

Zeitschrift: Internationale kirchliche Zeitschrift : neue Folge der Revue internationale de théologie

Band: 95 (2005)

Heft: 4

Artikel: A diaconate emerging from ecclesiology : towards a constructive theology on the office of deacon

Autor: Brodd, Sven-Erik

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-404996>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 02.02.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

A Diaconate Emerging from Ecclesiology Towards a Constructive Theology on the Office of Deacon

Sven-Erik Brodd

The discussions about a distinctive, “permanent” diaconate in the Church started during the second half of the 19th century and have since escalated in different ways. More and more ecclesial traditions have been involved and during the second part of the 20th century an increasing number of churches made the distinctive diaconate a canonically regulated order.

It is easy to demonstrate that in all traditions involved, there is no coherent confessional generally accepted theology characterizing a specific tradition. The opinion has been divided in such a way that the dividing lines are not drawn as much between traditions as right through them.¹ Compared with the discussions about bishops and priests/pastors, there is no tradition from the days of controversial theology to lean back on. Constructively used, the discussion about the diaconate might even throw new lights on old controversies regarding the office at large in the Church. The discussion has also sharpened the profiles of the different understandings of ordination. As one main result of this, the sharp lines between a Late Medieval juridical view on ordination and the epicletic view of the Early Church have become evident.²

¹ CHRISTER FJORDEVIK, *Ad experimentum. En observation och analys av Andra Vatikankoncilietts diakonatreform med särskild hänsyn till det förnyade diakonatets identitets- och legitimitetsproblematik* (BTP 59); Lund: Arcus, 1988; ELSIE ANNE MCKEE, *Diakonia in the Classical Reformed Tradition and Today*, Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1989; WILFRIED BRANDT, *Für eine bekennende Diakonie. Beiträge zu einem evangelischen Verständnis des Diakonats*, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2002; JEANNINE E. OLSON, *One Ministry Many Roles. Deacons and Deaconesses through the Centuries*, St. Louis MI: Concordia, 1992; OWEN F. CUMMINGS, *Deacons and the Church*, New York/Mahwah NJ: Paulist, 2004; CHRISTINE HALL (ed.), *The Deacon's Ministry*, Leominster: Gracewing, 1991.

² SVEN-ERIK BRODD, Art. “Ordination”, in: Erwin Fahlbusch et al. (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, vol. 3, Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans/Leiden: Brill, 2003.

More than one hundred years of discussions have, of course, left layers of opinions but also resulted in concrete developments in the different churches. One can notice that in most churches, all from small Congregationalist like the Mission Covenant Church in Sweden to the Roman Catholic communion of churches, the development runs from a debate whether the diaconal ministry should be perceived as a lay ministry or it should be seen as a part of the ordained ministry of the Church. The common result is that the diaconate becomes an office in the Church, either quasi-clerical by a rite of blessing or an ordained office. When decided that the diaconate is an ordained office, the discussion continues in what way that office is related to the pastoral office in the Church. Not all churches with an ordained diaconate have bishops. The need of a clarification of the meaning of ordination becomes acute as well as the question whether women should be ordained to deacons or not.³

It is possible to notice two main entrances into the debate about the theology on the deacon: One is a more functional identifying a need for getting something done. In the Roman Catholic traditions the lack of priests has evidently played a role for the development of a more pastoral profile for the permanent diaconate, while in other traditions the concept of diakonia, as it was developed in 19th century German Protestantism, as the need of the churches to engage in social welfare activities, has provided patterns for what is a deacon. Some of us, from various ecclesial traditions, have made ecclesiology as the explicit start of departure for describing the nature and task of the diaconate.⁴

³ KYRIAKI KARIDOYANES FITZGERALD, *Women Deacons in the Orthodox Church. Called to Holiness and Ministry*, Brookline MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998; DOROTHEA REININGER, *Diakonat der Frau in der Einen Kirche. Diskussionen, Entscheidungen und pastoral-praktische Erfahrungen in der christlichen Ökumene und ihr Beitrag zur römisch-katholischen Diskussion*, Ostfildern: Schwabenverlag, 1999.

⁴ FRANK C. SENN, *The Ecclesiological Basis of the Office of Deacon: The Contribution of Sven-Erik Brodd*, in: *Pro Ecclesia* 3 (1994) 197–205; SVEN-ERIK BRODD, *The Place of Deacons in The Ordained Ministry in the Church. Some Reflections on the Structure and Meaning of Ordained Diaconate in the Church*, in: *The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity. Preparatory papers for the Hanover meeting 5–11 October 1995 [Anglican-Lutheran International Commission]*, London 1995 (= Doc. 14); a German version is: *Der Platz des Diakons im ordinierten Kirchenamt. Einige Erwägungen zur Struktur und Bedeutung des ordinierten Amtes in der Kirche*, in: *Der Diakon und die Diakonin in der Kirche/The Deacon and within the*

There is, thus, still need for constructive theological reflections across the traditional divisions among the churches that makes the diaconate an ecumenical opportunity.⁵ In the following presentation of a possible constructive theology on the diaconate, I presume that the debate about the ordination is concluded. That is usually the first stage in the development to an ordained diaconate. So the basis for my presentation is that the diaconate is an ordained ministry in the Church. I also presume that the diaconate is in one way or another integrated in a threefold ministry. I would argue that this threefold ministry, not always explicit and clarified, is present in all churches.

The disposition of this essay takes its entry from the ecclesiological foundations of the diaconate, namely *martyria*, *leitourgia*, and *diakonia* that are constructive factors of the *koinonia* and that are based in Christology. From this perspective I will suggest the concept of collegiality as an ecclesologically based understanding of the relation between bishop, deacon and priest. Then I will argue in favour of an ontological perspective on the diaconate rooted in a view of ordination that is non-functionalistic and not primarily juridical in character, to be able to summarize a view on the diaconate that is a sacramental office in the Church, i.e. an office that is an effective sign and instrument of Christ's presence in his Church given to the salvation of the world.

1. Ecclesiological Foundations of the Diaconate: *Martyria*, *Leitourgia*, *Diakonia*

The Church is not a sum of individuals but a communion of saints, a total togetherness in Christ expressed by total interdependence among the Christians. The pattern for this can be found in the Eucharist

Church [sic]. Dokumentation der 15. Europäischen Diakonienkonferenz vom 21.–25. 06. 1994 in Trondheim/Norwegen, Bielefeld 1995, 14–26.

