

*To Love and Serve the Lord. Diakonia in the Life of the Church.* The Jerusalem Report of the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission (ALIC III). 2013.

As far as I am aware, this is the first international inter-confessional dialogue report to be devoted primarily to the diaconal ministry of the *whole* Church, and every baptised Christian within it, as opposed to the diaconate as an order of ordained or instituted ministry within the Church<sup>1</sup>. The latter was indeed a key theme of an earlier stage of the same dialogue, in the Hanover Report of 2002, entitled *The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity*.<sup>2</sup> What was said then with particular reference to such particular ministries is now set in the much wider context of a central aspect of the Church's identity<sup>3</sup>.

This report is particularly timely in terms of the secular context of a globalising world in which the gap between rich and poor continues to grow, adversely affecting the marginalized even in rich and developed countries. The mushrooming, in Britain, of food banks, trying to provide for some of the most basic of human needs to those who cannot now afford all the necessities of life, is sad testimony to this and requires of the Church the sort of holistic diaconal ministry to which this report refers when it states that,

‘Diakonia takes the forms of prophetic witness, advocacy and empowering action, as well as compassionate care. Diakonia means not only giving aid, but also confronting the concentration of power and wealth that is the cause of poverty. A diaconal church accompanies, bolsters and empowers the economically weak and vulnerable; with them it bolsters and empowers the economically weak and vulnerable; with them it resists abusive manoeuvres that deprive them of their basic human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights’<sup>4</sup>.

These are strong statements, but certainly in line with much in Christian tradition that needs to be re-received. It is line with the insistence of *Gaudium et Spes* on the importance of addressing the needs of the most disadvantaged<sup>5</sup>. It resonates with Wesley's championing of the poor and his perceptive and prescient analysis of certain trends in economic development that he saw as damaging to the general welfare<sup>6</sup>. Above all, as the introductory section of the

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<sup>1</sup> The reason for referring to ordained *or* instituted ministries is that not all separated diaconal ministries have involved ordination. In the independent tradition, common to Baptists and Congregationalists, members of a congregation are appointed as deacons, carrying out both a liturgical role in distributing the eucharistic elements and a disciplinary, supervisory role within the congregation concerned but they are not ordained. Nor, in the past were many of the deaconesses of the continental Reformed and Lutheran traditions. Within the British Methodist tradition, the former Wesley deaconesses were ordained but regarded as layfolk and not as a second order of ministry (whereas Methodist deacons today are seen as members of an order of ministry). Deacons in the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican Communion have always been both ordained as such and seen as ministers of the third order of sacred ministry.

<sup>2</sup> For the text of the Hanover Report see Gros, J, Meyer, H and Rusch, W. (eds) *Growth in Agreement II*, 2000, pp. 38-54.

<sup>3</sup> as can also be seen from the initial para of the Hanover Report.

<sup>4</sup> *To Love and Serve the Lord* (hereafter cited as Report), p 9.

<sup>5</sup> ‘The joys and the hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and the hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ’. *Gaudium et Spes*, initial sentence. See also especially paras 27, for a condemnation of ‘excessive economic and social differences between members of the one human family’, para 40 where the Catholic Church ‘holds in high esteem the things which other Christian churches or ecclesial communities are doing co-operatively by way of achieving the same goal’ and para 44 where it is said to be ‘the task of the entire people of God... to hear, distinguish and interpret the many voices of our age and to judge them in the light of the divine word’

<sup>6</sup> For an analysis of Wesley's thought, see Jennings, Theodore W. *Good News to the Poor. John Wesley's Evangelical Economics* (1990) , especially chapters 2-4.

Report makes clear, it is in line with the beginning of Jesus' own proclamation of Good News to the Poor (Luke 4:18-19) and that ministry which he exercises as the supreme *diakonos* or commissioned servant and agent of the Father in his plan of salvation. Diaconal ministry, both in its ordained representative form and in its general form as lived out amongst all the baptised, is central to the mission of God in His Church.

The Report begins by citing John 15:14, glossing it with the comment 'the friendship to which Jesus calls us is to be one with him in mission to the world'. It goes on to stress that 'diakonia is central to what it means to be Church' and that 'diakonia is a bridge, holding worship and witness together in a faithful response to God's mission'<sup>7</sup>.

Above all, it is an apostolic ministry of the whole Church, 'a ministry that belongs to **every** believer because it is rooted in the apostolic commission that all receive in baptism'<sup>8</sup>. It is most certainly not confined to those ordained or otherwise specially set apart as deacons or diaconal ministers, even though they 'embody the diakonia of the whole Church in a particular way'<sup>9</sup> and certainly have a particular responsibility for encouraging the laity in such service, a point which is strongly stressed within the ordained diaconal order in contemporary British Methodism<sup>10</sup>.

