities in other areas.

All this involves setting high requirements for church institutions and the people involved. In order to meet such requirements, continuing development of sustainable institutional cultures is needed, as well as relevant education and training of people. If churches are unable to find means to do this, they will need to consider their priorities and possibly give more attention to securing viable structures and relevant training rather than to embark on new projects.

There are many good examples of how diakonia can be embodied. Diaconal work should reach out to people regardless of class, gender, race, culture, religion or ethnic group. When diaconal work is carried out in this way, all involved will learn from each other and the diversity of insights and experience will lead to the better understanding of needs and ways to change present oppressive conditions and situations. In its broadest sense, diakonia is a part of God's mission in the world. It supports

people in their lives and struggles for justice and dignity.

How does diakonia become incarnate? The following two case studies exemplify this; one is from a church in the South, the other from a church in the North. The examples show that the forms for diakonia vary significantly depending on the context. This should encourage us to rethink diakonia in face of the challenges that we see in our various contexts today. We are reminded of Luther’s remark that love can write ever-new decalogues; it is not the forms or the formulations that are decisive.

Case study I

Diakonia in Brazil as seen in the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB)

Thirty years ago, the word diakonia was almost unknown in Brazil. There were only a couple of deaconesses and deacons in the IECLB. The mother house for the deaconesses in São Leopoldo was founded in 1939. The institution for the deacons in the state Espírito Santo was founded even later, in 1960.

A process of change began in the 1970s. In 1973, the IECLB created a Council of Diaconal Work whose main tasks were to support the two diaconal training centers, working out a bylaw for the diaconate and offering qualification courses for the diaconate. The deaconesses in São Leopoldo founded a training school for female deacons in 1974. In 1976, a community of male and female deacons was founded alongside the community of deaconesses.

The seventies were a time of strife in the church. There were two major theological streams—the so-called “evangelical” and the “socio-political” stream. The conflicts in the church were related to the situation in Brazilian society at large. A military dictatorship, which was established in 1964 and lasted until 1980, dominated the political field. Socially, growing poverty was a predominant problem. Theologically, there was the influence of lib-

eration theology. As a result of these factors, at least some church leaders became aware of the responsibility of Christians to respond to oppression. During this time, diaconal work was seen as a conservative church action. Social responsibility and social work were the main issues on the church’s agenda. In the long run, a growing awareness of the church’s responsibility for oppressed people strengthened the diakonia.

In the 1980s the word diakonia was increasingly used in the church’s vocabulary. The first national seminar on diakonia was organized in 1987 (the second in 1989). The Departamento de Diaconia (diakonia department) was created in 1988 in order to further the development of diaconal work. More than 30 courses were held between 1989 and 1994, with an average of 50 participants. An average of 60 projects per year were evaluated by the department. In 2000, the Lutheran Foundation of Diaconia was created with the special task to evaluate such projects.

In the 1990s, diakonia was becoming more recognized as an important dimension of the witness of the church, in such areas as:

Church structure: the diakonia department is located in the church centre (Porto Alegre) together with the other departments. Its expenses are included in the church’s budget. In the IECLB salary plan for the employed church workers, diaconal workers have the same salary as pastoral workers with the same level of education.

Official documents of the church: a “Statute of the Ordained Ministry” is being prepared, based on the understanding that the specific pastoral and diaconal ministries are equivalent and part of the one ministry of the church, under the concept of *The Shared Ministry* (see below).

Education of candidates for the different ministries: since 1999 the church is responsible for training the candidates for the pastoral ministry and the diaconal ministries (deacons and deaconesses). They study theology

together at the *Escola Superior de Teologia* in São Leopoldo, with only some separate subjects in preparation for their specific ministry.

Liturgy: research about the meaning of the different parts of the liturgy since the Early Church shows the importance of the participation of the diaconate in the Sunday services, including through the wearing of liturgical vestments.

Communities: as a result of a leadership training program, an increased number of volunteers are undertaking diaconal tasks in their communities. A “friends of diakonia” network is being formed.

The concept of shared ministry

At its 1994 assembly the Brazilian church approved the document *The Shared Ministry*. It is based on the understanding that the ministry of teaching/preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments (Article V of the *Confessio Augustana*) is entrusted to the whole church.

From the beginning of its existence, the church in Brazil followed the *Confessio Augustana* understanding, and restricted the ministry of proclaiming the gospel to pastors. Now, at a different time and in a different situation, the teaching or preaching of Jesus is viewed more broadly. Jesus preached through words, but also through signs, by the way he lived and how he related to people. In a similar way, the church is called to preach/teach the gospel through the many gifts of its members. The ministry of the church is a many-faceted or shared ministry. There is the one ministry of all believers, but this one ministry should be expressed in many different ways.

This new Brazilian perspective has also had consequences for the ordained ministry. Moreover, the ordained ministry has had to reflect the variety of expressions that are needed in teaching the gospel. This change was marked in 1996 by the replacement of the term “consecration” with the term

“ordination” for the ministry of deaconesses and deacons. To be ordained means to assume a larger theological responsibility for the preaching/teaching of the gospel. Those who are ordained act publicly in the name of the church. The ordained ministers are not a higher class of people (*clerus*); they carry out the function of teaching in the name of the church (not in their own name). The distinctive task is not their executive functions, but their teaching task.

Another consequence of the shared ministry is that all those who are ordained share the theological responsibility of the church. Therefore, all candidates for the ordained ministry have to study theology. Since 1999, all those who prepare for the diaconal ministry study at the *Escola Superior de Teologia*, together with those students who prepare for the pastoral ministry. There is only one ordination, which means that all are called to preach the gospel, but the way they do this varies.

In the proposed “Statute of the Ordained Ministry,” which the October 2002 church assembly will consider, it is also stated that a deacon/ess is allowed to lead a service or administer the sacraments, although these are not his/her specific areas of responsibility.

Today the IECLB has a number of specific ministries: catechetical, diaconal, pastoral, and missionary. Each is considered equally important (in theory, not yet in practice). The function of a catechist who teaches in the school is as important as the function of the pastor in front of the altar, or the function of a deacon or a deaconess caring for a person who is disabled.

A Brazilian understanding of prophetic diakonia

According to the Scriptures, the prophets were God’s instruments to proclaim God’s will when it was not recognized, or misunderstood, forgotten or willingly violated. Jesus was the strongest prophetic voice in his time. Actually, he was *the* prophet. He proclaimed God’s will both through words and service/diakonia. Through these signs God’s will became visible and explicit. Therefore,

all of the different signs were essential. Jesus’ diakonia had a clear prophetic dimension when it expressed God’s will in an unexpected way, in order to correct a common meaning or behavior. For instance, when Jesus healed on the Sabbath, he proclaimed that people should not love their rules more than their neighbors. Or, when Jesus touched and healed the man suffering from a dreaded skin disease, he proclaimed that God also loves the sick and they should not be excluded from society. In the world today God’s will is not yet being done. It is necessary to proclaim it through words but also through diaconal praxis, which often speaks louder than spoken words.

At a 1999 diakonia conference held in Brazil, Deacon Eric King, United Church of Canada, gave an example of the risks involved in diakonia. He spoke of the Canadian churches’ experience of staffing and administering residential schools for aboriginal peoples, where their children were educated away from their families and cultures. Many deaconesses and diaconal ministers served in these schools, believing that the assimilation of the First Nations peoples into the white European-centered society and churches was a good thing. Decades later it became clear that the church’s involvement in the residential schools was grossly misguided, unjust, arrogant and sometimes cruel. In the last decade most churches in Canada have either formally or informally apologized to their aboriginal sisters and brothers. One of the lessons from this experience is that the church must be cautious, humble, and repentant in how it has sometimes approached diaconal work.

Diakonia is prophetic insofar as it is a ministry that holds up God’s Word to the world and proclaims that the God we believe in does not want an injustice or suffering to continue; if it continues, there may be serious ramifications. It is also prophetic when it raises up for the world a new *shalom* vision of how things can be done differently. God’s vision is peace and justice for all of creation. Given this meaning of prophetic, many aspects of diakonia could not be called prophetic. However, ministries of charity, healing and nurture still are needed in our world. As Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, prophecy is but one of the gifts of the

Spirit, and just as the body needs different parts so we need to honor the different gifts we each have to offer (1 Cor 12).

Case study II

Diakonia in the Church of Sweden: the continuing call to Diakonia and the church’s answers past and present

The Church of Sweden was founded as a province within the Catholic Church in the early Middle Ages. During the Middle Ages this meant that diaconal work was carried out in the same way as elsewhere in Western Europe—nursing, caring and education were organized and carried out mainly by the religious orders. The monasteries were centers for medical service, education and social care. Parishes took only limited responsibility for diaconal work

In the Reformation this model of diakonia was brutally crushed, as it was for other Protestant churches in Northern Europe. The state confiscated the property from the religious orders, and medieval centers for health care, education and social care were destroyed. This was a disaster for diaconal work, from which it took the church a long time to recover. But because diakonia is a necessary part of the life of the church, it was essential to find new possibilities for diaconal work. From the seventeenth century on, the diaconal work of the church assumed new forms in which households and parishes came to play the leading roles.

When the religious orders were dissolved, the parishes became the only local social structure in society. What has been characteristic of the Church of Sweden since medieval times, is that the laity traditionally have held considerable local power in the parochial councils. A board of local representatives that controlled the assets of the parish has traditionally assisted the parish priest. This is why it was inevitable that the diaconal work was organized with the parish as its basis during the early modern times. The slogan was “organize!” It became the main task for the parishes, in coopera-

tion with the priest and parochial board, to organize medical service, education and social care locally. Households were organized in a strict order, where every household and member had to take responsibility for their part of the common diaconal call. A household cared for those within it who were infirm and those unable to work, gave children a Christian upbringing, shared their resources with the beggars within the parish, etc. The parish priest and the parish council supervised the households in order to make sure that they fulfilled their obligations. The idea was that no one who lived in the parish should be excluded from the common care of the parish. Poverty and destitution, wars and famines made it virtually impossible to live up to the ideal, but the result is nevertheless impressive. Even if the term diaconal work never was used at that time, it is only fair to say that this period represents a good example of a Lutheran church taking part in nation building.

From the mid nineteenth century the agrarian society with its roots in the Middle Ages began to be influenced by the changes in society that eventually led to the modern industrial society. This meant that the strain on the parishes' diaconal work increased. As a result of more efficient farming methods, an increasing number of people became destitute. The number of those without property increased and a growing number of people fell outside the traditional farm household or artisan family. This meant that more and more people fell outside the scope of the diaconal work of the church, because this work was based on the household structure. The great migration began to new municipalities, to towns and cities, where the new factories were built, and to other countries, primarily to North America, but also Argentina and Brazil.

The state's response was to organize public social care and medical service, severed from the diaconal work in the church. This change was clearly marked in 1862 when secular local administrative entities, *kommuner* (pl.) or municipalities were introduced alongside the parishes. During the years that followed more and more of the diaconal obligations of the parish were taken over by the *kommun* (sg.). The *kommun* took over the care of the poor in 1863, the elementary schools during

the first half of the twentieth century, and in 1924, the responsibility for child welfare. Not only were these tasks removed from the church, but the church was no longer allowed to engage in these tasks, over which the secular *kommun* now had a monopoly.

For the parishes this meant that a heavy burden of work was removed, which the church appreciated. The church greeted the changes with appreciation feeling that in a Christian society, diaconal work should be carried out in the most appropriate form. The secular *kommun* was regarded as an organ for Christian responsibility for society, because the country was still regarded as a solidly Christian country. During the course of the twentieth century this would change, due to the process of secularization. Church and state began to be perceived as two different entities, and the relationship between them was rather ambivalent.

Because diakonia is indispensable for the church, there was a void in the parishes when many of the diaconal tasks were taken away from the parishes. Although churches could not longer carry out the traditional diaconal work, the call to serve was there and the needs were clearly present.

It is from this void that modern diaconal work in the Church of Sweden was born. From the mid-nineteenth century onward, new diaconal organizations emerged independent of the parishes. Deaconesses' institutions or mother houses were created based on German models. Deaconesses were trained in these institutions to work with the poor, the elderly, "fallen women," orphans and the sick. The Church of Sweden along with other churches in Europe and North America spread this model for diaconal work to other continents through the missionary movement in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

This way of organizing diaconal work has been both empowering and stifling for the women who were engaged in it. When the deaconess' houses were introduced they provided new opportunities for women to train for nursing and the teaching professions and thus to gain respect and independence in a society where choices were limited for women. Originally, it was impossible to combine

family life with the vocation as a deaconess. Deaconesses were the Protestant equivalent of religious sisters. Although they never took any vows regarding chastity or poverty, they were nevertheless expected to live celibate lives on very small salaries or to be provided for by the mother house. If a deaconess married, she was expected to leave her profession as deaconess.

When society modernized, when more professions were opened to women and the economy became more developed and individualized, the old system of deaconess institutions as large households providing for their members became obsolete. Gradually, the deaconesses and deacons became employees in the parishes. In the 1960s, when deaconesses were allowed to marry and still continue to work, the salaries were too low for raising a family. The difference in salary between a nurse who worked as a deaconess in a parish and a nurse who worked in a secular institution became untenable. The church was seen as a stingy employer that did not value the qualified work done by many of its female employees. This is now changing slowly, and salaries are becoming more competitive, thanks to union activities as well as theological reflection on the place of diaconal work in the church.

During the second half of the twentieth century, the strong vocational character of diaconal work was reoriented toward a professional identity. The education for a profession (pedagogical, medical or social work) has become a more important aspect of the identity of the deacon. Both women and men are now called “deacons”; the word “deaconess” is no longer used. The connection between the deacons and the deaconesses’ institutions has been weakened, while the connection between the deacons, the parishes and the official church structure has been strengthened. This change has led to new reflection on what it means to have diakonia as a profession in this time and culture.