⁵ SVEN-ERIK BRODD, The Diaconate in the Lutheran Traditions, OiC 37 (2002) 63–74; SVEN-ERIK BRODD, Diakonaten i ekumeniska dialoger. En orientering, in: Diakonaten i olika kyrkotraditioner (Nordisk Ekumenisk Skriftserie 27), Uppsala: Nordiska ekumeniska rådet, 1995, 3–15; SVEN-ERIK BRODD, An Escalating Phenomenon. The Diaconate from an Ecumenical Perspective, in: Gunnell Borgegård/Christine Hall (ed.), The Ministry of the Deacon, vol. 1: Anglican – Lutheran Perspectives (Nordisk Ekumenisk Skriftserie 31), Uppsala: Nordic Ecumenical Council, 1999, 11–50.

(1 Cor 12). Since Christ is a person and the Church is, by analogy, Christ in this world, the Church must be interpreted as a personal communion. The body of Christ gives to its different members their specific tasks and vocations in accordance with the structures of the identity of that body. One main structure is above characterized as *martyria – diakonia – leitourgia*.⁶

One way of defining the diaconate is to identify *diakonia* as a mark of the Church of Christ.⁷ Because the Church is the Body of Christ, it is the presence of Christ in the world and his ongoing work in the world. The Church as the Body of Christ is the primary fulfiller of *diakonia*, because *diakonia* is primarily the work of Christ, not of individual believers. Individuals and organizations in the Church are not doing diaconal work privately, but as servants of Christ, and they bear witness to the vocation of the Church Catholic.

The German Reformer Martin Luther writes that all gifts of the Holy Spirit first of all are given to the Church and must therefore be distributed by the Church to the individual person to manage in an accountable way. And persons, to whom gifts have been given, are themselves gifts to the Church and have the task to administer their gifts for the benefit

⁶ SVEN-ERIK BRODD, *Diakonitet. Från ecklesiologi till pastoral praxis*, Uppsala: Svenska kyrkans forskningsråd, 1993; cf. the English summary: *The Diaconate. From Ecclesiology to Pastoral Praxis*, 239–273. There are similar ways to deal with the ecclesiological foundations for the diaconate in the reference to *kerygma*, *diakonia* and *koinonia* as necessary elements in defining what is church. The basis for all three is liturgy. See e.g. the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland committee which 1993 presented the report “Developments of the Church’s Structure of Office” (*Utveckling av kyrkans ämbetsstruktur*), in: *Tillsammans i kyrkans ämbete. Betänkande avgivet av den diakonatskommitté som Evangelisk-lutherska kyrkan i Finland tillsatte år 1994*, Helsingfors: Kyrkostyrelsen, 1997.

⁷ SVEN-ERIK BRODD, *Diakonia kirkkohistoriassa: viisi mallia*, in: *Anno Domini 2002. Diakoniatieteen vuosikirja*, Lahti 2002, 76–97; SVEN-ERIK BRODD, *Diakonia through Church History. Five Ecclesiological Models*, in: *The Theology of Diakonia (Samariterhemmet skriftserie 2)*, Uppsala: Diakonistiftelsen Samariterhemmet, 1999, 5–26; SVEN-ERIK BRODD, *Word and Action. Diakonia from a Theological Perspective*, in: *Vivi-Ann Grönqvist (ed.), People’s Need, People’s Search, Our Response?/Människors behov, människors sökande, vårt svar? DRAE-Conference*, Uppsala, Sweden 1999 (*Samariterhemmet skriftserie 3*), Uppsala: Diakonistiftelsen Samariterhemmet, 1999.

of the Church.⁸ This principle applies also to the Church as *diakonia* and to the diaconate.

The international Anglican-Lutheran dialogue has described a model based in a New Testament ecclesiology focusing the triad of *martyria*, *diakonia* and *leitourgia*. “Christ is determinative for the ministry and ministries of the Church. He is the basis for the *leitourgia*, the worship, of the Church, for he offers and gives himself in free obedience (Heb 9:14; Gal 2:20; 1 Cor 11:23–26; John 12:20–33, etc.). He is the basis for the *martyria*, the witness, of the Church, for he is the foundational witness to the everlasting love of the triune God (John 3:16; Rom 5:8). As the incarnate Word sent by the Father, Jesus is the basis for the Church’s *diakonia*, the freedom to announce and act out God’s eschatological salvation (Rom 15:8). Christ is *diakonos*, servant, as the agent and image of the one who sent him, acting and forgiving with his Father’s own power, mediating the Father’s will to the world. Being *diakonos* does not mean that the roles of leader and servant are reversed or abolished, but rather that those who lead and rule do so as servants, that is, as agents of Christ’s salvation (Luke 22:27).”⁹

In the People of God, *martyria*, *leitourgia* and *diakonia* are necessary structures. They are implemented in various ways through the history of the Church by a variety of organizations in the Church. *Diakonia* has been represented by the office of deacon, *leitourgia* by the office of priest and *martyria* by the office of bishop. This draws these offices into the structure of the Church and that is demonstrated by history: Each

⁸ WOLFGANG STEIN, *Das kirchliche Amt bei Luther* (VIEG 73), Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1974, 90 et al.; Martin Luther, *De captivitate Babylonica* (WA 6:566). This is also referred to in the Anglican – Lutheran international dialogue: “The ministry of the whole people of God requires the ministries of individuals. Through baptism persons are initiated into the ministry of the whole church. Incumbent upon all the baptized is the exercise of *leitourgia*, *martyria*, and *diakonia*. However, baptism itself does not confer office in the church. ‘What is the common property of all, no individual may arrogate to himself, unless he is called’ (Luther’s Works, WA 6:566; American Edition 36:116). Office must be given by the church. Within the liturgy there is a variety of specific tasks to be performed; these tasks have traditionally been correlated with distinct roles in the liturgical celebration, e.g., that of presider and deacon, which have a symbolic function.” Cf. *The Diaconate as an Ecumenical Opportunity. The Hanover Report of the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission*. Published for the Anglican Consultative Council and the Lutheran World Federation, London: Anglican Communion Publications 1996, § 24, p. 13.

⁹ *Ibid.*, § 10, p. 9.

time a Church tradition has tried to abolish any of the three offices, substitutes have emerged. When the office of priest has been denounced, other ministries have substituted them, when the office of bishop has lacked, presidents, superintendents, moderators or whatever called, have taken on the function of *episkopē*. When the office of deacon has been missing, ministries of various kinds have substituted the diaconate.