In the second section of the Report, entitled *Diakonia Dei, Missio Dei, The Shared Imperative*, there is strong emphasis on the fact that diakonia involves more than aid and compassion. It is 'to support individuals in vulnerable situations and to address conditions that create vulnerability...it is not just a ministry of repair or protection...it is also expressed in the ways in which the Church helps build up communities that are gracious, that value people because God values them without reference to their successes or failures. Constructive diakonia helps communities find the energy to move forward by pointing to God's action in their prior history'<sup>11</sup>. One may say that, viewed holistically, it is an eschatologically orientated ministry of service, witness and action pointing to and, as far as possible in the present situation, embodying kingdom values that reflect in anticipation the life intended for the new heaven and the new earth. The Report cites both Isaiah 11 and Revelation 21, stating that they present both humanity and the natural world as destined 'to be saved not just from the powers of sin and death but also for the kind of community in which the wolf lies down with the lamb and the nations bring their gifts into the new Jerusalem to share with each other'<sup>12</sup>.

God's mission is represented as 'the creation of communities that reflect the quality of life shared within the Trinity. The life of the Trinity thus gives both ideal and real shape to diaconal ministry which nurtures in communities a spirit of mutual trust and love, of interdependent empowering relationships, like those we see among the Father, Son and Spirit'<sup>13</sup>.

The importance of this statement for the social prophetic role of the Church, in an age when so many feel helpless in the face of the worship of market forces, cannot be overstated. History has not come to a full stop, as Francis Fukuyama alleged, with the triumph over the

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<sup>7</sup> Report, pp. 4 -5.

<sup>8</sup> Report, p. 9

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*, p. 37.

<sup>10</sup> See the quotation at the very end of this paper and ref. 32.

<sup>11</sup> Report, p. 10

<sup>12</sup> Report, p. 10

<sup>13</sup> Report, p. 11.

market economy over the collapsing command economy of the former Soviet bloc, but has yet to find its providential fulfilment in the transforming appearance of the sons of God fulfilling their providentially appointed diakonal ministry (Romans 8:19-23) .

It is interesting to note the similarity between the teaching in this Report and that of the last section of the recently published final version of the ecclesiological process of the WCC, *The Church-Towards a Common Vision*. In that report, it is also stressed that ‘the church was intended by God, not for its own sake, but to serve the divine plan for the transformation of the world’<sup>14</sup>. ‘The Church needs to help those without power in Society to be heard...faith impels them (Christians) to work for a just social order, in which the goods of this earth may be shared equitably, the suffering of the poor eased and absolute destitution one day eliminated’<sup>15</sup>. The diakonal mission of the Church is stressed, even if the term *diakonia* is little mentioned.

Another interesting feature, not just of the finished report but also of the dialogical process that preceded it, is the stress on the observation and citing of practical examples of diakonia from across the world, as lived out in particular churches of the partner communions. Thus five examples of such diakonia, as directly witnessed by the Commission during the course of their meetings their meetings, are cited<sup>16</sup>. In addition, at varying points throughout the text, nineteen further examples of diakonia are cited in brief cameos, ranging from action for HIV victims in Tanzania to action on behalf of the dalits in South India to the creation of new styles of diaconal ministry in the Church of Ireland diocese of Clogher.

To an extent, this follows a model earlier adopted in the Reformed-Roman Catholic Report of 2007 on *The Church as Community of Witness to the Kingdom of God* where, however, three very diverse forms of diakonia undertaken jointly by the two communions were examined in some depth rather than in the briefer cameos used in the Anglican-Lutheran statement<sup>17</sup>.

The third section of the Report , *Diakonia, Koinonia and the Unity of the Church*, stresses the eucharistic assembly as manifesting the leiturgia, martyria and diakonia of the Christ who is present to it and through it<sup>18</sup>. It highlights the go-between role of all diakonal mission in linking the Church to the concerns of the world, going out from the church to the needs and hopes of the people beyond it<sup>19</sup>. It stresses the many aspects of this ministry. First, it is a matter of ‘truth telling’ in which ‘the Church is called to look at the world’s problems from the bottom up rather than the top-down’. It can then involve protest, specifically described as ‘political diakonia, publicly confronting and working to change oppressive structures’, but also involving ‘accompaniment, in the power of the Spirit, of the wounded and voiceless’. Christians are to be ‘yeast and light, pioneering examples of public responsibility’, empowerers, helping people develop the capacity to act and speak. Finally, diakonia is to involve bridge building ‘allowing people with conflicting perspectives to engage with each other with respect and openness...providing enemies with an hospitable place to talk to each other, helping them struggle through the issues or events that drove them apart’<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> *The Church-Towards a Common Vision* (WCC, 2013), para 58.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, para 64.