The Church of Sweden is today challenged to find new forms for diaconal work. The welfare system that was created during the era of the industrial society is changing or crumbling in our late modern or post-modern society. The resources of public welfare institutions are increasingly strained

at the same time as the gaps in society widen. Areas that have been closed for the parishes since the mid-nineteenth century, such as social care, medical services and schools, are now opened as possible working fields for the parishes.

This situation, where there are new and increasing diaconal needs and new possibilities for diaconal services, challenges the congregations to deepen their theological reflection on the meaning of the call to diakonia in our time. Some of the questions that are currently debated are:

Is it the task of the parish to clean up where the *kommun* has failed to fulfil its duties?

Should the parish build its own institutions or should it cooperate with the public welfare institutions that already exist?

How can the congregations find credible ways for diaconal work in a time when the market penetrates all traditional areas of diakonia; social care, medical service and education?

How can the church fulfil its prophetic task in situations where norms of the market increasingly tend to govern also humanitarian work and even personal relationships?

How shall the prophetic task of the church be understood when the daily lives of people living in the parishes are changed by globalizing processes?

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Aspects of the Biblical Foundation and Theological Orientation of Diakonia

Cornelia Füllkrug-Weitzel

Jesus summarized his ministry in being a servant to all. This focus also needs to determine the ministry of the church. In its service that transcends borderlines, seeks justice for the poor and the marginalized, and its preparedness to transform structures which threaten life, diakonia responds to the God who hears the cry of the poor. Following the example set by Jesus, the priorities of the work of diakonia are set by those who suffer.

Preliminary remarks

The title I was given for this presentation was, "prophetic diakonia." I have chosen not to begin with a direct explanation of this term, or with a discussion of only this particular aspect of diakonia. This would have been too limiting for an introductory paper to this consultation. Instead, I have taken the title to be an invitation not to repeat all the platitudes about diakonia, on which we could very quickly agree, but in a deliberately one-sided way to highlight those elements of diakonia which are normally somewhat neglected, because they are uncomfortable for the church.

I have not done this in the form of an academically polished treatise, but in the form of aphoristic observations.

Introduction

In this paper I would like to follow the preparatory group’s recommendation to distinguish between diakonia and diaconal work, namely: diakonia will be understood as the ecclesiastically substantial feature, an expression of the church’s essence. Diaconal work will be understood as the way in which diakonia is practiced at a specific time and in a specific context.

The preparatory group’s study document also states quite correctly, that diakonia has a great variety of connotations and meanings in contemporary theology. Although the word appears in the New Testament a reflection on diakonia today cannot directly start with the biblical use of language. The different understandings of the practical forms of diakonia are partly, but by no means exclusively, due to the different theological approaches to and concepts of diakonia.

What are the origins of these differences in the way we understand diakonia and diaconal practice?

Beside the general state of the church, the differences in the way in which we understand diakonia mainly arise from the socio-political and socio-economic environments. Diaconal work always interacts with society in two ways: on the one hand, the church in its concrete form and in its service has to take maximum account of the concrete developments and problems of society and a globalized world. On the other hand, diaconal work shares in all these developments and is immediately involved with them—often long before the church recognizes the changes in its immediate environment and the world at large, or takes them seriously. This requires permanent efforts to adjust. In a constantly changing society, diaconal work can only remain faithful to its original task if it develops different forms and structures appropriate to the different conditions, i.e., if it can work in a contemporary way. If it cannot adapt to different circumstances, then it will not be true to the task originally entrusted to it. Diaconal work must be organized according to the given local circumstances, and able (or allowed)

to adjust quickly to the given conditions. It must be in the vanguard of life.

Diaconal work depends on national conditions, and on the degree of differentiation and specialization of the social systems in a given society. Today it is also closely linked to the dynamics of neo-liberal globalization. Is the social system subject to the criteria of a neo-liberal market economy or is there a stable public welfare system? In a “social market,” are the churches merely suppliers among others and in competition with one another and others, or do they hold a monopoly position? Are they recognized by the state and by society, or do they have to solicit or fight for acceptance and toleration? Are they being persecuted by the state, regulated and subject to restrictions, or can they speak and act freely? Is the primary social orientation of the population directed toward the family or group, or is there an interest in the welfare of the whole community or an understanding of international obligations? Is there a culture of compassion and solidarity in society? Are there any traditions of social commitment at the neighborly, communal and local levels, or at national and international levels? Are independent initiatives and attempts at self-help stronger in civil society than a welfare mentality and passivity?

Different understandings of diakonia frequently arise from the varying challenges of different cultural, social and political contexts in which the church tries to shoulder responsibility for the marginalized. This means that there cannot be any one, universally correct answer to the question of what is “correct” diaconal practice in the church, and what is the “right” understanding of diakonia (therefore I will not attempt to give it here). What is needed in the common debate therefore is a concrete analysis of the needs, challenges and possibilities in the different political and social situations as a basis for theological considerations of the meaning of diakonia in a specific context.

Regardless of accepting this contextuality we have to recognize that in times of globalization, all local, national and regional—and also confessional and religious—contexts are increasingly subject to the same economic logic and dynamics (even if in different forms). In a ruthless competi-

tive struggle for resources and markets, people, ethnic groups and nations are set against each other, and all traditional communities (even of the churches, both locally and globally) are under the pressure of fragmentation and competition. In this context, (irrespective of contextual specificities and differences) it is necessary for churches to analyze together, at a worldwide level, who the victims of this global process in the different regions and sectors are, in order to understand the nature of this process and to define what forms of support from the churches the victims need, again at the global level (e.g., international advocacy and networking). Because the different contexts today depend on each other and are all influenced by global dynamics and developments (economic, ecological and by conflicts) diakonia today, contrary to the past, always also has to be ecumenical diakonia.

Some basic biblical observations

“For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45). His service finds its central form in his vicarious suffering and death for humankind (Mk10:45; Lk 22:27; Phil 2:5-11; Jn 13:4-14). Service is not just one dimension in Jesus’ life but its whole content, its meaning, its only goal. Jesus has come to serve. “I am among you like a servant” (Lk 22:27). In his entire work Jesus sees himself as the deacon, the servant among his disciples. This is the only title that he irrefutably gave himself, even if the church never invokes him as deacon. The church wants to be the body of a lord, a prophet, a king, a high priest, but which church would really like to be the body of a deacon? (That is probably why the feet washing, that one can understand as the rightful sacrament of diakonia, was never elevated to the status of ecclesial sign, let alone to that of a sacrament).

But if, in principle and essentially Jesus is deacon, the church also can be nothing but deacon, in all that it does. (Mt 20:27-28, “and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as

the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”)

Diakonia therefore is more than just a “dimension” of the church, as is often claimed. It is not an adjective, or one expression of the church’s life among others, but the expression of the very nature and life of the church itself. I would agree with Professor Ricca from Rome when he says that diakonia is “the very being of the church, its inner nature, just as it was for Jesus.” “Diakonia is not only about actions or works although they are indispensable. Diakonia goes deeper. It is the original destination of the church, her essential characteristic.” For that reason the use of the word “diakonia” in the New Testament is very comprehensive and varied, and includes everything, from the widows’ service at the table via the congregation’s preaching service (Acts 6:1 ff.) to the collection for the poor in Jerusalem—even including the ministry of the apostles.

Diakonia is not just the consequence of the gospel but part of it. Jesus (*cf.* Mt 4:23-24) was concerned with the preaching of the kingdom of God and the healing of the sick. The gospel includes proclamation and healing, forgiveness and recovery, word and deed. It is the word that creates, and the deed that proclaims. The gospel is both in the doing of the word and the preaching of the deed.

Diakonia wants to bear living witness to the fact that the power of Jesus is strong in the weak. It seeks and confesses Christ’s presence in the powerless, it strives to put its power and privileges at the service of the powerless, to lend them its power, at the price of becoming powerless itself and of sharing the tribulations of the life and the sufferings of the powerless. In the tradition of the prophet Isaiah (Isa 53) it is a church that denies and empties itself. It is church as servant of God in the discipleship of Jesus “but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave ... he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross” (Phil 2:7-8). “We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day” (1 Cor 4:13). This neither idealizes poverty and suffering, nor makes it sacrosanct. Rather, it opens the way for the church to free itself from

the powers of injustice, destruction and domination.

The church becomes a sign of God’s kingdom of justice, peace and love by keeping the picture of the crucified before its eyes. The message the church has to proclaim is a message of love, but of crucified love that is victorious thanks to the confidence we have in God’s righteousness. Therefore we are called to recognize the face of Christ in every person who suffers from the injustice and violence of people and of the existing structures, and we have to be prepared to share their suffering while fighting for love and justice by their side:

But as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ... (2 Cor 6: 4-5).

Over the centuries and throughout different continents the church has always had difficulties with this. The church in Germany for instance refused to take this path in the nineteenth century which led to a division of labor in which diakonia was given the freedom to take it vicariously. This division of labor relieved the church from the obligation to follow the ideal.

Diakonia is the part of the church that moves it to look away from itself, not to concentrate entirely on its own well-being, reputation and worldly standing, not to worry primarily about its existence, survival and position in the “market of denominations and religions.” It pushes it to a position where it is no longer self-sufficient and self-interested, and becomes the “church for others.” As Paul writes in his letter to the Philippians:

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others (Phil 2: 3-4).

This relativizes the confessional element in diaconal work. If diaconal work is to serve everybody, and first and foremost the needy, it also means that it is not the place to emphasize one’s

confessional identity, or for different denominations to compete for shares in the religious market, i.e., new church members. On the contrary, for the sake of the effectiveness of the service (particularly at times when competition is one of the special methods and evils of the mechanisms of power that produce marginalization and rejection) diakonia should, wherever possible, only be practiced in ecumenical community and without any reticence or fear of contact with people outside the church, or from other religions.

Following Jesus’ mission, it is the church’s mission to proclaim the good news to the world, through its life, in word and deed, that through Jesus the kingdom of God has come among us. This message judges and transforms every individual and changes the structures of the world and puts an end to sin. In line with all the prophets, including John and Jesus, it is part of the church’s mission to cry out in accusation against and condemn all human alienation from God and from the neighbor (i.e., sin), including the sins committed by humans like poverty, oppression, exploitation, exclusion, violence and humiliation, and call others and itself to repentance (Mt 4:17). It is the mission of the church to preach to those who live and walk in darkness the good news that a light has shone upon them (Isa 9:1); to preach to the destitute that their marginalization and dependence, their oppression, humiliation and sickness (Lk 4:18-21) are ended once and for all, and to witness to God’s alternatives through its life, its acts and its words. The church has been sent to be a sign of the kingdom of God, and to set up signs of God’s kingdom. Its mission therefore means struggling for dignity, justice, human rights, participation, reconciliation, healing and integrity in her own life and her actions, and supporting the efforts and struggles of those who are concerned.

Diakonia is the part of the church that commits itself not to seek and serve its own power, but remembers to seek Jesus and serve the “losers” (not to call them “needy” since that always smacks of a self-inflicted deficit) in economic and political terms. In line with the prophets diakonia (*cf.* Isa 58:6-7) is the part of the church that seeks and serves God by identifying with the hungry, the thirsty, the

strangers, the naked, the sick and the prisoners (Mt 25:31-46). It cares for the poor and their individual and structural needs (*cf.* the Year of Jubilee, Lev 25:25; Lk 4:19) as God has done, and seeks justice and righteousness for them (Am 5:21-24).

Even if the Lutheran tradition is reticent to recognize diakonia as one of the marks of the church (*nota ecclesiae*) it still is indisputably part of the core of biblical faith, and one of the central challenges to the faithful to hear the cries of the poor and to remember them always.

The Council of the Apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 15) looked for an answer to the question of the meaning of Christ's baptism. It decided against requiring the observance of the traditional Jewish customs (circumcision, etc.) as essential conditions for belonging to the church, with the few exceptions demanded out of consideration for Jewish Christians (Acts 15:20-21) and allowed mission to the nations. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul mentions a further reservation about their missionary work that the fathers of Jerusalem had expressed to him and Barnabas at the end of the council meeting,

... they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do (Gal 2: 9-10).

This warning not to forget the poor is consistent for a church whose experience encompasses not only prayers and miracles but also the sharing of food from house to house, and the community of property (Acts 2:43-47). This reminder not to forget the poor induced Paul to take at least two large collections for the poor congregations (Acts 12:29-30; 1 Cor 16:3), and this has traditionally been seen as one of the beginnings of diakonia in the Early Church.

Scripture repeats over and over again that God hears the cries of the poor (Ex 23-25; Ps 12:5; Jas 5:4) and takes their part by setting up justice for them and creating righteousness.

The good news is not primarily intended for the church but for the needy and suffering (Mt 4; Lk

7:32), and they are called blessed (Lk 6:20; Mt 5: 3-12). Their healing and liberation are signs of the approaching of the kingdom of God. This shows how serious and deep the challenge that the suffering and the poor present to the church is: the church is not only confronted by the question of poverty because it happens to exist in poor countries. The God of the Bible to whom the church wants to remain faithful primarily and basically confronts it with poverty. The light of God rises over the poor (Isa 58:10), therefore the church can only be blessed if it opens itself to "invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind" (Lk.14:13), seeks justice for them and in this way becomes the church of the poor. God's Spirit will rest upon the church when it brings the good news to the poor (Lk.4:18).

Therefore the poor and the marginalized are not primarily objects of charitable giving through diakonia, but they have to be seen and treated as the subjects and actors of God's judgment, as signposts to God's kingdom and call to repentance, even for the churches. Many think that the weak and the poor are the problem, and the rich and powerful the agents of its solution. The Bible, and in particular the prophets, indicate the opposite (Am 8:4ff.; Mic 2:1;3ff.) and Jesus confirms it (Lk 16:19; 18:18-27; Mt 19:16-26; Mk 10:17-27).