Now it is important to say that *leitourgia*, *martyria* and *diakonia* are not sectors in the Church. They are perspectives on the one and same reality. They are distinctions made, not separations. Thus Christ who is the deacon, the bishop, and the priest is not three but one, the Church that is *leitourgia*, *diakonia* and *martyria* is not three churches but one, and so the offices of bishop, deacon and priest are three offices but only in the framework of the one office in the Church. This one office can be described as threefold and ordination is to one of its three ordained ministries, because there is no abstract existence of the one office.

There is always a strong bond between *leitourgia*, *martyria* and *diakonia* as expressions of the presence of Christ in the Church. In order to be a sign and an instrument of God's redeeming grace, a kind of sacrament, the Church bears witness in words (*martyria*), in prayer and sacramental life (*leitourgia*), and in service for the sake of human beings (*diakonia*). And *diakonia* differs from humanitarian, social work in any society by the fact that diaconal work is born through prayer and lives as witness of Christ in his Church.

The local Church is a *communio sanctorum*, a *koinonia*, made visible by means of preaching, sacraments, ministers and believers, by *leitourgia*, *martyria* and *diakonia*.¹⁰ All this builds up the household of God (*oikodomē*) (1 Tim 3:15) but it also equips it for responsible actions in the world (*oikoumenē*). The line of arguments for this could be the following:

1. *Diakonia* is an ecclesiological concept and thereby rooted in the person and work of Jesus Christ. So, one has to make a distinction, not a separation, between *diakonia* and diaconal work. *Diakonia* must neither be restricted to diaconal or charitable work nor to the diaconate. But, at the same time, both diaconate and charitable work can be derived from the ecclesiological concept of *diakonia*. *Dia-*

¹⁰ Church and World. The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community. A Faith and Order Study Document (FOP 151), Geneva: WCC, 1990, 36f.

konion is not a sector in Church life but an aspect of the entire Church. Therefore the *diakonia* of the Church is manifested in as manifold ways as the Church is. On the local level, in the parish or the diocese, *diakonia* is made known by social work, diaconal institutions, charitable work, etc. Internationally, the *diakonia* of the Church is manifest through inter-church aid and solidarity between the local churches.

- 1.1 *Diakonia* is founded in the insight of the Church that Christ is the deacon. The Son of Man “did not come to be served, but to serve” (*diakonein*) (Matt 20:28). Christ is, according to St. Paul, a deacon (Rom 15:8), the one who sacrifices himself for the sake of the world and by words and deeds he manifests the will of God.
- 1.2 Only in Christ the Church is *diakonia*. The Church, the Body of Christ, is the agent of salvation today, which includes the *diakonia* of Christ. It is, however, important to make the distinction between Christ as deacon and the Church as *diakonia*, because of the unique character of Jesus Christ. Even if the Church by analogy is the Body of Christ, there can be no unqualified identification between Christ and Church. The Church as *diakonia* is not a sum of diaconal works but the representation of Jesus Christ as the deacon. This corresponds with, for example, the relation between Christ as priest (*hiericus*) and the Church as priesthood of all baptized believers (*hierateuma*).
- 1.3 Diaconal work and diaconate are different realizations of *diakonia*. The Church as the reconciling and healing power of Christ in this world is the source of both diaconal work and diaconate. But the origin of the diaconate is not a need for having things done, some functions to be executed, but it is Christ as deacon and the Church as *diakonia*. The theological reason for the diaconate is the necessity of structures, clarifying basic ecclesiological patterns.
2. The word *leitourgia* has, seen superficially, a similar meaning as *diakonia*, service. Most frequent in the New Testament is the connotation of priestly service. It is then mostly related to the collective service of the Church as *hierateuma* (priesthood), the corporate service before God. Then *leitourgia* is intimately linked with the Eucharist.
- 2.1 Christ is not only *diakonos* but also *leitourgos*, the priest. Jesus Christ is in the New Testament both the priest and the sacrifice

(John 17:19). “He offered himself without blemish to God, a spiritual and eternal sacrifice” (Hebr 9:14). This unique sacrifice is not repeated but present in the Eucharist.

- 2.2 The Church is *leitourgia*. God’s reconciling activity is offered to the world through the liturgical, self-giving aspect of the Church, performed by both ordained and non-ordained ministries. That is the only reason for calling the Church a priesthood of all believers, “a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5).
- 2.3 Diaconal work and the diaconate are also realizations of *leitourgia*. The Eucharist is the source of the diaconal vocation of the Church. Liturgy without *diakonia* is reduced to pure “cult”. There are strong diaconal implications for the congregation celebrating the life, sacrifice, and victory of Christ in the Eucharist. The consequences of this must form the every-day life of the Christian community where everyone takes part in the *diakonia* of that Church which is the sacrament to the world, a *sacramentum mundi*. Of course, everyone is a part of the priesthood of all believers, not only priests but also lay persons, bishops, and deacons. But since the diaconate is a structure in the Church, deacons must *sui generis*, in their office, play an independent role also as an expression of the Church as *leitourgia*. This can be made visible when deacons have such a function in the Eucharistic liturgy, which is not confused with the function of the priest, but which is reminding the Church of its authentic calling to be the *diakonia* of Christ and perform diaconal works.¹¹
3. Then something about *martyria*, the witness of the Church. The basic collective category, the Church, which has earlier been exposed as *diakonia* and *leitourgia*, can also be interpreted as *martyria*. Primarily the Church is *martyria* by its mere existence as a People of God or Body of Christ, because it is originally Christ who is the martyr, the one who is witnessing.
- 3.1 Christ is the martyr. First of all Christ is the witness (*martys*) to the Father and the Holy Spirit not only by preaching and acts, but by the fact that he is the incarnated God (John 17:26, 8:18). In his life, the life of the high priest, the *leitourgos*, witness and *diakonia* were held strongly together.

¹¹ SVEN-ERIK BRODD, *Diakonen i mässan. En praktisk teologi för diakoner*, Stockholm: Verbum, 2005.

- 3.2 The definition of the Church as *martyria* is fundamentally depending on the fact that Christ is first the martyr, the witness. In her existence and through her functions the Church is God's *martyria* for the world.
- 3.3 Diaconal work and diaconate are also realizations of *martyria*. The diaconal work of the Church, emanating from the Church as *diakonia*, bears witness to Christ as deacon, as the servant of God and redeemer of mankind. Diaconal work is the witness of Christ through the spoken word, the liturgical actions, and a multitude of tasks. In the diaconal work of the Church, to be properly understood, explanatory words are needed. The Church as *diakonia* then requires an ordained ministry to hold together the words and actions of the *diakonia* and overview the right administration of it. The diaconate is then as an ordained ministry of the Church partaking in the *Predigtamt*, but not in the ministry of priest or bishop.

The sacramentality of the Church is derived from Christ as the original sacrament, a concept used by e.g. Martin Luther and the Second Vatican Council. I have chosen to characterize the Church by means of three fundamental concepts in current ecumenical theology: *diakonia*, *leitourgia*, and *martyria*. Since there is an immediate interconnection between Christology, ecclesiology and the doctrine of ministry, I have traced the *diakonia* back to its origin, namely Christ as deacon, transformed and realized in and by the Church as *diakonia*. It is fulfilled by means of two interrelated but autonomous structures in the Church: diaconate and diaconal work.¹²

Referring to the Christological and ecclesiological concepts of *leitourgia*, *diakonia*, and *martyria*, the question is raised of how they might take shape in the ordained ministry of the Church. I dare say that it is meaningful to concretize these concepts in the offices of priest,

¹² SVEN-ERIK BRODD, Wort und Tat. Diakonie aus einer ekklesiologischen und theologischen Perspektive, in: Theodor Strohm (ed.), *Diakonie an der Schwelle zum neuen Jahrtausend. Ökumenische Beiträge zur weltweiten und interdisziplinären Verständigung (VDWI 12)*, Heidelberg: Winter, 2000, 188–210. See also SVEN-ERIK BRODD, *Kyrka och diakoni. Något om förhållandet mellan ekklesiologi och diakoni inom Kyrkans Världsråd*, in: Gunnel Borgegård et al. (ed.), *Att mänskliggöra tillvaron. Festskrift till Anne-Marie Thunberg*, Falun: Nya Doxa, 1993, 46–64; SVEN-ERIK BRODD, *Diakonia Through Church History. Five Ecclesiological Models*, in: *Theology* (cf. note 7), 5–26.

deacon and bishop, not as isolated and exclusive fulfillments of the contents of the concepts, but as signs and means for what is essential for an understanding of what Christ and Church means. Then, as signs and instruments, the ministry of deacon, priest and bishop is intrinsically sacramental. Through ordination they are given the appropriate gifts of the Holy Spirit and they become a gift to the Church. They are signs primarily by existence and secondarily by functions derived from their existence. I will return to this term that is not related to traditional ontological distinctions between essence and existence.

Recapitulating that the understanding of the Church (ecclesiology) depends on the teaching on Christ (Christology), and that the theology of the *ministerium* must reflect the understanding of what the Church is, it is time to remember the distinction between *martyria*, *leitourgia* and *diakonia*. Reflecting the ecclesiology, these aspects must be held together, they cannot be separated (*separatio*) but must be distinct (*distinctio*). This implies for the ordained ministry a threefold form, deacon, priest and bishop.

2. Collegiality as an Ecclesologically Based Understanding of the Relation between Bishop, Deacon and Priest

Christ is one, the Church is one and the ordained ministry in the Church is one. But as Christ was *leitourgos*, *martys*, and *diakonos*, and the Church is *leitourgia*, *martyria*, and *diakonia*, so the ordained ministry must demonstrate and bear witness to this unity and diversity. The form for unity in the ordained ministry is, as mentioned above, the collegiality.

In the Pauline letters “body” stands for the corporate. Ecclesologically this must be demonstrated in the life and structures of the Church and all baptised believers must bear witness to this in their common life. Baptism is integration into an organic communion with Christ and with all Christians. Modern psychology teaches us that a person is not the sum of his or her experiences, heritage, or whatever, but is fundamentally a whole, a totality in itself. This is called a structure. If the Church is the Body of Christ, which implies the presence of the head, of course, then the Church is seen as a corporate personality.

The Church is thus a structure and should by that be made identifiable by everyone who has any knowledge of what is "Church".¹³

When the corporate or collective character of the Church is being emphasized, this collectivity precedes and determines the individual. The Church is not the sum of Christian individuals or ministers, but the Body of Christ which gives to its various members their specific vocations in accordance with the structures of identity of that body. The Church is, consequently, not the additive result of individuals but a communion of saints, a total togetherness in Christ expressed by total interdependence among the Christians. The maternal function of the Church as well as the maternal content of grace implies that the Church is prior to its members and that they depend upon the Church for the origin and continuation of their new life in Christ.¹⁴ Since Christ is a person and the Church is, by analogy, Christ in this world, then the Church must be interpreted as a personal communion.

The Church is a *communio* and the *ministerium* must have the same characteristics as the Church. There cannot be a contradiction between the character of the Church and the character of the office in the Church. The communion in the *ministerium* can be materialized through collegiality. Collegiality is more than mere co-operation; it is a unity in reconciled diversity. Any segregation within the *ministerium* in the Church is contradictory to the description of the People of God as *communio*. Concretely, this also refers to salaries and social status.

The Mystical Body of Christ is necessarily characterized by mutuality between the various parts of the body, and accountability first and foremost to the head of that body, Jesus Christ (Eph 1:23), but also accountability between the members themselves (Eph 4:7–16). "As a ministry of the Church, diaconal ministry is not the ministry of isolated individuals, but should reflect the personal, collegial, and communal aspects of the Church's ministries (cf. BEM, Ministry, 26)."¹⁵

¹³ CHRISTA GRENGEL, Structure – Proclamation, Parish and Renewal, in: Church Renewal. Problems and Possibilities of Structural Change in the Congregation. European Consultation of the Department of Studies of the Lutheran World Federation, Lislerud/Slagelse, Denmark, 13th–20th September 1975, Geneva [1976], 11–38.

¹⁴ EUGENE L. BRAND, The Lutheran World Federation: Communion and Structure, in: Harding Meyer (ed.), Gemeinsamer Glaube und Strukturen der Gemeinschaft. Erfahrungen, Überlegungen, Perspektiven. FS Günther Gassmann, Frankfurt/M: Lembeck, 1991, 158.

¹⁵ The Diaconate as an Ecumenical Opportunity (cf. note 8), § 57, p. 19.