All this does not exclude a charitable approach, nor should it do so in view of the group of people who cannot speak for themselves and cannot take their fate into their own hands, like some of the disabled and sick, old people and children and particularly orphans and people in humanitarian crisis situations. But apart from this, and primarily, it calls the churches to a different kind of diaconal service for the poor, the sick, the disenfranchised, the victims of violence and the exiles. The church has to denounce and condemn all forms of injustice, violation of human rights, social and environmental conditions that make people ill. It is called to unconditional and boundless solidarity with the suffering and their efforts to fulfill their needs and obtain their rights, and to find justice. It demands constant repentance and reorientation towards the poor, and conversion to a sign of the kingdom of righteousness.

In its efforts to react to the needs of the suffering and marginalized, the church has to exhaust all possibilities and use all instruments at its disposal. But these conditions of life cannot be healed by charitable attention alone. The nature of structural poverty alone requires that one should attack its causes by appropriate methods and try to get to their roots at a structural level. In other words: the factors that damage and humiliate life, that prevent the fulfillment of basic needs and produce human injustice and dependence must be dealt with at the level of their causes and not (or not only) at the level of their consequences.

In 1946 Bishop Eivind Bergrav maintained that the following quote made popular by Dietrich Bonhoeffer was really a quote from Luther (something I cannot verify). He spoke of “the possibility not only to bandage the victims under the wheel but also to grab the spokes of the wheel.” He was referring to the need for direct political action by the church in favor of the victims of racism, injustice and violence when it fails to keep order.

Diakonia keeps alive the perception of the wider horizon of the church’s mission: salvation and liberation for the whole inhabited earth, the *oikumene*, and for all humankind and nature that are all groaning for redemption (Rom 8). Diakonia is the part of the church that in principle helps every man and woman in need, i.e., the whole of humankind. The church is only the point of departure for this work, not its boundary or aim. One should not advertize loudly when one gives alms to the poor, or do it to gain any particular advantage (not even in order to increase church membership!) but it should happen silently and anonymously (Mt 6:2-4).

Diakonia is the church on the way to going beyond its own borders. The church is not only challenged to stretch out its hand to society, but also to cease being self-centered. The church follows Christ, its center, to the margins, the hedges and ditches, outside the gates of the city walls, away from the centers of power, away from Jerusalem, to go to the periphery, to the marginalized, to Galilee (Mt 8:7;10), away from the community of a culturally or ethnically defined church to go to the nations (Acts 10:45).

Resources and priorities

If the aim of the mission of Jesus and his followers, the church, is nothing less than the renewal of the earth, this raises the question of resources and priorities. The needs are immense and growing inexorably. In light of the ever increasing number of conflicts over the last decades, the army of refugees and exiles has been growing rather than decreasing, and natural catastrophes, consequence of the increasing devastation of the natural environment, have taken their toll (climate change, desertification). Poverty is continually increasing worldwide, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic has taken an unimaginable toll. In view of the limited resources available, is it not necessary to prioritize now? But if so, who sets the criteria?

The Bible gives important guidelines

The story of the Syrophoenician woman (Mk 7:24-30; Mt 15:21-28) deals with the question of whether the needs of the Jews and proselytes should be satisfied before others may profit. The question was not new to Jesus or to the apostles whose collections were primarily only meant for the poor in the congregations, or the poor churches. But Jesus is convinced by the Syrophoenician woman’s firm confidence that God’s love and grace is meant for all, and that God’s chosen people are meant to be a blessing for the whole of humankind, and heals her daughter.

According to biblical understanding, the frontiers of the diaconal service in principle do not follow the frontiers of churches, ethnicities, gender, etc. Among those whom Jesus healed and liberated were representatives of other religions, cultures and nations. Because they were isolated and shunned by his own community of faith, and therefore in a particular way pushed to the margins of society, they were the privileged recipients of his love. (In the end those whom he had healed came to confess him, but that was not the condition or the aim of his actions, but their consequence. With the prayer for the help of God’s Holy Spirit we can

also hope for such a consequence if we act in a similar way, but we cannot enforce it.)

But how can one prioritize? Following biblical testimony, it has to be done in accordance with the needs that the poor themselves articulate and determine. Jesus does not plan his healings. He has mercy on all those who are brought to him, are placed at his feet or come to him by themselves. He does not send anyone away who finds him and asks for help. The needy themselves set his priorities, even against his own principles and intentions; he changes them in the living encounter with the poor—see the story of the Syrophenecian woman. Who asks receives (Lk 11:9), unconditionally and without exception.

The way to prioritize goes via the direct encounter with the poor and needy (Mt 25). Jesus does not just heal them but talks to them, is interested in them, and leaves the initiative to the needy themselves. That presupposes proximity. It means that there must be no fear of contact with the poor, it means living and walking where they are (Isa 57:15), and letting oneself be spoken to, touched, pawed and changed (Lk 8:44, the woman with hemorrhages). It means that the church must be prepared to meet the poor not as objects of their charitable giving, but as actors of change; it must not stop at the listing of their problems and needs but should also take into account their own potential to heal and renew themselves, and to renew the whole of society including the churches.

This also tells us something important about resources: according to biblical witness the acts of healing as a rule originate from the sufferers. Jesus does little more for their healing than giving them his power (Lk 8:46, the healing of the woman with the hemorrhages), take away their fear and, contrary to every expectation or conviction that poverty, illness and violence are unavoidable destinies, gives them hope of liberation and resurrection (Lk 8:50, the raising of Jairus' daughter). Jesus supports those who come to him, especially by trusting them to take charge of their own destiny, and persuading them that they are capable of getting back onto their feet (Lk 7:14, the raising from the dead in Nain, and Lk 8:50, the raising of Jairus' daughter). Thereby he gives them the necessary

self-confidence and the hope for a future. He listens to them, answers their pleas and turns to them and thus ends their exclusion and isolation from life and brings them back into the community. He gives them the spirit of certain confidence that, with the approach of the kingdom of God all injustice, oppression, exclusion and violence have no future and can be overcome. He gives them the power of resurrection or—translated differently—of revolution.

“Who asks receives.” The most important step in support is the strengthening of self-confidence and individual potential, but this requires resources that are not as unrealistic as it might seem. Another aspect of Christ's miracle works shows this clearly: the feeding miracles (Mk 6: 30-44; Mk 8:1-9; Mt 14:13-21; Mt 15:32-39; Lk 9:10-17; Jn 6:1-13) show that under the horizon of the kingdom of God, life in all its fullness is possible for all. There the scandal of hunger has been overcome. For those who trust in the kingdom, and act out of this trust, there is no lack of resources, only bad faith and lack of imagination when it comes to sharing. Sharing is the most essential characteristic of the realization of the kingdom of God, a signpost to alternative ways of using the world's resources. The feeding miracles also indicate that the resources of the poor themselves, usually considered to be too meager, actually are sufficient to be signs of the kingdom of God, and a foretaste of the global redemption from sin and injustice (the counter story is found in Lev 26:26). This is also a way of describing the task of diakonia.

Diakonia: a thorn in the flesh of the church

Diakonia is a permanent challenge, and a constant thorn in the flesh of the church. It challenges the church to ongoing change and stimulates transformations that make it more capable of diakonia.

Do the churches know that they exist for others and not for themselves? That the needs and suffering of people must be central to their thinking and acting and not the concern for their own significance, self-preservation and power? That they are

to serve and not to dominate? That their proper characteristic and strength is their solidarity with the powerless and not their share of national, economic or social power? Do the churches realize that the world is their field of action and responsibility and not just their own flocks? Do they continue to ask themselves how they can better fulfill their mission in the world not only in faithfulness to the gospel, but also in ways appropriate to the situation? Are the churches present among the exiles and victims, are they accessible to them, do they let themselves be touched and moved by them? Do the churches share their miserable living conditions and tribulations or do they rise above them? Are they open for the participation of the poor, the victims of violence, AIDS sufferers etc. even in decision-making processes concerning priorities? Do they encourage and support the marginalized and the poor (even in their own ranks) themselves to take the initiative to solve their own problems rather than act for them? Do their actions and their message reflect Christ's presence among the poor? Are they part of the solution to the problem or do they share the problem? Or, are they themselves part of the problem because they are in league with the ruling powers that maintain and justify the mechanisms or structures of exclusion and discrimination: the caste system, racism, ethnocentrism, patriarchy, etc.? Is their theology able to stand up in the world, relevant for the everyday realities of the lives of the poor and excluded, and the solution to their problems. Are they more interested in their own image and limits, or are they trying to strengthen the “somatic” element, the communion in the *soma Christou*, and are they seeking ecumenical cooperation for the sake of the credibility and effectiveness of their service?

All these questions and challenges are relevant if the churches want to be capable of diakonia, or become capable of it through constant renewal, even of their structures.

In Germany for instance, church and diakonia have grown like two tree trunks from a common root of faith because the life of the churches in Germany increasingly developed a separate religious character after the Enlightenment and the French revolution. Wichern was convinced that the

emergence of Communism and the revolts of the proletariat, even against the church, were the consequences of the church's own sins of omission. He thought that the church had been too self-sufficient in its life and celebrations, had identified too much with the upper classes and not cared enough for the social concerns or the welfare of the people. It had not followed the people sufficiently (i.e., had not been missionary enough), had too often separated individual faith from real life, preferring and emphasizing it too one-sidedly at the expense of love. In his opinion this did not only damage society but the church. Wichern's diaconal efforts, under the name of “Inner Mission” were aimed both at the renewal of the church and at the world. Throughout history, the churches have had great difficulty in accepting the work of diakonia as their own work.

Prophetic Diakonia— A Response

Kjell Nordstokke

Diakonia is in need of shedding its traditional image. Rather, in line with the Old Testament prophets, diakonia is committed to unmasking injustice and working for a just, participatory and sustainable society. Prophetic critique of diakonia addresses also the church by questioning the latter's conformity to this world.

Introduction

I have understood the main aim of this consultation as being to get a closer understanding of what it means to be engaged in international diakonia, taking into consideration our identity as worldwide Lutheran communion, including the kind of organizations (agencies, departments etc) we have developed. Further, we have been asked to identify the prophetic dimension of diakonia. How is this dimension rooted in our identity and its biblical and theological heritage? How should it be expressed in the kind of world we live in today?

One of the basic assumptions is that diakonia and its prophetic expression must be contextual, having to be sensitive to suffering and injustice, or expressed in ecclesiological terms, incarnated in human reality, following the mandate the Lord gave to his disciples: "Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you'" (Jn 20:21). The mission of the disciples, and consequently that of the church, must be seen in continuity with the mission of Jesus and his incarnated presence in the world.

Thus, while being church in diakonia implies the God-given mandate of participating in God's mission to the world, it also means a call to incarnated presence, including a radical option for (or

better, with) the poor, by following Jesus' example in healing, dignifying and empowering the excluded of his time.

The first points to the theological and ecclesiological basis diakonia and all its action, the second points to a human reality and the necessity of knowing that reality. So diaconal reflection by nature is interdisciplinary; it uses both theology and socio-political analysis, it is challenged by the prophetic word in the Bible and by the words of our time.

With this in mind, and having paid close attention to the words of the honorable keynote speaker, I shall first present one main point of view which I think is fundamental if we want to develop the concept of international diakonia responding to the challenges we are confronted with. After that I shall share with you some observations related to the term of prophetic diakonia.

Empowering diakonia

The history of diakonia, especially after the 1830s when the modern diaconic movement started in Germany, shows that in many cases servility became part of diaconal lifestyle and performance. To a large extent this is in due to the strong influence by pietism that interpreted diakonia as humble service. The deaconesses and deacons were educated in the spirit of obedience and silent service.

In spite of its important role in the development of modern health and social services, institutional diakonia has on the whole always been loyal to the established order, both in church and in society.

Can the same be said regarding international diakonia as it developed in the form of relief and development work some 40–50 years ago? Do we here see a similar loyalty to ruling and changing development ideologies and practices elaborated in the North, and to political rulers, in both the North and South? While this has at times been defended as a necessary neutrality, or also as professionalism, it is also possible to interpret this attitude as a modern version of diaconal servility.

How has diakonia come to be identified with humble service? Many think that this is how the Bible understands diakonia. Recent research, however, has proven that this interpretation is quite mistaken. There are good exegetical reasons for defining diakonia as the service of an agent or as a go-between. Looking at how the Greek words of diakonia/*diakonein* are related to Jesus in the gospels, they most frequently refer to messianic mission that he is empowered to by his heavenly Father.

As we heard yesterday in the opening message of Bishop Sibiya, referring to Luke 4.18ff, the mission of Jesus brought good news to the poor. The messianic authority (Greek: *exousia*) was very different from that of the powerful of his time (Mk 10:42ff.). It was not an authority over people, but an authority for people, manifested on such occasions as when he healed the sick and included them in the life of society. His authority astonished people (Lk 9:8), and they praised God for what they had seen him do. This same authority was expressed in the way in which he ate with people, as well as in the act of washing the disciples' feet. It manifested itself as a salvific, including authority, thus giving a profound meaning to diakonia.

According to this interpretation, there are definite reasons to break with the tradition of understanding diakonia as self-effacing, humble service. Diakonia is commissioned service, given by the Lord and empowered by his Spirit, with the aim of lifting up the downtrodden, of dignifying the expendable, and of empowering the excluded. As such, diakonia expresses the healing service of the church—for the healing of the world.

But does not the Bible say that Jesus humbled himself (Phil 2:8) and was obedient unto death? The Greek word for humbling oneself does not mean an introvert individualist pious action as it often was idealized in pietistic tradition. Much more the word should be seen socially, as an act of moving in direction of the lowly. For Jesus this was a voluntary action, an expression of his incarnation, with the purpose of getting close to the lost and open new ways of salvation.