The diaconate has, however, traditionally been viewed more as a subordinate ministry than from the perspective of collegiality, though there does not appear to be any support for that in the New Testament. In the Fathers, there seems to be some limited support for it in one sense only, namely in the application of the terms *diakoneo* and *diakonos* in the sense of “co-worker” (2 Cor 6:1; Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8–12). This would fit into the understanding of an intimate relationship between the content of sharing (*koinonia*) and the content of service (*diakonia*). This is also possible to pursue in regard to other passages in the New Testament. Servanthood in the New Covenant implies participation, a sharing in the New Covenant (2 Cor 3:6). Servants of justice are at the same time sharing justice (2 Cor 11:15) and the same could be said about servants of Christ (2 Cor 11:23 et al.), servants of the Gospel (Eph 3:7 et al.), servants of the *ekklesia* (Col 1:25). It is probably also from the perspective of co-worker that the relation between the deacon and the bishop must be seen (1 Tim 3:1f; 3:8f; 1 Clem 42:1f; Ign. ad Magn. 2:1, 6:1, Ign. ad Trall. 3:1). In the light of *koinonia*, the deacon participates in the office of the bishop.¹⁶ Subordination is not an intrinsic characteristic of the deacon but, under certain circumstances, a practical application or consequence of *koinonia*.¹⁷

Another problem related to the principle of collegiality is reflected in the historically motivated domination of the presbyterate or rather the local priesthood. The relationship between the deacon and the priest has often been as problematic as that between presbyter and bishop. In short: The ministries of bishop and deacon developed seemingly clear profiles in the Early Church. The scene became, though, complicated when the collegial presbyteral system merged with the bishop – deacon system. The tensions created between presbyters partaking in the episcopal administration of the sacraments and deacons with massive economic and administrative power, were finally solved when the female

¹⁶ SVEN-ERIK BRODD, *Episcopacy as the Fundamental and Communal Ministry in the Church. Some Preliminary Remarks*, in: Anglican - Lutheran Consultation “Episcopé in Relation to the Mission of the Church Today”, Niagara Falls, Canada, 24 September – 3 October 1987. Papers of the Consultation, published for The Anglican Consultative Council and The Lutheran World Federation, Geneva: LWF 1988, 164–176.

¹⁷ I refer here to a pastoral letter from the Church of Sweden’s Conference of Bishops: Bishop, Priest and Deacon in the Church of Sweden. A letter from the bishops concerning the ministry of the Church, Uppsala 1990.

diaconate's liturgical tasks were successively reduced, even if some remained with the abbesses, and the male diaconate became integrated into the sphere of the presbyterate and thereby a step towards priesthood. This is the context of the transitional diaconate. It should be understood from a perspective of a fragmented ecclesiology in search of sacred spheres, things and persons. The Middle Ages are marked by the symbiosis of Church and culture, and Church and politics, what has been labeled Christendom. It can be characterized by an ongoing search for holiness, which actually kept Church and society, *sacerdotium* and *regnum* together, but this development fragmented the Church. Sacred places, sacred times, sacred actions, and sacred people had decisive importance in Christendom. *The sacerdotium* was the dominant sacred group and there was an ongoing debate how to conceive monks and nuns and especially later on sisters in religious orders. Sometimes they all were attributed a quasi-clerical status. In this ecclesiology, there was no room for a permanent and distinct diaconate whose tasks became integrated into offices like the arch-diaconate, held by priests. In ecclesiologies marked by sacredness, focusing what is set apart from the "world", there was no room for an office that integrated in its existence the double meaning of *coena caritatis*, the table of the Lord and the table of the poor.

Actually, entering into medieval times also the office of bishop became a part of the priesthood because the *sacerdotium* mostly was identified with the presbyteral priesthood, to which the expositions of the seven sacraments during the Middle Ages bear witness, some even not mentioning the office of bishop.¹⁸ The expositions of the priesthood contains normally seven, sometimes nine degrees, but sometimes the bishops are not included in the teaching on the sixth sacrament. The grades are: (1) *gradus hostiarum* (2) *lectorum* (3) *exorsistarum* (4) *accollitorum* (5) *subdiaconorum* (6) *diaconorum* (7) *septimus gradus et sacerdotium*. The relations between these grades are rather complex but one could say that the fullness of the office belongs to the one who is ordained to priesthood. Whether the bishop was a proper office or an

¹⁸ CARL-GUSTAF ANDRÉN, *De septem sacramentis. En sakramentsutläggning från Vadstena kloster ca 1400* (BTP 15), Lund: Gleerup, 1963; German summary: «Eine Sakramentsauslegung aus dem Kloster Vadstena von etwa 1400».

extension of the power of the priesthood was debated. The diaconate was always included in the higher ordinations.¹⁹

Another obstacle for the implementation of a collegial understanding of ordained ministry based on an ecclesiology of communion is the generally held view on power. During the late history of the Church there have been certain tensions between the *ministerium* of the Church and so-called laity, between priests and deacons, ordained and non-ordained ministries. Basically, the setting for the mentioned tensions is a rationalistic view of power. The conception then is that power is distributive and constant and that more power given to one group leaves less power to another. This is not in accordance with the *communio*-concept in which all power in the Church belongs to Christ, the head of the Body, and that Christians, in the *ministerium* of the Church or not, are servants of Christ. No one can lay claim to power in the Church for his or her own ends.

According to the faith of the Church Catholic, power as a positive force belongs to God and is given by God. Power must be differentiated, because it has to do with authority, capability to achieve things, for example to heal a person or consecrate something or someone, to judge and so on. The basic structure in the Church is that different authorities and different tasks are given to different persons. The power is given the Church by God in the Holy Spirit for the up-building of the Church. That means that one should not look jealous upon another's power, because all power is destined to be for the benefit of the whole Church. The power given to different persons in the Church belongs to the whole Church but is exercised differently.

It is obvious that the concept of a 'charitable diaconate' has also played a role in the power game or even power struggle in the debate about the diaconate. Charity has been given a connotation of love in the meaning of self-sacrifice or even self-effacement which is associated with a romantic apprehension of the deaconesses attached to the 19th century Mother House system. Charity thus has been associated with humble service. Therefore it is sometimes possible to read the arguments against ordination of deacons in such a way that the functional

¹⁹ HUBERT FILSER, *Ekklesiologie und Sakramentenlehre des Kardinals Johannes Gropper. Eine Glaubenslehre zwischen Irenik und Kontroverstheologie im Zeitalter der Reformation (Studien zur systematischen Theologie und Ethik 6)*, Münster: Lit, 1994.

aspects of the diaconate, interpreting it as the sum of charitable tasks, performed without any claim to power, are interventions dealing with the problem of power in the Church. The diaconate easily becomes a threat to the power of the priests and a challenge to the power of the laity. Theologians as John Collins dispute the idea of the diaconate as a lowly, serving, charitable ministry.²⁰

To make collegiality productive, it is necessary not to confuse the offices in the threefold ministry. The tasks of bishops, priests and deacons are different, but not separated from each other. *Per definitionem* a deacon can not do the same things as the priest because he will then cease to be a deacon. Still, it is also important to insist, that the deacon, or priest or bishop is not defined by what he does, the function, but what he is, i.e. the existence. The ordained minister is not what he is because he does certain things but he does certain things because of what he is. The deacon is a sign of Christ as the *deacon* and a sign of the Church as *diakonia*, as the bishop is a sign of Christ the *martys*, and the priest is a sign of Christ the *leitourgos*.