During the Latin American consultation on diakonia held in Florianopolis/Brazil recently, the

concept of migrant diakonia was coined. Referring to Latin American reality and its context of internal migration by which the poor are forced into even more cruel poverty, this expression of migrant diakonia is a challenging way of interpreting “humbling oneself.” It is a conscious move by which the church will become more incarnated in peoples' lives, their struggles and victories, in faith and hopes, empowered by diaconal authority, modeled on Jesus' example.

Can this also be seen as a basis for understanding the prophetic dimension of diakonia? As I see it, there are many reasons for finding a connection between diaconal authority and prophetic action. In the following I shall present some observations in this regard.

Observations regarding prophetic diakonia

Prophecy is a biblical term and should be understood and used against this background. Some times, political diakonia and prophetic diakonia are being referred to as being the same thing, but I think we should differentiate between the two.

Political diakonia expresses the very important political dimension of diaconal work. Since diakonia takes place in the public sphere, it must be conscious of its socio-political role and ready to speak out whenever necessary.

Prophetic diakonia, on the other hand, has another focus. It relates to the intrinsic nature of diakonia, affirming that the prophetic task is part of the mandate and authority that God has given the church and its diakonia.

In the biblical tradition, prophecy appears as a response to divine revelation and a God-given mandate given to the prophet. “The word of the Lord came to me, saying....” This word always manifests God's lordship and power, as we read in Amos 4:13:

For lo, the one who forms the mountains, creates the wind, reveals his thoughts to mortals, makes the morning darkness, and treads on the heights

of the earth—the Lord, the God of hosts, is his name.

But it also expresses God's concern for creation, especially for his people, reminding them that he is judge and redeemer, now and in times to come. Isaiah 52.7-10:

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns!" ... The lord has made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

This message is of special relevance in a time like ours that has declared that history has come to its end, or that the market, eventually some worldly powers, should set the ultimate condition for human existence. In such a situation, the prophetic word reminds us that God is the Lord of history, it is still a word that judges and promises redemption.

How is the relation between prophecy and diakonia established?

Both have the task of finding ways, of building bridges as the keynote speaker was saying, towards renewal (repentance) and transformation. Someone has described the task of diakonia as being that of a pathfinder. Diakonia is never only words, but action, looking for ways by which transformation may take place. Here again I am reminded of the Latin American migrant diakonia.

Acting like this, diakonia is never silent. It conveys a message of new times to come (as we read in Isa 52:7). It is important to notice that the prophets were strong defenders of justice. They reacted especially when the God-given law was broken. This so-called apodictic law was established at Mount Sinai as a part of the covenant between God and his people. It is different from the casuistic law made by the elders who met at the gates of the city. The apodictic law is unquestionable. It belongs to the covenant and its promise of shalom and well-being. That is why breaking that law had so dramatic consequences.

From this perspective it becomes clear that to be prophetic means to defend justice. Diaconal action should by its very nature include the task of unmasking injustice and of promoting justice—or better: being a pathfinder serving that cause.

For the prophets of the Old Testament, this task was undertaken within the framework of theocratic society. How can continuity be given to this same task when theocracy is no longer viable as a political option? Could it be by being committed to human rights as a manifestation of apodictic law in our times? And to work for a just, participatory and sustainable society as our way of expressing what covenant and theocracy meant at that time?

In any case, there is a strong link between prophecy and diaconal commitment to justice. This should have normative consequences for all kinds of diaconal work, but especially for international diakonia.

Prophetic diakonia is thus characterized by its divine mission, but at the same time in accordance with its nature and due to its commitment to justice, it is oriented toward the fringes of society, toward the poorest and their conditions of life. This has sociological and theological/ecclesiological implications—prophetic diakonia is committed to the perspective of those belonging to the periphery. Here a kind of diaconal sensitivity must be developed, so that last are heard first.

The fact that on the whole the prophets addressed their message to the leadership of the religious order, is another important observation to make. They also addressed the rich and mighty, such as the king, but then within the rationality of theocracy. Within this system they abused their power, and manipulated it so that they could appear pious and lawful. They even installed false prophets that announced what pleased them.

What kind of challenge is this to prophetic diakonia? Possibly the prime focus of prophetic action should not be political institutions and similar secular entities. Although I see cases even today when they claim religious authority for what they do, and refer to a kind of metaphysical "it must be done" when they allow that the poor are being sacrificed.

But it must be at least an equally important task for prophetic diakonia to address the church establishment, in order to question how we are being “conformed to this world” (Rom 12:2) in dealing with burning issues of our time. Is it fair to say that the church some times has imitated structures of domination and exclusion? Have we too easily adopted a lifestyle of religious consumerism and ethical indifference instead of being profoundly provoked by the signs of growing poverty and injustice in the world?

Could it even be that our own performance as diaconal institutions need a prophetic questioning? How do we measure what we are and what we do? Is it done according to standards of efficiency and professional work, as defined in current manuals of development work? Or is it done according to the mandate given by the Lord: “As the Father has sent me, I also send you!”

A last point I want to make concerning the diaconal ministry as part of the ordained ministry of the church. Since traditionally the ordained ministry in the Lutheran churches has become an office of the word, with the tendency of centralizing and monopolizing power in the church, the establishing of the diaconal ministry could help to bring some balance, between word and deed, between “center” and “periphery.” Also international diakonia could use such a ministry of empowered action and transformation.

Conclusion

Without critical prophetic questioning the church and its diakonia is easily trapped by triumphalism, by ecclesiocentrism and other variants of the theology of glory. The church needs constantly to be renewed and reminded of its God-given mandate and to be on the road, even when this is a way of the cross.

Poverty

Call to worship

From the fragmented world of our everyday lives
We gather together in search of wholeness.
From the shortage of love and faltering commitments
We gather together in search of abundance.
From the midst of our hunger for justice and equity,
our thirst for transformation and solidarity,
We gather together in search of the inexhaustible Source of Life.
The endless Healing Source of Life.

Invocation litany—based on Psalm 145

Before the world began and after the end of eternity
You are God and you have called us to your service.
Before becoming peoples of different places, cultures, religions and ways of being
You are God and you have called us to your service.
The eyes of all look to you and you give them their food in due season
You open your hands and satisfy the desires of every living thing.
You are just in all your ways and kind in all your doings
You fulfill the desire of all who fear you; you hear their cry and save them.
Come God, to the midst of our lives and establish new criteria for relationship and love

The World Provokes Us: Poverty a Challenge to Diakonia

Shanta Laxmi Shrestha

Economic globalization has aggravated existent inequalities in the worldwide distribution of resources and dramatically increased the number of poor. The main challenge for development work is to encourage the poor to make use of their own potential and to pool their resources within their respective communities and beyond. If it is the primary task of the church to live out the gospel of salvation and liberation, then it is challenged to alert the poor to the question of why they are poor, and to encourage them to take transformative action.

Introduction

Although an age-old concern, poverty was the major focus in development discourse in the 1990s, especially during and after the 1995 United Nations' World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen, Denmark which affirmed poverty reduction as an indispensable requirement for the sustainable development. Since then, we have seen a shift in development discourse.

Following the Summit, poverty eradication was adopted first by the United Nations Development Programm (UNDP), the World Bank (WB) and other international and national agencies as the central goal and organizing principle of their action. Now a number of developing countries, strongly encouraged by bilateral and multilateral donors, are officially proclaiming the struggle against poverty as their primary goal. In this way the focus has shifted from the perpetrators to the victims and thus to

the dynamics of structures which exploit human greed to accumulate maximum profits. This shift also brings into focus the liberalization and privatization movement, that aims to promote global capitalism as the all-pervading model of development. The bitter facts listed below indicate how alarming the consequences of this process have already become.

Bitter facts

1.6 billion (of 6.2 billion) people live in extreme poverty (less than US\$1 a day)

70 percent of the people living in extreme poverty are women

Some 300 million Africans—almost half the population—live on barely US\$0.65 a day

Chronic hunger kills millions each year, especially children, and millions more die unless more money is invested in the fight against hunger (FAO)

Around 34 million undernourished people live in developed countries (The State of Food Insecurity in the World 1999)

1.1 billion have no access to safe water

113 million children are not enrolled in school

515,000 women per year die of pregnancy-related causes

11 million children per year die under the age of 5

36.1 million people live with HIV/AIDS (95 percent in developing countries).

Definitions, concepts and perceptions of poverty and strategies to overcome it

In order to reduce poverty in a sustained way we need to understand what poverty is and who the poor are. This is very important for our work, because our definition or description of poverty determines the future framework of our work, including the chosen target groups.

Definitions of poverty

Obviously, different people, groups and institutions define poverty differently. I would like to mention some.

Poverty is hunger, loneliness, nowhere to go when the day is over, deprivation, discrimination, abuse and illiteracy (Tarawatti Sooklall, single mother of two, Guyana, *Choices*, October 1996)

Poor: lacking adequate money or means to live comfortably” (*Concise Oxford Dictionary*)

Every man (or woman) is rich or poor according to the degree in which he [she] can afford to enjoy the necessities, conveniences and amusements of human life (Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 1776)

A person having income less than a US\$1 a day—absolute poor”(World Bank).

Concepts of poverty

Different organizations have developed different concepts of poverty. The 1997 UNDP Human Development Report, referred to human poverty as a lack of resources/basic human capabilities: illiteracy,

malnutrition, abbreviated life span, poor maternal health, illness from preventable diseases, insecurity and vulnerability, powerlessness and low self-esteem, etc.

The work on poverty carried out in Great Britain in the 1970s by Peter Townsend developed the concept of relative (overall) poverty defining it as: the lack of income necessary to satisfy essential non-food needs such as clothing, energy, and shelter—as well as food needs according to the accepted and approved standard in the societies those affected are a part of.

Perceptions of poverty

Perception of poverty is also different. Some see it as the result of a system and some as inability fully to take part in human society. According Muhammad Yunus, Managing Director, Grameen Bank, Bangladesh,

poverty ... the denial of all human rights. The poor do not create it. It is created and sustained by the “system” we have built around us.

Poverty meaning the failure to be able to take fully part in human society, due to lack of choice or capability rather than simply material living standard (Amrtya Sen, Nobel prizewinner for economics, 1998).

To me, poverty is not having power (energy, strength, self-esteem, capacity, confidence etc) necessary for earning one’s livelihood and sustaining one’s own development. It is material, but also psychological, social and political. It is a symptom of a socio-economic and political disease caused by inequitable systems, structures and strategies at all levels from the global to the very ground of human being, the household level.

Strategies for poverty reduction

There are also different views regarding strategies for attacking poverty. Some say poverty reduction

programs should be linked to international policies. Trade, one of the potential means of reducing poverty, has to be harnessed by way of influencing the WTO. Countries should negotiate terms of trade from the perspective of reducing poverty, and their national policy should be pro-poor. Others say poverty reduction programs should link with humane governance (ownership, equity and accountability), because they provide the setting for human development. Encouraging decentralization is key to dealing with poverty.

Apart from the above, most NGOs consider empowering and organizing the poor as the best strategy for poverty reduction. If the poor lack organization and power, the benefits of development are unlikely to reach them. Building organization of, by and for the poor is an essential condition for sustainable poverty reduction.

To me, every human being is born with potential. Enabling every human being to achieve his or her basic human rights is a pre-requisite for eradicating poverty in a sustained manner. Unless those directly concerned, who themselves are poor, have the opportunity to struggle against poverty on their own, it will not diminish. Thus, every program

needs to be implemented in a way that unfolds innate and inherent potentials of poor people.

Hillary Rodham Clinton aptly put it in the following way:

We can only overcome the scourge of poverty if, as a global family of nations, we commit ourselves to investing in the world's greatest resource: our people. Giving all men, women and children the tools of opportunity—education, health care, employment, legal rights and political freedoms—does not just serve humanitarian purposes. It is the key to economic, social and political progress. When individuals flourish, families flourish. And when families flourish, communities and the nations will flourish as well.

The question of strategies for poverty reduction will be further pursued below.

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and targets for poverty reduction

In order to address the situation, the World Summit for Sustainable Development (1995) had set the (MDGs) and targets to be achieved by 2015,

To reduce the proportion of people living on less than US\$1 a day by half by 2015

To reduce adult illiteracy and child malnutrition by half between 1990—2000, and to raise average life expectancy to 60 years by 2000

To reduce overall poverty substantially by specified year.

To work toward the fulfillment of MDGs and its targets, countries committed themselves to:

Estimate overall and extreme income poverty

Set time-bound goals and targets for the substantial reduction of overall poverty and the eradication of extreme poverty

Implement national anti-poverty plans to reach their targets.

By 2000 more than 3/4 of all countries have poverty estimates, and more than 2/3 have plans for reducing poverty. However, only a few countries have genuine action plans with explicit targets, adequate budgets and effective organizations (UNDP Poverty Report, 2000) Many anti-poverty plans are no more than vaguely formulated strategies.

Constraints

Donor countries have reduced aid and failed to keep commitments made to combating poverty. Many donors still do not give poverty reduction a priority.

Terms of trade of the World Trade Organization have not been improved in favor of developing countries.

Therefore, overall prospects are still bleak. What could be the reasons?

Causes of poverty

Inequality

We are living in a world of inequality. It has been divided into rich and poor. Research in the field of world income has revealed the following:

The ratio of the income between the poorest and the wealthiest people has more than doubled from 30:1 in 1960 to a staggering 78:1 by the mid 1990s (Tim Allen, Alan Thomas, *Poverty and Development: Into the 21st Century*, Oxford University Press, p.354)

The richest 20% of the world’s population had seen their share of the world income increase from 70% in 1960 to 85% in 1966 whilst the poorest 20% had had to get by on a dwindling proportion of world income down from 2.3% in 1960 to 1.4% in 1966 (Castells, 1998, p. 81).

The trend of unequal distribution of material resources is continuing. The challenge for the world is how to stop it and thereby to reduce poverty in a sustained manner.