This can be made even more complicated: One of the problems present in the debate about the diaconate thus concerns the understanding of functions and tasks in Church life ('getting a job done') in relation to what takes shape through an irreversible act of God, in this case an office established by ordination. Like the words *apostolos* or *episkopos*, the word *diakonos* also seems to have a double connotation in the New Testament. *Episkopos* can connote both a person who exercises *episkopē* in one way or another and a person who holds the office of bishop. In theological discussions this has caused some problems. They have been obvious in the debate about the relationship between *presbyteros* and *episkopos* in the New Testament. In the absence of the distinction mentioned, ever since St Jerome the opinion has been advocated that 'from the beginning' presbyter and bishop was one and the same office.²¹ The same ambiguity can be applied to *diakonos*. The term

²⁰ JOHN COLLINS, *Deacons and the Church. Making Connections between Old and New*, Leominster: Gracewing/Harrisburg PA: Morehouse, 2002.

²¹ SVEN-ERIK BRODD, *Superintendenten som ersättning för och komplement till biskopsämbetet i svenska kyrkan 1539–1631*, in: *Reformationens etablering och konsolidering i de nordiska länderna 1540–1610*, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1990, 21–64; SVEN-ERIK BRODD, *Biskopsämbetet i kyrkoordningen 1571*, in: *KHÅ* 89 (1989), 91–109.

diakonia can denote both ministries at large in the *ekklesia* (Eph 4:11ff) or characterize a specific office (Acts 1:17; Rom 11:13/apostle; Col 4:17/undefined ministry; 2 Tim 4:5/*episkopos*). Among these specific offices there are also deacons (Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8ff).

This presentation has, until now, hinted at a *communio* ecclesiology, structured as *martyria*, *diakonia*, and *leitourgia*, provided with signs and effective instruments in the office of bishop, deacon, and priest. The suggested form for the co-existence of them is a qualified collegiality. There seems, however, examples given from history and at present, that theologically unqualified problems of subordination, dominance of the local priesthood, a rationalistic view on power, confusion of task and office, and other problems need a structuring factor in the concept of collegiality. This structuring factor is found in the Eucharist. The international Anglican–Lutheran dialogue states shortly: “The celebration of the Eucharist is a paradigm for the interrelationship of various ministries in the Church.”²² It also says: “The eucharistic assembly as *koinonia* participates in and manifests the *leitourgia*, *martyria*, and *diakonia* of the Christ who is present to it and through it. It is in the eucharistic assembly that the Church receives its identity (Body of Christ) and its mission (to be offered for one another and for the world; 1 Cor 10:16–17; 1 Cor 11:17–26). In gathering, Word, prayer, meal, and sending the Church is called and embraced by Christ for his mission and ministry in the world.”²³

The Church is made manifest in the world by Word and Sacrament and associated with them an ordained ministry, including the diaconate. One of the meanings of *diakonia* and *diakoneo* is ministry, in the Gospels predominantly service at table (Mark 1:31, par., Matt 22:13, et al.).²⁴ This is fundamental for the theological understanding of *diakonia* in the New Testament, since all the ministries in the Church are rooted in the mystical Body of Christ and thereby constitute an organic unity (1 Cor 12; Rom 12). As far as Church to its nature is the New Covenant, it is founded in the first Eucharist. All ministries in the Church are ser-

²² The Diaconate as an Ecumenical Opportunity (cf. note 8), § 22, p. 12.

²³ Ibid. § 20, p. 12.

²⁴ For a critical and nuanced discussion of this, see JOHN N. COLLINS, *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources*, Oxford: OUP, 1990.

vants of that New Covenant (2 Cor 3:6).²⁵ But this Church, built on Word and Sacrament, does not exist without that fundamental structure which in the tradition of the Church is called *diakonia* and is a sign and instrument of God's *agapē*, God's love.²⁶ "*Diakonia* as the Church's ministry of sharing, healing and reconciliation is of the very nature of the Church."²⁷ If *diakonia* has this meaning, then collegiality should be understood from the Eucharistic centre of the Church, not from a series of functions or tasks to be performed.

3. The Sacramentality of a Deacon: ontological and functional perspectives on the diaconate rooted in the view on ordination

There is a growing awareness that the preaching of the Gospel is not only a verbal matter but also something acted out in service. The teaching and the deeds of the Church go together and form the witnesses of the Church. The Church of Christ is an integral part of the Gospel itself. Therefore the Church must in its structures be a sign and effective instrument of the grace of God, that is a sort of sacrament.²⁸

Diakonia is a manifestation of the Church Catholic as a sort of sacrament to the world, a sign of Christ's redemptive and sanctifying life to all people – a *sacramentum mundi*. The report of section iv of the World Council of Churches Seventh Assembly in Canberra 1991 states: "Since

²⁵ See JOHN N. COLLINS, *Are All Christians Ministers?*, Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1992, 86ff, 102–108. Collins even coins the term 'servant myth' about the idea of the deacon as a sort of inferior servant in the New Testament. For a more thorough scholarly work on this, see his book in note 24.

²⁶ SVEN-ERIK BRODD, *Caritas and Diakonia as Perspectives on the Diaconate*, in: Gunnel Borgegård/Olav Fanuelsen/Christine Hall (ed.), *The Ministry of the Deacon*, vol 2: *Ecclesiological Explorations* (Nördisk Ekumenisk Skriftserie 32), Uppsala: Nordic Ecumenical Council, 2000, 23–70.

²⁷ DAVID GILL (ed.), *Gathered for Life. Official Report. VI Assembly World Council of Churches*, Vancouver, Canada, 24 July – 10 August 1983, Geneva: WCC, 1983, 62.

²⁸ LUTHERAN-ROMAN CATHOLIC JOINT COMMISSION (ed.), *Church and Justification. Understanding the Church in the Light of the Doctrine of Justification*, Geneva: LWF, 1994, 71–75; cf. GEMEINSAME RÖMISCH-KATHOLISCHE – EVANGELISCH-LUTHERISCHE KOMMISSION (ed.), *Kirche und Rechtfertigung. Das Verständnis der Kirche im Licht der Rechtfertigungslehre*, Paderborn: Bonifatius / Frankfurt/M.: Lembeck, 1994, 68–74.