Culture restraining development

Most South Asian and African countries are lagging far behind comparative countries on other continents regarding development of human capacity, health, education, infrastructure etc. About 70 percent of the world’s poorest countries are lo-

cated in South Asia and Africa. Why? Is it due to exploitation through colonialism? Is it due to unfavorable trade treaties, WB and IMF restrictions and directives?

Is it not also due to “our culture”: a culture of subordination to certain power structures such as caste/color/ethnicity, orthodoxy, patriarchy, fatalism, nepotism, corruption, etc.

As long as human beings continue to corrupt others in the name of repressive cultures and traditions, poverty will remain.

The global development paradigm

To overcome global poverty, the global development paradigm should be pro-poor meaning poor-people-centered. But the reality is just the reverse.

After the end of the Cold War, liberal capitalism is accepted as the dominant mode of social organization and the basis for globalization. Globalization is reordering developing countries into clear winners and losers. Thus it operates to the advantage of the more dynamic and powerful countries in the North and the South (UNDP, 1997b, p. 87). According to Nancy Birdsall, special adviser to the UNDP Administrator, “whilst the polarization between rich and poor in the global economy is intensifying, there is also evidence to suggest that those countries largely by-passed by globalization are amongst the poorest.”

To a large extent, development is not searching for alternative modes for social transformation rather trying to ameliorate problems.

The world trade order

Poverty of the Developing World is directly linked to the terms of trade. It is said that most often it is trade, not aid, what developing countries need. But, international rules of the game are not in their favor, but rather the opposite. Protectionism for the rich countries persists. If developed countries slashed their agriculture subsidies, it is estimated that the annual per capita income would increase by US\$1 in South Asia, US\$4 in South East Asia,

US\$6 in Africa and US\$30 in Latin America. The average producer household in developing countries would clearly gain from liberalization (World Bank, *Can Africa Claim the 21st Century?*, p. 177.).

According to the former Director General of WTO, Renato Ruggiero, the share of the 48 Least Developed Countries (LDCs) accounts for only 0.4 percent of the world export,

a figure which points to the problem of marginalisation of these countries in the world economy and to the insignificance of the competitive threat.

Although the G77 act as an important caucus within the UN for promoting the interests of the developing world across the entire agenda of global issues, it has yet effectively to exert influence in formulating a fair new world trade order.

Donor commitment for poverty reduction

Among the problems to be addressed by development, poverty is the most basic. This is recognized by the world in words, but not in deeds. That is why, despite the commitments made one world summit after the other, the donor countries are reducing aid and many donors are not making poverty reduction a priority. Even if they set up action plans with explicit targets, effective organizations remain short of funds. But adequate budgets and effective organizations are important for poverty reduction. So is economic growth with fair distribution. It is estimated that there is a need of more than 7 percent economic growth in LDCs to achieve MDGs until 2015.

Development approach

Most of the community development programs initiated as intervention for poverty eradication were constructed as safety nets to relieve the poor by way of providing services rather than liberating them from their state of poverty through their full

participation and empowerment. There are serious shortcomings in program development not only on the part of governments but also of NGOs. Some of the shortcomings are:

Lack of poor-people-centered planning and programming: the traditional style of resource-based planning for rapid growth with social spending and safety nets is still in practice. The very concept of community development “Go to the people, live with them, learn with them, love them” is neglected. “Start with what they know, build with what they have” is not practiced to develop people’s confidence and pride. Still prevailing is the approach of funneling programs down to them without even consulting them.

Unwillingness to build poor people’s organization: most organizations continue to treat poor people as objects and mere beneficiaries rather than actors of their own development. Building poor people’s organizations, which is the foundation of poverty alleviation, is yet to be made a priority.

Failure to give gender question due attention: although the majority of the poor are women, due to a discriminatory culture with regard to gender relations rooted in the world religions, only little attempt at reinterpreting gender relations is made. Gender inequality as a major source of poverty has yet to be realized and adequately responded to.

The question here is how to address the above cited problems or issues so that poverty decreases. Here are some suggestions for the development discourse especially for non-governmental organizations.

Suggestions

Program development centered on poor women and men

Discerning poor people’s potentials

Poor people’s potentials vary. We can categorize poor people into two groups: Poor people without potential to overcome poverty on their own and poor people with potential to overcome poverty on their own.

The poor, who cannot work enough for their livelihood due to their physical, social and psychological conditions fall into this category. Old, disabled, mentally and physically sick people are examples of this category:

I’m old and I can’t work, and therefore I am poor. Even my land is old and tired, so whatever little I manage to work does not give me enough harvest for me. All my family members except my mentally ill sister have died already.

Civil Society Organizations should not make such people dependent on the delivery of their services—it is the responsibility of the government—but rather lobby the government to establish a fair social welfare system for these types of citizens and assist them in doing so.

Most of the poor can liberate themselves from poverty if they are empowered, if their innate, inherent potential is unfolded and if they are given access to ways and means to do so. The able-bodied fall within this category. Even the lifting of restrictions imposed on them in the name of religion and culture could often mean a lot to them.

My hands and feet are whole and all right, but I am not able to earn enough for a living. I have this son with me. I divorced my husband.

This woman with a child is healthy and able. She lacks capital, skills and social support. If, she gets social support (childcare), economic support (i.e.,

credit), skill training to start her own vocation and moral support (recognition and self-esteem), she can overcome her poverty. There is no need of food aid or material aid to her. Here comes in the role of Civil Society Organizations or NGOs. They can facilitate self-organization of the poor at the community level, which is the best antidote to powerlessness, a central source of poverty and they can help to have access to skill and capital.

Tailor-made development programs

Centrally devised standard services and relief programs are not suitable for all poor people. As Robert Chamber says, “the realities of poor people are local, complex, diverse, and dynamic” (*Poverty and Livelihoods: Whose Reality Counts?*, IDS Discussion Paper 247, Sussex, 1995)

Target poor individuals rather than the community

As literacy programs are designed to eradicate illiteracy, poverty programs should be designed to alleviate poverty of poor individuals by physically identifying them and focusing on them as individuals. An approach which targets all communities as one homogeneous group is unlikely to effectively empower the people.

Poverty programs must follow the empowerment approach to enable poor people to elevate their low self-esteem so that they themselves are able to assert their causes, concerns and priorities at all levels. It is a process that should start from the self of an individual.

In order to develop the habit of working together for their cause and to develop leadership skills and knowledge, poor people need to organize in small groups. The organization of poor women and men separately and jointly is imperative to enable them to advocate their cause.

To enlarge their circle of solidarity and become a social and political force, the poor **people’s network** has to be strengthened. Presently, most of their networks are informal and limited to ceremonies and social events—restrictions which prevent them from taking effective action.

Advocacy for their rights should be an important area of their work along with service delivery for meeting their practical needs.

Multi-sectoral “mini-many” activities in an integrated way

“Mini-many” programs, not “mono-macro” activities or projects should be developed. Firstly, they allow to take seriously the multi-dimensionality of everyday life. Secondly, poor people have limited opportunities. Their experience may not reach beyond their immediate vicinity and community. Wide and diverse experience, which is required for macro-mono programs may not be at the disposal of the poor. Thirdly, their needs are both manifold and elementary. Hence, development programs should start from the basic and immediate needs of the poor.

Civil Society Organizations work at different levels and in different fields.

National/local

Civil Society Organizations arising outside poor communities can play crucial roles in poverty alleviation campaigns:

Enabling poor people to build their own organization

Engaging in policy advocacy on behalf of and with the poor to influence national policy making

Lobbying and pressurizing the government to be accountable to the people

Enlightening the élites

Developing grass-root professionals for working with the poor.

International

International Civil Society Organizations, operating in affluent countries can play crucial roles in

their own societies and countries in favor of the poverty-stricken. Broadly, we can expect the following:

Creating an awareness of sustainable consumption and production patterns. Voicing the concerns of less affluent people and countries with their own governments and advocating a pro-poor countries policy.

Lobbying and advocating for fairer terms of trade and development.

Financing and capacity building of Civil Society Organizations.

Promoting poverty alleviation.

Religious organizations as Civil Society Organizations

The church, a faith-based organization, can faithfully play a crucial role in:

Providing spiritual inspiration for liberation from fatalistic attitudes, promoting an understanding that each human being is created in the image of God and thus possesses an inalienable dignity.

Challenging the structures of poverty through political action and advocacy rather than performing activities of charity.

Alerting the poor to the question of why they are poor and enabling them to take transformative action. This type of work may seem political to the people in power, but if we accept that the primary task of the church is to live out the gospel of salvation and liberation then this task must be central. It reminds me of Dom Helder Camara’s statement ,“ When I give bread to the poor, they call me a saint, but when I ask why people are poor, they call me a Communist.”

In summary, poor women and men centered programs (by all the three actors: governments, NGOs and business), the empowerment approach and the creation of new just cultures are adequate ways to address poverty.

Development can contribute to enlarging inequality as the way it is to a large extent now, but it also can contribute to a process of eliminating inequality. The choice is ours. It depends on what we do, how we do it, for whom and with whom we do it.

Conclusion

Poverty is a symptom of a socio-economic and political disease. It is linked to unequal distribution of the world income at the global, national and household levels. As long as the marathon for economic growth through liberalization of the markets continues without addressing the existing stark inequality at different levels, the situation of poverty will remain catastrophic. It is time to think about new development paradigms and to reverse the damage done by development.

Let me conclude my presentation by quoting the statements of two noble people.

Nobody benefits from the islands of richness in the ocean of poverty. What we need is a global responsibility. That is the biggest challenge to the world today (Nelson Mandela).

The Mother Earth has only enough for every one's need but not for every one's greed (Mahatma Gandhi).

Violence

Call to worship

From within the alarm of the daily news,
We search for the Presence that makes us rest.
From within the tremors of our shaking world,
We search for the Embrace that shelters and protects us.
From within our fears which result from war and abandonment,
We search for the vigorous Hand that holds us.
We gather together in search of the inexhaustible Source of Life,
the endless Healing Source of Life.

Invocation litany based on Psalm 55:9; Amos 3:10; Psalm 27:1–9

I see violence and strife in the city!
The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
I see violence and strife in the city!
The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?
They do not know how to do right, those who store up violence and robbery in their strongholds.
When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh, they shall stumble and fall.
Though an army encamps against me, my heart shall not fear;
Though wars rise up against me, yet I will be confident.
I will ask the Lord for one thing that I seek after:
To live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,
To behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.
For He will hide me in His shelter in the day of trouble;
He will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
He will set me high on a rock.
Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me,

And I will offer in His tent sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the Lord.
Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud!
Be gracious to me and answer me!
“Come,” says my heart “seek his face!”
Your face, O Lord, I do seek.
Do not hide your face from me.
Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help.
Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation!
Come God, my heart says!
Come, for we wait for you.

Violence Provokes Us: Discerning Diaconal Responses to Violence

Deenabandhu Manchala

Diakonia being itself prophetic should be a ferment of change transforming this violent world into a world of peace and justice. Diakonia must stop treating the poor as recipients of its service, and join them in their moral struggle against poverty which is but a brutal form of violence. On the other hand, this kind of diakonia can only emerge out of a process of genuine repentance. Diaconal possibilities in dealing with violence include affirming human dignity and human rights, promoting mutuality and interdependence, redefining power as a shared, liberating source.

I want to begin my reflection by sharing with you a recent incident of violence that happened in India with the purpose of analyzing violence from the perspective of the victims. Such an attempt, I am convinced, can open new possibilities for discerning the meaning and implications of diakonia in the context of increasing violence all over the world.

In a small village called Dulena in the Indian state of Haryana, on October 15th, five young Dalit men, Dayachand, Virendra, Totaram, Raju and Kailash, were lynched and 18 others were badly injured by a mob who were told that these Dalits had slaughtered a cow in order to skin it. This incident took place late in the evening right on the premises of the local police station. While the local community leaders and Hindu militant groups justified the act because it involved the cow, a sacred animal for Hindus, and warned the administration not to take any punitive action against the

perpetrators, the political leaders and district administration preferred to maintain silence. This incident reveals some common features of the culture of violence which I would like to place into three categories for our discussion today.

The victims are always the innocent and the powerless

In Dulena, the mob did not hesitate, in fact they were energized at the prospect of indulging in an orgy of violence against a small group of young men who earned their living by skinning dead cows and buffaloes and by cleaning the streets. This rabid enthusiasm for violence might not have been there if those skinning that cow had not been Dalits, or if the Dalits had had the ability to fight back.

This incident reiterates two facts. One, violence is an exercise of power over the powerless and two, the innocent and the powerless are always the victims. As an instrument of intimidation and subjugation, violence serves the interests of the structures and cultures of domination. It is easy to punish the powerless and for the powerful to get away with their selfish pursuits because those structures and cultures provide the necessary legitimization. In many cultures, it is thought normal for the older to be violent toward the younger, men against women, the dominant against the dependent, the majority against the minority, and the rich against the poor. In fact, this seems to have become a dominant trait of our generation. For some, maintaining a comfortable and luxurious lifestyle is held as a priority at the expense of the misery and suffering of millions elsewhere. The US could dump its hazardous waste in the Pacific because the governments there are powerless and dependent. The Israeli government could use its military might against civilians, most of them children, for the sake of its own security and territorial interests. It was easy for the imperial, economic and military powers to form a coalition to bomb Afghanistan—a country without an army or government and to insist that all endorse it. Millions of children lost their lives while the governments

of the US and Iraq continued to challenge each other's power and pride. It has proved to be hard to form a coalition against the powerful. For instance, there has been no significant resistance when the US refused to go along with the world nations on initiatives such as the International Criminal Court, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change, and withdrew from the World Conference against Racism.

Violence, therefore, is not just an irresponsible assertion of anger, nor just a behavioral trait, but a widely used instrument today in the struggles for power, domination, wealth and resources. These pursuits invoke patriotism, social identities, and religion to legitimize the use of violence. It is being widely said that the US-led war on terrorism is actually a war to terrorize the world into subjugating itself to the domination of the market forces and that the intentions of the US administration to name and take on the "axis of evil" is a key strategy of the US empire building project.¹

Therefore, in most cases of violence in our world today—whether local or larger—the majority of the victims of any form of violence—wars or armed conflicts, murders or domestic violence, natural disasters or human-made disasters—are the innocent and the powerless—women, children, young people, the aged, the disabled, the poor, religious and ethnic minorities, racially oppressed groups, and rural folks. This reality testifies to the extent of the moral degeneration of our world and provokes us—Christians and churches—not only to bind the wounds but also to be bold in our attempts to heal the world plagued by the avarice of some for power and wealth.

Violence is justified

For right-wing Hindu groups, the killing of the five untouchables was an understandable, perhaps even justified, response to a more serious offence of killing the sacred cow. Lynching them was seen as a fitting punishment.

We consider the cow to be the mother of the world, or humanity, so if you have murdered a cow, then you have murdered a mother, asserted a local

leader of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, a leading right-wing group.

Violence takes place in situations where prevailing norms, values, belief systems and cultures provide the needed legitimization. For example, the assumption that human beings are by nature evil and have the propensity to be violent has justified the creation and continuation of highly repressive regimes. Wars are justified as inevitable. Crime control mechanisms are given preference over the need to ensure just and humane social and economic dispensations. Another assumption that some human beings are inferior to others has justified and continues to justify violence against certain sections of the people in every place all over the world. Racism, the continued discrimination of women and the oppression of the Dalits in India, are but a few examples. Some of the Christian missions were led by these assumptions of superiority. Certain prejudices are also projected prominently in order to hide the interests of the powerful. For example, the numerous civil wars in Africa are analyzed as arising out of insoluble tribal conflicts while in reality these wars have served the business interests of the weapons' industries based in the North. One can have weapons of mass destruction which others should not have because the others are projected as uncivilized and irresponsible.

There is also the assumption that violence is a divine attribute which has justified acts of aggression for the sake and on behalf of good and morality. The doctrines of redemptive violence, the theories of just war and the holy war, the US-led war on terrorism, and the legacies of the crusades and colonization, all have their roots in these assumptions. Religions have been and continue to be the most actively used instruments. The history and traditions of the two Abrahamic religions—Judaism and Islam—have been the source of much bloodshed in Israel and Palestine with each justifying violence against the other. Christianity too has its share in this history of violence. The rise of aggressive right-wing ideologies and their insistence on oppressive traditional values and relationships need to be viewed as emerging forms and perpetrators of violence. Perhaps it may not be too

much of a generalization to state that there is hardly anything religious about the right-wing ideologies except sheer greed for political power. Mark Juergensmeyer makes a succinct point that religion can be a potent political tool because it has the ability to give moral sanction to violence and that violence is the most potent force that a non-legal entity can possess.²

As a key instrument in the struggle for power, violence, therefore, is always justified by those who benefit from it. So much so that many, including churches, because of the influence of their historical relationships with political and economic powers, remain silent and indifferent towards violence. While some actively justify and support the use of violence, others allow, deny and fail to recognize the presence of violence within and around. These values and forces that legitimize violence around us and within us provoke us—as Christians and churches—to be courageous in our attempts to expose the logic of violence and to be creative in proposing alternatives.

Violence overwhelms us

The mob returning from the local Hindu festival in a town near Dulena late in the evening heard rumours that a few Dalits had slaughtered a cow. That was enough to energize them ruthlessly to exercise their violent instincts. In India, most incidents of mob violence are inspired by rumors and draw on destructive human energy. In many parts of the world, the media has been found guilty of encouraging violence by sensationalizing certain experiences and even acting as key instruments in the politics of power. We entertain ourselves with violence. We allow the entertainment industry to teach our children the values of destroying, attacking, and killing in attractive ways. This fascination for violence not only makes one immune to violence, but also makes one believe and pursue violence as necessary for peace and security.

Violence can also silence people and make them complacent. A report on the Dalit lynching in Dulena by a fact-finding team led by the left-wing parties concluded that:

The silence of mainstream political parties in Haryana and indeed at the national level against the terrible atrocity against Dalits shows how the communal agenda of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council) has so distorted politics that the concern for vote banks takes precedence over the defence of minimum human rights.³

After this massacre, there was no protest, no moral outrage because of the dynamics of social and political power. The victims of violence do not protest because of the fear of further violence or losing their livelihood. Economic boycott is a widely known response of the powerful to any initiative or movements of resistance by the excluded. Women do not speak up against violence, sexual harassment and abuse because of the fear of being ostracized and becoming destitute. Sometimes we react only when we are affected. When there were some stray attacks against Christians and churches in India a year ago, the churches in India—Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox—got together to protest. Other minority communities, especially Muslims, were very visible in their expressions of solidarity. But when nearly two thousand Muslims were massacred over a period of two months in the state Gujarat recently, the churches’ response did not go beyond a few press statements. The continuing bloodshed in Israel and Palestine does not seem to provoke us as much as it did two years ago when the second *intifada* began. We get used to violence and become immune to human suffering. Keeping silent in the face of blatant assaults on life is nothing but covert violence.

Violence is not only what we see as acts of physical aggression, but also deeply structural. Those who eulogize India’s glorious traditions of *ahimsa* (non-violence), *satyagraha* (non-violence resistance) and tolerance fail, sometimes even deliberately, to acknowledge the violence of its socio-economic structures. Let me substantiate this point: nearly half of the one billion population of India do not have access to basic needs. Millions of Dalits and other backward caste communities are kept in perpetual poverty and bondage and are treated as sub-human beings. Over 4 million children start

working before they are ten. Millions more, especially girls, die of malnutrition, disease and lack of health care. Millions of women sell their bodies in order to survive and to feed their families. Many women are physically and sexually abused in homes and communities every day. Millions of people are driven out of their homes and villages to ensure a lopsided development that benefits the rich and the powerful. What else do we call these except forms of structural violence, more brutal than physical and direct forms of violence? We hear our political leaders, the media and the urban middle class glorifying the prospective benefits of economic globalization right in the face of the rapidly widening gap between the rich and poor and the increasing unemployment and poverty all over the country. This economically instituted violence is going to victimize many more besides giving rise to other forms of violence.

Therefore, this fascination for violence, and our silence and denial of violence make violence unleash itself uninhibitedly and ruthlessly. Its glorification and its destructive intrusion in our lives and relationships provoke us—Christians and churches—to reconceive diakonia as rekindling human sensitivity and courageous resistance.

Diakonia: a contextual interrogation

What then are the meaning, scope and form of diakonia as we analyze violence and the challenges it poses—the abuse and misuse of power, the legitimization of violence and the culture of silence? Before we undertake that task, I would like us to review our traditional notions and methodologies of diakonia. To a great extent, these have arisen out of an evangelizing diakonia and a self-understanding of the church as a religious community that sees serving and caring for the needy as an important part of its vocation.

In India, the churches are often praised for their humanitarian services and for their educational and health institutions. A number of church and Christian organizations in partnership with their counterparts in the North, have been doing sub-

stantial work in the areas of emergency relief and development bringing succor and making a difference in the lives of the victimized and the excluded. While I affirm this ministry, in view of our present task to discern the implications of prophetic diakonia, I have, however, a few hesitations to view this as a prophetic diaconal response adequate enough to respond to violence. One, these forms of diakonia need expertise, resources and infrastructure. It is not a diakonia by the church but on behalf of the church. I would call these forms “institutionalized diakonia” done on behalf of the members of the church who see themselves in some cases as donors and in most cases as mere consumers of the services offered by the clergy and the institution of the church. Two, the challenges posed by issues such as violence and poverty, are dealt with mostly at the level of symptoms. In other words, diakonia serves the poor and the victims of violence. It must continue to do so. However, in view of its institutional obligations and compulsions, it cannot deal with the causes and forces which create conditions for poverty and violence. This raises the fundamental question of whether the institutional church or institutionalized diakonia can ever be the agents of prophetic diakonia. Three, the majority of Christians and churches in the world today belong to the categories of the weak and the powerless, of threatened minorities, of victims of various forms of violence whose victimization, in many cases has the tacit approval of our theological and ecclesiastical traditions and norms. And the victims have learned or have been forced to remain silent on account of various factors. What would be prophetic diakonia of these impoverished, victimized and threatened communities of Christians? What forms of diakonia would make a difference in the lives of these and others who are caught in the vicious cycle of violence? What needs to be the nature and content of diakonia to the perpetrators of violence?

I have two major hesitations in understanding “prophetic diakonia.” One, I am not comfortable with the attempt to qualify an essential Christian function “diakonia” with an adjective. If diakonia can be viewed as varied in today’s market world of multiple choices, it is then easy for many of us to

opt for the least risky. Therefore, I want to insist that diakonia itself is and has to be prophetic. Two, if diakonia has to be understood in the traditional sense of service—of caring and serving—there are many religious communities in my country and in Asia that hold communitarian values as essential to the practice of religious faith, who do such acts of service. I have no complaints about the fact that the churches are also one among them. However, the challenge for me is to explore how diakonia can be a ferment of change transforming this violent world into a world of peace and justice. I want to emphasize this point because the poor and other excluded groups in many parts of the world are getting organized and have several allies—journalists, academics, lawyers, etc.—in their struggle. If the churches do not participate in their struggles, their struggles will not stop but the church will lose an opportunity to be an ally of those in the vanguard of justice and life. This also makes me assert that we must stop treating the poor as recipients of our service but join with them in their moral struggle against poverty which is but a brutal form of violence.

Understanding the prophetic character of diakonia

John N. Collins’ extensive linguistic and semantic investigations of *diakonos* and *diakon*⁴ sketch the evolution of the meaning of the terms over the centuries and point out that this essential form of Christian discipleship was constantly reinvented by the needs and demands of the time as well as the limitations and capacities of the churches.⁵ It is not my intention to undertake an elaborate study of the meaning of the word diakonia, but to highlight that openness to reconceive the forms and methods of expression of our faith in the light of the imperatives of the gospel. Each specific historical context is what makes the church credible and relevant. Mathai Zachariah, a prominent ecumenical leader in India, known for his incisive analysis of the Indian churches, identifies three kinds of diakonia—charitable, social and revolutionary.⁶ He explains charitable diakonia as one of tending the

wounds of the victim as with the “towel and basin,” social diakonia as one that is done by development agencies and organizations and revolutionary diakonia as one that seeks to transform situations and cultures through struggle against and confrontation with powers and forces that abuse, deny and diminish life. Insisting that there are no choices as regards diakonia, Zachariah calls for an ecclesiological rediscovery of diakonia in the context of unjust and oppressive social, political and economic structures.

Therefore, a thorough process of ecclesiological introspection and a reformulation in the light of the theological and ethical questions that violence poses seem urgent and necessary. What I understand as the prophetic character of our faith affirmation is our ability to stand for truth, to be transformative in our actions and to be able to propose alternatives. I would like us to recall the prophetic traditions: of Nathan who took up the cause of the slain Uriah, of Elijah who confronted violence that claimed divine sanction and of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Joel, Hosea and others who exposed and condemned all visions and dispensations of peace which ignored the centrality of justice. I would also want us to take a look at the images that Jesus used and the Early Church professed as part of their self-understanding— salt, leaven, light, mustard seed, grain of wheat, talents, etc.—images that speak powerfully about the transformatory presence and practice of Christian faith. I would want us to reflect on the passionate pursuit of the early communities from whom we have inherited models of diakonia, to live as communities led by alternative values and visions that are radically different from those prevailing at their time. Let us recall those verses “...those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant,” (Mk 10:42-43). The one in the letter to the Philippians: “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5), and about the apostles as those “...who have been turning the world upside down” (Acts.17:6).

However, goals become realistic and effective when they begin with self-appropriation. Hans

Küng's searing analysis of the inside of the church seems apt.

Many people...associate Christianity...with an official church which is blind and greedy for power, with authoritarianism and doctrinal dictatorship, with promoting anxiety, sexual complexes and discrimination against women, with repression and refusal to engage in dialogue, and a scornful way of dealing with those who think differently and with opponents.⁷

We cannot overlook some of the serious contradictions within us. For instance, Is it possible to pursue the path of peace and justice with norms and values that legitimize domination? When the majority of people in the world today are victims of power of one form or the other, can the churches still be led by theologies of power and glory? How can we deal with the problem out there before dealing with violence within, in our structures, theologies, liturgies, relationships, etc.? How can we be led by biblical interpretations, theological formulations and liturgical affirmations that legitimize violence and promote self-aggrandizement and social irresponsibility?

The challenge of violence, therefore, calls for a diakonia that emerges out of a process of genuine repentance for our insensitivity and indifference, our selfish pursuits, our intolerant attitudes towards others who look different, who profess a different faith and for abusing religion to safeguard our own positions of power and influence.

Overcoming violence: diaconal possibilities

In the light of our above discussion, I would like to point out a few areas for our consideration as we grapple for creative meanings and forms of diakonia.

Affirming human dignity and human rights

Many in the world today are violated because they are considered less important and expendable. Certain self-assumptions make some ruthless in their self-assertions and others subject themselves to domination and charity. The low self-images and self-esteem which are inculcated in the oppressed, often inhibit them from resisting oppression and the violation of their lives. Moreover, people are not poor and powerless by choice, but are made and kept so. Therefore, we must also take care to see that our initiatives are not informed by assumptions and orientations, whether theological or otherwise, that denigrate the personhood of the human being. Some of our paternalistic attitudes toward the poor emerge out of such value orientations.

Let me illustrate: for a people, such as the Dalits and other oppressed people, who are constantly made to sacrifice themselves for the sake of others, the doctrine of atonement that glorifies vicarious suffering and self-sacrifice is a mockery. For a people, who are made and kept as servants, glorification of servanthood and obedience is nothing but that the sanctification of subjugation. Jesus Christ liberates people from all forms of oppression, including oppressive self-images that stifle creativity and fuller realization of the purposes of God in creation.