Pentecost, a visible Christian community of repentant and redeemed believers has been constituted by the work of the Holy Spirit, in order to become the fullness of the Body of Christ in history, a sign and sacrament of the kingdom of God among the nations.”²⁹ This means that *diakonia* must build up and maintain the Church in such a way that it not only by words but also by its total life is that sign and effective instrument.

Diakonia has no given form to be applied neither universally nor contextually. Therefore churches around the world look for methods and procedures for praxis. I think there is, however, a fundamental danger that the churches in their lives integrate practices which are not theologically grounded. There is a danger of inner secularisation of diaconal work. This inner secularisation comes into existence when churches integrate into their praxis means which increase their efficiency but at the same time create confusions about the meaning and goal of *diakonia* and thereby of the Church. It is often, but not always, rather easy to analyse the discrepancy between the meaning of the Church and the praxis of the Church as rooted in a vague theological fundament. It has to do with what could be called a theological out-rationalisation, which means that “success” or other criteria that are not basic to the Christian faith, became controlling criteria and the Church therefore can be characterised by the concept of organisational drift. That means that the genuine identity of *diakonia* is pushed into the background by influences of financial, cultural, political or other natures.³⁰ This is especially easy when there is a division between “spiritual” and “material”/“institutional” Church or “visible” and “invisible” Church.

Today we know that the churches are judged not only by what they say but also how they act in religious matters. The way the churches manage *diakonia*, that is their financial and administrative lives and

²⁹ MICHAEL KINNAMON (ed.), *Signs of the Spirit*. Official Report, Seventh Assembly, Canberra, Australia, 7–20 February 1991, World Council of Churches, Geneva: WCC/Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1991, 113; cf. WALTER MÜLLER-ROMHELD (ed.), *Im Zeichen des Heiligen Geistes*. Bericht aus Canberra 1991. Offizieller Bericht der Siebten Vollversammlung des Ökumenischen Rates der Kirchen, 7.–20. Februar 1991 in Canberra, Australien, Frankfurt/M.: Lembeck, 1991, 117.

³⁰ See e.g. ESKIL JONSSON, *Narrow Management*. The quest for unity in diversity. A study of resource dependence and institutionalisation in nonprofit organisations. The case of the Ethiopian Church Mekane Yesus, Uppsala: Reprocentralen HSC, 1998.

their social responsibilities, internally and externally, is looked upon as relevant standards also for the Gospel itself and for the credibility of the Christian Church. There is a quest for accountability raised by the “world”. And this critique from outside the churches is a legitimate one: spiritual is not the opposite of material. “Spiritual” is a way of living and treating also the material side of life, making this material, bodily life enlightened and transformed by the redeeming work of Christ.³¹

The concept of the Church as sacrament offers to theology a possibility to hold together the “material” and the “spiritual”. Every sacrament requires a material element in conjunction with words. If *diakonia*, practised in administration of finances, charitable work, witness, social responsibility, and management, is located in the framework of a sacramental ecclesiology, the risks for inner secularisation and theological out-rationalisation will certainly decrease, because “the Church as mystery and prophetic sign, a communion sustained by the Holy Spirit, is sent by God to continue the mission of Christ, in whom the kingdom of God became present among us as a life-giving reality to be offered to all.”³² “Spiritual” and “material” must be held together even if a distinction must be made between them. For a long time there has been a predominant idea that organizations of the Church, its bureaucracy, social work, and financial management, are of no theological importance. They have even been interpreted as non-theological factors and as just a framework for the proclamation of the Gospel. This has led up to what the German theologian Edmund Schlink considers as ecclesiological docetism.³³ It is a heresy that not takes incarnation seriously and denies

³¹ Cf. *The Identity of the Church and its Service to the Whole Human Being*, vol. 2: Summary, Analysis, Interpretation by a special team, appointed by the LWF Commission on Studies, Geneva: LWF, 1977, 236f.

³² *Church and World. The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community* (FOP 151), Geneva: WCC, 1990, 35.

³³ “We cannot limit the unity of the Churches to the common belief in unity. Such a limitation would mean a docetic conception of the Church and an unreal ‘spirituality’. For the Body of Christ is always simultaneously a visible community of its members in Word, Sacrament and Ministry.” Cf. EDMUND SCHLINK, *The Pilgrim People of God*, in: Oliver S. Tomkins (ed.), *The Third World Conference on Faith and Order*, held at Lund, August 15–28, 1952, London: SCM, 1953, 159f.; cf. the German original: *Das wandernde Gottesvolk*, in: *Der kommende Christus und die kirchlichen Traditionen. Beitrag zum Gespräch zwischen den getrennten Kirchen*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1961, 202–210, here 208f.

the possibility that divine can unite with creation, what is spiritual with what is material.

The basis for the perception of the deacon's office should reasonably enough be the same as for the priest and the bishop. A person does not become bishop, priest or deacon by means of performing certain tasks or functions but bishops, priests and deacons have certain functions because they are bishops, priests and deacons. The ultimate ground for those office holders is not their personal skill, competence or talent, but their ordination. The basic idea is that Christ ordains together with the Church who is his Body. By ordination the person receives the gift of the Holy Spirit who sustains the person ordained and by ordination the ordinand becomes a gift to the Church for life. Therefore the office received in ordination is neither a private property nor can it be exercised outside the *communio* of the Church. The whole idea of ordination is based on this and it is centered in grace because all gifts of God to his Church are rooted in God's grace through Jesus Christ and in ordination they are by laying on of hands and prayer (*epiclesis*) conveyed to the ordinands in form of certain *charismata* (1 Tim 1:16 et al.).

It is obviously possible to distinguish between ordained deacons, who get their authorization by ordination, and non-ordained diaconal ministries, who get their authorization through an appointment. The appointment adds precisely nothing to the person's competence but is a consequence thereof. One could thus distinguish between persons who are ordained and therefore given certain tasks and those who by appointment become something because of what they are expected to do. An ordained deacon becomes a deacon by ordination and ordination gives him or her competence to exercise the ministry. The deacon remains deacon indifferently of what type of position he or she holds. A diaconal minister ceases to be a diaconal minister when he or she is not exercising a diaconal ministry of any kind. This distinction underlines the importance of structures, namely that a person or a thing does not become someone or something because he or she does something or it effects anything. One could say that the existence foregoes the function. You do not become a priest because you do something, e.g. administer the sacraments. But a person administers the sacraments because he is a priest. The Eucharistic elements are not becoming the body and blood of Christ because they are distributed but they are distributed because they are by consecration the Body and Blood of Christ.