I would also like us to recognize the dehumanizing potential of the processes of economic globalization, aggressive reactions of fear and hatred towards others in many parts of the world today and rampant racism and other forms of discrimination. How do we counter these onslaughts and do diakonia in such a way that the innocent and the powerless do not fall victim to it? At this point, we must recognize the importance of upholding the integrity of creation. It is the ultimate matrix that ensures the value, dignity and rights of all people. The traditional Western Christian disregard for the ecological order has provided the ideological foundation for the modern growth-oriented, exploitative processes of development and technological advancement. Surely, life has become

comfortable and enjoyable for some at the expense of the basic needs and rights of many. Many of us are caught in this dilemma. We are conscious that this lopsidedness is not only unsustainable for the continuation of life, but also unethical and immoral. Besides making the world unsustainable, these ideological forces have been extremely harsh towards the rights, dignity and survival of many communities of the poor all over the world.

Rajni Kothari, a leading Indian sociologist holds the collapse of democratic institutions as an important cause of the brutalization of societies and argues for a new political consciousness as deterrence against the willful manipulation of social dynamics by those in power.

Democracy can survive only by striking roots in a direct form. It is secured not by great leaders but by competent, responsible citizens.⁸

Perhaps facilitating this new political consciousness and creating conditions for people to assert their political rights need to be seen as part of our diakonia. This calls us to be in partnership with movements that are committed to justice, human rights and with initiatives that expose the intentions of the powerful. I would like to emphasize “participation” and “partnership” because I am hesitant to believe that churches and organizations with all their institutional obligations can be involved in diakonia that is expected to be prophetic in character. Only individuals and movements might be sufficiently independent for such bold initiatives.

Promoting mutuality and interdependence

The September 11 attacks have exposed the myth that military superiority will ensure security. Yet the US seems convinced that the elimination of all potential enemies through violence will guaran-

tee a safer America. These notions of security arise out of the arrogance that power creates and the resultant confidence in one’s own destructive capabilities. Unfortunately, the US-led war against terrorism has emboldened many governments in the world to enact repressive laws. In addition, we are also faced with the polarizing and fragmenting potential of economic globalization and its ability to encourage unscrupulous combinations of various forms of power and more aggressive assertions of hegemonic power over the powerless.

In *For a Culture of Life: Transforming Globalization and Violence*, Konrad Raiser makes this point clear:

The culture of violence draws its energy from a cult of strength and superiority that is often only the cover for a profound disturbance of relationships, for the inability to live in relationships of genuine mutuality...A culture of peace rooted in this ethos of non-violence does not aim at creating a state of complete harmony where all conflicts have ended. Rather, it is characterized by a new consciousness that facilitates a different way of responding even to violent conflicts.⁹

This is exactly what a study document, produced by the Church of Norway explains vividly in its “Vulnerability and security: current challenges in security policy from an ethical and theological perspective.” Holding that enmity and conflict are a greater temptation for the person who knows him/herself to be invulnerable, the study document argues that vulnerability is an inevitable, intrinsic human reality and that it is not a sign of weakness but of strength and ability to inspire morally sound relationships.¹⁰ What we need then is a new logic of peace effectively to expose the logic of violence.

At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus rejected the temptation of seeking foolproof security when the devil asks him to jump down from the pinnacle of the temple (Mt 4: 5-7). Instead Jesus affirms his vulnerability and advocates security that comes through a life rooted in God’s will and purposes (Mk 10:45; cf. Phil 2:5-11). Following this event, he calls people to love their enemies, pray for them

and bless those who persecute them (Mt 5:6, 10, 43-48). He preaches a new ethic that calls for a recognition of one's own vulnerability and for attitudes of mutuality and interdependence in relationships.

The church, therefore, needs to be a place to live out this ethic of mutuality and interdependence besides promoting the same. This ethic is a concrete affirmation of the sovereignty of God as the source of all life. It testifies to a spirituality that finds its fulfillment in the celebration of life in relationships. Promoting the value of mutuality and interdependence in human relations—in family, community, church, nation, globally, etc.—has to be seen as a new logic of peace to counter the logic of violence based on greed and self-assertion. We must also seriously debate whether denominational presence, witness and diakonia can effectively uphold the integrity of the gospel of peace and reconciliation in a polarized and fragmented world. Interfaith dialogue initiatives, ecumenical action, and inter-regional church cooperation are to be seen as instruments in building a new world order based on just relationships.

Redefining power as a shared resource

As we have so far seen, we cannot overcome violence without exposing the destructive potential of and greed for power. We are confronted with various forms of power which are more frequently abused and misused than properly used—military power, economic power, political power, technological power, media power, religious/sacred/ritual power, and the love of power. I must add and underline the disempowering potential of economic globalization which is quickly making many vulnerable to violence. Furthermore, power is also an important element in the life and structures of the church. It is glorified, venerated and feared, and consequently concentrated in the hierarchical structures. Traditional theologies have, by and large, glorified power and have held obedience to power and authority as a Christian virtue.

We need to interrogate power and expose the ways in which it most often serves the interests of the powerful. It is the fear and glorification of

power that encourages violence and inhibits the victims from resisting violence. We also need to be conscious of the despair and sense of helplessness that the victims of power experience. Holding that people alienate themselves from their birthright by projecting the image of power upon the collective, its symbols, its processes and its products, Lewis Mudge argues that people become blind to the dis-empowering consequences of what they do to others, because they are not aware of the power that is in their hands in the first place. He therefore upholds the biblical vision that calls for a new consciousness through which the use of power can be intrinsic to the constantly rewoven fabric of human sharing.¹¹ The values of justice and truth, mutuality and interdependence, non-violent resistance and solidarity in struggle, need to be lifted up as alternatives to the greed and the resultant abuse and misuse of power.

This global and complex reality of violence, therefore, may inspire us to look for solutions beyond merely local and community-based reconciliation efforts, for areas of active political engagement and advocacy in affirmation of our faith in God who shared his power and glory so that all may have life and have it abundantly.

The harshness of the Christian gospel is easily made subservient to an ideology of reconciliation, which manipulates the principle of Christian love into a means of resisting any real challenge to the established order.¹²

Therefore, as new combinations of power create new forms of violence, the challenge for the churches is to provide alternative ways of understanding, exercising and sharing power. Initiatives stimulating and experimenting with such possibilities need to be accompanied and supported.

In conclusion, the challenges for us as we try to understand afresh the meaning and implications of diakonia in this context of violence are manifold: diakonia has to be understood and pursued as transformative action. It must empower the disempowered. It needs to facilitate the emergence of a new logic of peace to counter the logic of violence, new ways of exercising power, and ensuring

justice. It must inspire and assist new and courageous actions that expose injustice and abuse of power. It needs to be a process that makes the church walk alongside those struggling for the fuller realization of a new world order of justice, dignity, freedom and life for all, which we call the coming reign of God. It must be one which is understood as an essential form of Christian discipleship. As Lewis Mudge puts it:

Hence the force of the idea that the Church could function as “sign” in our situation by being the sort of parabolic community, or lens, or prism, through which human beings might be summoned to new possibilities of moral imagination in relation to power. The “sign-ature” of Jesus Christ could and should be acted out.¹³

Notes

¹ Ninan Koshy, “Terrorism in a Globalized World,” an unpublished paper presented at a WCC-CCA-NCCP sponsored international ecumenical conference on Terrorism in a Globalized World, Manila, September 2002.

² Mark Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p 163.

³ Jhajjar Lynching of Dalits—A Report <http://www.cpim.org>

⁴ John N. Collins, *Deacons and the Church: Making Connections between the Old and New* (Morehouse Publishing Group, 2003).

⁵ Collins points out that the ancient Greeks, and authors of the New Testament and other early Christian documents did not use these words to mean loving and caring service and that only since the nineteenth century churches have understood diakonia as an agency of loving service, ” *ibid.*, pp.13-14. Reflecting elaborately on Jesus’ own understanding of diakonia as found in Mark 10:45, Collins points out that Jesus’ use of the term has to be understood in the light of his redemptive activity. “In extending self-less and loving service to those in need, deacons would be extending across time the diakonia of Jesus by which he brought redemption to the world,” p. 31.

⁶ Mathai Zachariah *Justice and Peace in the World Tomorrow* (Nagpur: NCCI, 1988).

⁷ Hans Küng, *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics* (London: SCM Press, 1997), p. 152.

⁸ Rajni Kothari, “Beyond Democracy. Human Security in a New World Disorder,” *ARENA* vols 17&18, nos.1&2 (2002), pp. 18-19.

⁹ Konrad Raiser, *For a Culture of Life: Transforming Globalization and Violence* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2002), pp .89 & 92.

¹⁰ Council on Ecumenical Relations and International Affairs Study document (2000), pp .11,13 & 17.

¹¹ Lewis Mudge, *Rethinking the Beloved Community: Ecclesiology, Hermeneutics, Social Theology* (Geneva and New York: WCC and University Press of America, 2001), p. 72.

¹² Christopher Rowland & Mark Corner, *Liberating Exegesis: The Challenge of Liberation Theology to Biblical Studies* (London,: SPCK, 1991), p. 187.

¹³ Mudge, *op.cit.* (note 11), p 141.

HIV/AIDS

Call to worship

With the pressing crowds, searching for healing and hope,

We wish to see Jesus.

With the pushed out and cast aside, with the lonely lost, stripped of pride,

We wish to see Jesus.

With those who seek mystery and meaning, wisdom and grace,

We wish to see Jesus.

We gather this day in search of the inexhaustible Source of Life.

The endless Healing Source of Life.

Invocation litany

We wish to see Jesus! We wish to see Jesus! Who are we?

We are millions of people living with HIV/AIDS among millions living with hunger and violence.

We wish to see Jesus. We wish to see Jesus!

We are millions affected by HIV/AIDS among millions who join hands in solidarity.

We wish to see Jesus. We wish to see Jesus!

We are millions who have made discrimination into love, isolation into community, weakness into joy, discouragement into creativity.

We wish to see Jesus. We wish to see Jesus!

Come, O God, and fill the world with vigor and care.

Come, breathe on us remaking life and its qualities.

Come, for we wish to see Jesus! We wish to see Jesus!

Prophetic Task of the Church: A Listener’s Response

Molefe Tsele

Prophetic diakonia seeks to be faithful to God under specific conditions. Diakonia is a core component of the church’s work, alongside the ministries of Word and sacraments. Rather than merely rendering humble service to the poor, diakonia needs to be viewed and enacted within the context of the Jubilee and Sabbatic dynamic of relief and social intervention which aims at restoring the dignity of human beings. It involves taking a stand and the willingness to take risks. It touches and engages us personally and requires a spirituality that includes confession of our own culpability and the acknowledgment that we are not heroes or saviors of the poor. In terms of HIV/AIDS, the Lutheran church’s diakonia is challenged to overcome the misconception of sexual moralism and to rediscover the gift of sexuality in light of justification by grace.

Prophetic diakonia is by definition a special form of diakonia, a qualified or distinct form, certainly not the norm.

Many have attempted to take their cue from the related concept of “prophetic theology” which is a theology for specific times with a special urgency and directness. This is what is also called kairotic theology. Thus doing diakonia in a prophetic mode is practicing it at a special time in a way which is pregnant with unique possibilities and possible dangers. In short, “prophetic diakonia” seeks to be faithful to God under specific conditions.

The opening address and the response to it raised the critical question, What are the challenges of the society in which we live and what

unique opportunities and threats exist for the work of diakonia?

We heard that our world is confronted with unique forms of dehumanizing poverty constituting a serious distortion of the core intention of God with creation. Thus the challenge of poverty of our present time presents itself as a specific word of judgment about the sinfulness of our situation.

We heard that our world is confronted with unique forms of violence which has become an accepted form of our established order of living, a daily reality of the poor. Indeed, we can go as far as saying, we live in a world that subscribes to the creed of the necessity and inevitability of violence, even the celebration of violence as an aspect of our life.

We specially heard that a new challenge to diakonia is the reality of HIV/AIDS in our midst, especially in Africa.

In identifying critical insights from what we have heard we remember the narrative of Acts 6: the call and induction, the ministry and martyrdom of Stephen. Interestingly, the text specifies the qualifications of those who were to be dedicated to the work of diakonia: trustworthiness and wisdom. The motivation for instituting this ministry was that others may be able to dedicate themselves full time to preaching of the word. Since then, the ministry of diakonia has become a lower ranked ministry, to be carried out by those who cannot preach or who do not have the mind for theology, and therefore cannot be ordained as pastors. Thus diaconal ministry was relegated to women (nuns and deaconesses), in line with the domestic functions of women in society. What we tend to forget is that Stephen, the first minister of diakonia, was also a gifted speaker and that it was Stephen who first earned the wrath of the enemies of the church, thus becoming its first martyr. Evidently, diakonia, far from being an innocent service, was more of a threat than any other form of ministry.

What fresh insights have we heard in the last two days of our work together? Far from claiming to be exhaustive I would like tentatively to offer the following ten theses:

Diakonia is a core component of the church's work alongside the ministries of Word and sacraments. The unique challenges of our time must provoke us to reposition diakonia to its rightful place in the order of our ministries. Over against the history of its neglect we should reprioritize it. With regard to the special human needs in our world today we should do that with a sense of urgency.

At the heart of our Lord's call to the church to carry out its mission is the call to diaconal ministry: He has called us to preach, to heal, to set free, in conformity with his own ministry. You cannot separate the ministry of the church from the ministry of Jesus. And you cannot make diaconal ministry an addition, even an appendix to other ministries. Diakonia is a component of the inseparable unity of the ministry of the Word and of Communion. The ministry of diakonia must be seen as an essential part of discipleship.

The notion of diakonia as a ministry of humble service to the poor needs correction. The biblical understanding of diakonia stands in contradiction to the "liberal" notion of diakonia as an inoffensive, unchallenging, neutral service that is dominant today. There is the danger of developing a false and questionable virtue of service, which comes down to a continuation of poverty, with no intention of addressing its root causes and fundamental systemic issues.

We are challenged to discover a new *locus* for diakonia: the jubilee or sabbatic dynamic of relief and social intervention aims to restore the dignity of human beings. Thus, diakonia must be viewed as sacramental service, like Communion which restores wholeness to our brokenness. Thus the notions of empowerment, transformation and reconciliation belong to the overall concept of diakonia.

Prophetic Diakonia entails addressing injustice, unmasking falsehood, speaking up boldly

(especially to those in power), it involves taking a stand and the willingness to take risks. It is opposed to ecclesial triumphalism. It raises concerns about the traditional model of charity work: justice to the poor needs more than charity. It seeks to put a spanner in the wheel rather than treat the wounded.

On the other hand, we need to appreciate that humanitarian aid, even by secular agencies, is one of God's ways to provide for basic needs. Charity on its own has a rightful place and we must be grateful that there are such agencies as the Red Cross. God is charitable to his entire creation. Society as a whole needs to be made more charitable. We must resist the tendency to turn charity into a dirty word, an undertaking viewed with suspicion. However, the ultimate objective of diakonia is restorative: it aims to restore the dignity of the poor. In doing so, diakonia unites the giver and the receiver and leaves neither of them unchanged. Thus it is liberating and transforming.

Diakonia in a prophetic mode is demanding. It touches and engages us personally. At the same time, it is the work of the Spirit. It is a

spiritual praxis, and thus requires a particular spirituality and ethos. Such spirituality includes confession of our own culpability, the acknowledgement of our own failures, vested interests and at times the imposition of our agendas. It challenges us humbly to acknowledge, that we are not heroes or saviors of the poor, that the task of lifting the burdens of others may be more than we can bear. Thus we need support. We may even fail in our efforts, in our prayerful engagement, in our discernment of the will of God.

Diakonia acknowledges vulnerability and advocates mutuality as preconditions of authentic change. The poor will always be with us as long as we follow a model which insists that we must first build our power and se-

cure ourselves, only then can we share. Prophetic diakonia is a call to share resources in a way in which we entrust ourselves to God. It must agitate for alternative ways of sharing power and resources. As it does so within the church, it must advocate adopting vulnerability and mutuality as guiding principles in the broader global community as well, e.g., in the areas of trade and consumption. In this respect, this must lead to a transformation of social cultures, our relationship with money, etc.

Towards a new *koinonia*: diakonia cannot be an end in itself. It must seek to reconcile the broken fellowship of the body of Christ. In the midst of a world of poverty, a new *communio* learns through diakonia how to create just relationships beginning in the church and extending to society. In a world of abuse of power and violence, we learn through diakonia that where our *communio* is broken by violence, whether in the family, neighborhood or amongst nations, it is the weak, especially women and children, who become lambs sacrificed to those in power. We also learn that the humanity and peace of the aggressor are corrupted and need restoration. Thus, prophetic diakonia challenges us to move beyond caring for the victims of violence, witnessing to the possibility of an alternative culture of power based not on violence but on mutuality.

In the area of HIV/AIDS the very Lutheran understanding of sin and justification by grace is at stake. The challenge of HIV/AIDS exposes the hypocrisy of ethical teaching which preaches the virtue of abstinence and faithfulness, not out of grace but on account of the fear and stigma associated with the disease. People are called to faithfulness to their partner, not because this is what they should prayerfully aspire to out of free will,

but because they are driven by the fear of death. The ambivalence in the churches' statements on condoms reflects an underlying ethical misconception in terms of sexual moralism. The debate about condoms should be resolutely pastorally oriented. And from a theological perspective, we need to say that it is morally wrong not to inform, assist and equip people, especially the youth, with the means of protection against HIV/AIDS, or even to condemn those who seek methods of prevention. To deny them access to those means, based on the fear that you may thereby promote promiscuity, should be rejected. The challenge of HIV/AIDS must make us rediscover the gift of our sexuality and celebrate it without any fear of its power or its association with sin. As a Lutheran church we must affirm that our justification is not based on how we deal with our sexuality, but on the grace of God alone.

Ten Propositions for the Discussion of Diakonia: A Listener's Response

David Pfrimmer

Introduction

I want to thank the organizers of this consultation for inviting me along with Dr Molefe Tsele, to offer some observations about what we have heard in our discussions at this mid-point in our conversation. The presentations and discussions have offered a range of helpful perspectives and insights. There does appear to be a converging consensus on the vital importance of diakonia for the life and ministry of the church in general and our Lutheran communion in particular.

In the North American context, Lutherans often refer to diaconal ministries as “social ministry.” These involve ministries of service, education, moral formation/deliberation, and advocacy in the public square. Such ministries need to be **pastoral**, offering care and compassion, as well as **prophetic**, seeking God’s justice, peace and the sustaining of creation. I agree with the view that such diaconal ministries witness to the gospel and are expressions of the in breaking into our time of the reign of God. We have often understood the pastoral dimension while not emphasizing the importance of the prophetic. I use the term “prophetic diakonia” as a means to highlighting this aspect, which should be vitally present.

I want to acknowledge the importance for me of the experience many of us had in visiting the people engaged in diaconal ministries in this region. The many people, who are living with the realities of poverty, violence and HIV/AIDS, are the unseen guests of this conversation.

I do not offer these reflections as exhaustive. My purpose will not be to reflect on or synthesize all the issues raised but to offer some thoughts that might help direct our discussions in the next days. I offer the following ten propositions not as conclusions but as short markers to help guide us on our way.

Proposition 1: Prophetic diakonia is the mission and ministry of the whole people of God under the cross of Jesus Christ.

This is the vocation question facing the Christian community. I think we might well have had a more detailed conversation on this central aspect of our discipleship. The church as a movement of individual Christians gathered in a community through their work whether paid or unpaid, plays a role in prophetic diakonia. More needs to be done on the question of our call and vocation to act as disciples. This in turn may offer some useful catechetical direction to people who know they are Christian but who are asking and searching for what they must do.

Proposition 2: Prophetic diakonia is a “means of the church reforming itself” (i.e., the Reformation Principle—“semper reformanda est”).

I will not say much here about this except that this should be of particular interest to “Lutheran” diaconal work. We need to ask of ourselves, How is the church different because of this work? How is the church renewed because of this work?

Proposition 3: While diakonia begins as unconditional service to our “neighbor in need,” prophetic diakonia leads inevitably to social change that is restorative (e.g. healing) and/or progressive (e.g., reformative) and/or transformative (e.g., liberation). Diakonia understands what kind of social change is appropriate or required.

Diakonia results in change whether for individuals, their communities, countries or the global fam-

ily. However, there are different types of change and we need to understand that nature of change if we are to comprehend the impact of diaconal ministries. Restorative change sees the world as broken and in need of being put back together again (e.g., the healing paradigm). Progressive change sees the situation improving incrementally step by step (e.g., the development paradigm). Transformative change leads to a dramatically new situation (e.g., the liberation paradigm).

While God through the Holy Spirit inspires the process of change, our participation as disciples is helped if we understand what is taking place and what kind of change is needed. For example, in one community we visited, a young woman publicly disclosed that she was HIV positive. Sadly, this often leads to exclusion from the community. But in this case, through the work of the church, it led to understanding and acceptance and a healing change in attitudes. This was very different from the transformative change that took place in South Africa in 1994, which liberated people from the oppression of apartheid. My concern here is that the aims of diakonia are not served if, for example, one calls for healing when what is needed is transformation. More precision regarding prophetic diakonia might be achieved with a more thorough understanding of the nature of social change.

Proposition 4: Prophetic diakonia must maintain a healthy skepticism of the “prophetic.” In nurturing a “prophetic imagination,” prophetic diakonia confronts the “royal consciousness” whether in society or religious institutions such as churches.

The Lutheran theologian George Forell once said, “There are no prophetic committees.” The prophets were individuals chosen by God to speak a prophetic word to those in power who were deviating from God’s purposes. While it is not a view I entirely agree with, it does highlight a concern for those who would invoke the mantle of prophet for himself or herself. Many of our churches are large organizations and have development agencies that are powerful institutions. Can such powerful insti-

tutions be truly “prophetic?” Walter Brueggemann points out that prophets were sent, particularly during the Solomonic project, to disrupt the “royal consciousness” that had taken hold in the ruling class. They had come wrongly to assume that they had been the authors of their own achievements. As a result, they felt they were entitled to their wealth, positions, and status. All the while the poor people in city and country were forgotten, losing their land, being cheated, and unfairly taxed to pay for the royal mega-projects. They had become very self-satisfied and forgotten God’s call to do justice. One effect of prophetic diakonia is to disturb this “royal consciousness.”

But equally important is to understand that Solomon’s court was not without those who claimed to be prophets. There was an ample supply of “court appointed prophets” telling their leaders what they wanted to hear. Have our churches and our agencies and those of us who serve them become “court prophets” supporting the “royal consciousness?” I would not presume to answer the question but it is worthy of more vigilant scrutiny and further exploration.

Proposition 5: Prophetic diakonia is the journey of a pilgrim church that ventures to the margins in order to hear the gospel. It recognizes that just as “poor people” are not the objects of the churches’ material charity, neither are they the objects of the churches’ theological charity. Diakonia recognizes the “preferential attentiveness” the church must give to the special ministry of marginalized people to speak the gospel to the churches.

As Deenabandhu Manchala of India in his presentation on violence pointed out, the voices of the marginalized have something to say to the churches. While many poor people in the world are not members of the church, many millions are. The gospel almost always comes to us from the margins of our societies. I think we need to recognize this special particular witness that poor and marginalized people give to the whole church. This is about more than the technique of projects and programs and it is about more than the moral de-

mands of justice and peace, it is a redemptive word of God's grace.

Proposition 6: Prophetic diakonia requires the continual community discipline of “social analysis” or “reading the signs of the times” (Mt 16:3) that widens and expands the church’s understanding of its social context (e.g., globalization etc.) and deepens its capacity to be conversant on the challenges it faces (e.g., poverty, violence and HIV/AIDS, etc.).

We have referred to many of the elements of the three challenges (i.e., poverty, violence, and HIV/AIDS) facing this region and the world. To sustain prophetic diakonia requires that we make the connections, identify all the actors, consider the dynamics and articulate them in a way that informs our perspective and our ensuing actions. This means wrestling with the broader realities of globalization, militarism, consumerism and environmental exploitation. How do we keep ourselves current? How are we fluent in the language of the public debate? Can we bring a more concrete ethical and gender analysis to the discussion of specific public policies? We need to be more than moral cheerleaders.

Proposition 7: Prophetic diakonia needs to address the spiritual crises of misery and suffering facing the victims of poverty, violence and HIV/AIDS in a way that is life informing for affluent people who face a spiritual crisis of meaning in their way of life.

Poverty, violence and living with HIV/AIDS in addition to the real problems of suffering and survival also pose a deeply spiritual crisis. For the marginalized, it is a crisis of survival that leads to a pervasive sense of being undervalued and excluded from the human community. But there is also a spiritual crisis for many—not all to be sure—in affluent countries whose individualism and relentless consumerism have dulled their human spirit and left them with a deep questioning of the essence of who they are and what they are called

to do. How will those struggling with these twin spiritual crises hear a message of hope? Certainly and rightly so, the affluent will hear a word of judgement. But what is our pastoral strategy?

Proposition 8: While diakonia incarnates the Word as church, prophetic diakonia seeks relentlessly to articulate and embody an ethic of justice and peace for the world to be pursued with those of others faiths and people of good will.

Sociologist Rodney Stark¹ suggests that the traditional explanation of traveling evangelists starting new churches is insufficient to explain the dramatic growth of early Christianity. Stark estimates that during the first centuries Christianity grew at an amazing rate of 40 percent per decade. Using various sociological comparisons with what is known about religious movements, Stark argues that the early Christian community embodied a radically different ethic than the surrounding pagan culture of its time. The treatment of the sick during epidemics, the respected role for women, a welcoming community in the midst of rapid urbanization and horrible living conditions, were but some of the ways that Christians embodied different values which attracted new members.

In our time, we might ask how diakonia in general and prophetic diakonia in particular offer evangelical guidance to the churches. How is it that prophetic diakonia can help the church distinguish itself from and make its message clearer to the culture which surrounds it and often seeks to domesticate it?

Proposition 9: Prophetic diakonia recognizes its responsibility to advocate and to listen to those in positions of public authority.

There seems to be a general assumption that advocacy is a diaconal responsibility and part of the churches' mission. Churches and their agencies bring a substantial body of expertise as well as ex-

tensive networks of information that can greatly assist in shaping public policies and avoiding serious problems. But is advocacy merely telling politicians or pricking the moral consciousness of the public? Or is advocacy more dialogical and if so, what is our responsibility as churches to listen? Churches need to recognize what is required of them and their agencies when they are involved in the culture of politics and in setting public policy.

Proposition 10: Prophetic diakonia understands that, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” It offers hope by welcoming into the presence, instances of the Reign of God, all the while keeping open future possibilities.

At times the world can seem like it is without a destination. Some have described this as the end of history when human decisions are turned over to the impersonal forces of markets and distant unaccountable institutions. If you do not know where you are going, all roads look the same. For the people of God, they know where they are headed and have not surrendered their discipleship. God’s vision summons them to undertake prophetic diakonia.

Aboriginal people in Canada and elsewhere in the world, remind us that the world is not ours to possess but is rather a world we borrow from the next seven generations yet to come. Prophetic diakonia needs to recognize this kind of obligation to the future, God’s future.

Notes

¹ See Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity, A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (New Jersey,: Princeton University Press, 1996).

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