The idea that someone became anything because of functions exercised is new in the idea of history. It is contradictory to the idea of grace alone, because it suggests that someone without ordination in his own capacity can exercise the office in the Church. A person does something because he or she first by an act of the Church has become someone, she or he does not become someone because of what he or she may do.

In 1976, the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland commission on ordained ministry stated that the diaconate is a sacramental reality which manifests the interconnection between liturgy and service. The latter is defined as catechetical and charitable tasks. It was even stated in the debate that a purely charitable diaconate which does not embrace liturgical functions, cannot be a part of the one office of Word and Sacrament in the Church.³⁴ Ordination changes the perspective from what a deacon should do, to who a deacon is. The question then is not primarily what is the work of a deacon but which are the gifts given to the deacon. Already in the letter to Timothy, the bishop of the Church in Thessalonica, this is the main perspective: 'Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the council of elders laid their hands upon you.' (1 Tim 4:15)

Sven-Erik Brodd (geb. 1949 in Oskarshamn, Schweden), Prof. Dr. theol. 1982 Promotion in Uppsala, 1986–1993 Direktor der Internationalen Studienabteilung der Schwedischen Kirche und Mitarbeiter in der Forschungsabteilung dieser Kirche, seit 1993 o. Professor für Systematische Theologie, seit 2000 Dekan der Theologischen Fakultät; 1998 Gastprofessor am General Theological Seminary, New York; 1998–2003 Gastprofessor am University College, Chichester.

Adresse: Uppsala Universitet, Teologiska fakulteten, Box 511, SE-751 20 Uppsala, Schweden.

³⁴ Tillsammans (cf. note 6), 38ff. In the Church of Sweden, which ordains deacons into the threefold ministry of bishop, deacon and priest, the Church Ordinance of 1999 says nothing about liturgical functions of the diaconate, and in the debate during the General Synod 1999 the charitable character of the diaconate was heavily stressed. In spite of that, there is a growing praxis that deacons, who are ordained in alb and stole, are assigned the traditional role of the deacon in the liturgy; cf. SVEN-ERIK BRODD, The Deacon in the Church of Sweden, in: Gunnel Borgegård/Christine Hall (ed.), *Ministry* (cf. note 5), 97–140.

Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Der Diakonat als ein unentbehrlicher und daher permanent zu verwirklichender kirchlicher Dienst ist seit der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jh. in verschiedenen Denominationen entdeckt und hinsichtlich seiner theologischen Begründung diskutiert worden.

Unter der Voraussetzung, dass der Diakonat ein ordinationsgebundenes Amt ist, legt der Autor einen Entwurf zu dessen ekklesiologischer Situierung vor. Ausgangspunkt sind die grundlegenden Vollzüge der Sendung der Kirche als *martyria*, *leitourgia* und *diakonia*, die durch das eine dreiegliederte Amt in Gang gesetzt werden. Wenn auch der Diakonat in einer spezifischen Weise die *diakonia* der Kirche (und letztlich Jesu Christi selbst) zur Geltung bringt, so tut er das nicht isoliert von Episkopat und Presbyterat. Kirchliche *diakonia* als Weitergabe der heilsvermittelnden Zuwendung der *diakonia* Jesu Christi an Menschen in Notsituationen jeder Art darf nicht im Sinn einer sektoriellen Tätigkeit, die sich von der sakramentalen Mitte kirchlicher Existenz abkoppelt, verstanden werden.

Prägt *diakonia* (wie auch *martyria* und *leitourgia*) das eine dreiegliederte Amt, so sind die Beziehungen zwischen Bischof, Presbytern und Diakonen in der (lokalen) Kirche im Rahmen einer grundlegenden Kollegialität zu leben; das entspricht am besten dem Wesen der Kirche als Leib Christi, einer strukturierten und interdependenten Personengemeinschaft, die nicht einfach die Summe von Individuen darstellt. Der Diakonat ist dann nicht primär durch das Untergeben-sein gegenüber Bischof oder Priester definiert, sondern durch Zuordnung zum bischöflichen Dienst im Rahmen von Mitarbeit in konkreten Aufträgen. Das in der Alten Kirche dominierende Verhältnis von Episkopat und Diakonat geriet aus den Fugen, als sich das dem Bischof zugeordnete Kollegium der Presbyter dahin gehend auflöste, dass die einzelnen, nun als *sacerdotes* fungierenden Presbyter quasibischöfliche Funktionen (Messfeier) übernahmen und andererseits der Diakonat als Vorstufe zu dieser nunmehr dominanten Form und Stufe des Priestertums mutierte; damit verbunden war auch eine hierarchisierte Verteilung von Macht, die oft zu Konflikten innerhalb des dreiegliederten Amtes oder zwischen Priestertum und Laientum führte. Die qualifizierte Kollegialität innerhalb des einen dreiegliederten Amtes hebt aber nicht die spezifischen Beauftragungen und Verantwortlichkeiten aus: ein Diakon oder eine Diakonin kann *per definitionem* nicht dasselbe sein und tun wie ein Priester oder eine Priesterin (oder der Bischof). Diese Kollegialität kommt am deutlichsten in der eucharistischen Versammlung der Ortskirche zum Ausdruck und sollte auch von dieser Mitte her verstanden und effizient umgesetzt werden.

Die konkrete Organisation der *diakonia* der Kirche, d.h. in der Wahrnehmung gesellschaftlicher Verantwortlichkeiten, im Einsatz und in der

Verwaltung von finanziellen Ressourcen, in der Planung karitativer Betreuung, ist alles andere als ein nichttheologischer Faktor. Sie kann nicht ausschliesslich von einer säkularen Rationalität her konzipiert werden, sondern gehört mit den verschiedenen Realisationen von *martyria* und *leitourgia* zu den Elementen, mit denen die Kirche gegenüber einer kritischen Welt durch ihre Praxis bezeugt, dass sie sich als ein Zeichen des Reiches Gottes unter den Menschen zu verstehen wagt. Die Ausgrenzung materieller Aspekte aus dem, was man als Spiritualität sucht und bezeichnet, würde zu einer kirchlichen Scheinexistenz führen.

Ein Diakon oder eine Diakonin ist, was sie ist, nicht aufgrund ihrer Tätigkeit, sondern ihrer Ordination in der Gemeinschaft der Kirche, in der er oder sie die Gaben empfängt für den Dienst, wie immer er konkret aussieht.