<sup>16</sup> Report p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> For an account of the Reformed Catholic dialogue concerned, see my article in *One in Christ*, Winter 2009, pp. 99-112.

<sup>18</sup> Report, p. 14

<sup>19</sup> ibid, p. 15.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, pp. 15-17.

The fourth section deals with historical approaches to diakonia in the two communions. It mentions Luther's belief that the Gospel should undergird not just a personal sense of worth but also the healthy functioning of society. It cites his command to work for justice<sup>21</sup>.

'Govern yourself according to love and tolerate no injustice to your neighbour. The Gospel does not forbid this; in fact, it actually commands it.'<sup>22</sup>

An account is then given of the general Lutheran belief that care for the poor was seen as a responsibility attaching to all believers. This is followed by an account of the development of specific diaconal ministries within German Lutheranism from the 1830's<sup>23</sup>.

Anglican deacons at the Reformation were stated to have the duty of searching out the poor in the parishes and intimating their needs to the Curate (i.e. the incumbent priest). However, from then till very recent times, the diaconate was seen and used primarily as a transitional ministry for those soon going on to presbyteral ministry. In the late nineteenth century, the ministries of deaconesses and Church Army officers were developed but regarded as distinct from that of the ordained diaconate as such. Much more recently, some Anglican provinces and dioceses have developed a permanent diaconate which preserves the full liturgical functions of the traditional Anglican diaconate whilst stressing its servant role in the community in acts linking the needs of the world to the service of the Church<sup>24</sup>.

Finally, this section details the ways in which Lutherans and Anglicans have discussed diakonia with other ecumenical partners. The Lutheran-Reformed report *Called to Communion and Common Witness* stresses a common commitment to justice and the agreement that opposition to racism has *status confessionis*<sup>25</sup>. Lutherans and Mennonites have agreed that 'the Church needs to maintain a critical stance in relation to the State in order to fulfil its prophetic witness and service to the world'<sup>26</sup>. Specific Anglican references in dialogues to diakonia have been less frequent but it is argued that their ecumenical work is informed by an awareness of the need to participate in God's mission by working for the transformation of unjust relationships.<sup>27</sup>

In the last section, *Diakonia and Mission*, challenges, first made in the Hanover Report, are re-issued to both churches about the ordained diaconate. Lutherans, in churches which still lack an ordained diaconate, are challenged to consider whether such a diaconate, grounded in word and sacrament, would be of value to the service of the Gospel. Anglicans are challenged to restore the diaconate to its character as a lifelong and distinct form of ordained ministry<sup>28</sup>. The danger that over-emphasis on the ordained diaconate might overshadow the diakonal calling of the whole Church is acknowledged and it is once again stressed that 'deacons and diaconal ministers, whether ordained or not, embody the *diakonia* of the whole Church in a particular way'<sup>29</sup>. Finally, Lutherans are invited to consider the joint American Anglican-Lutheran understanding of the diaconate as belonging to the *triplex* form of the *one*

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 21.

<sup>22</sup> Report, p. 21.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 21.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, pp. 23-4.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, pp. 26-7.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p.26

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p.27.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 34

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 37.

ministry<sup>30</sup>. This is to help resolve the tension between the traditional Anglican understanding of the three-fold ministry and the traditional Lutheran stress on the *one* ministry of word and sacrament.

The section ends with a series of suggestions for study and action at several levels of church life, parishes, regional and national churches, in theological education and in the Anglican Consultative Council and the Lutheran World Federation.

Two appendices are added to the main Report, the first a series of regional reports on developing Anglican-Lutheran relationships across the world; the second relating to the issue of transitivity<sup>31</sup>.

Both are important because of the increasing closeness of the two communions almost everywhere where they co-exist. In North America and over much of northern Europe, there are already relations of full communion, including inter-changeability of ministry. In many other areas, there are agreements allowing widespread co-operation and a degree of mutual eucharistic hospitality without, however, permitting full inter-changeability of ministry. Examples of this particular stage of relationships can be found in the Meissen and Reuilly Agreements between the Church of England and the Evangelical Church of Germany and the French Lutheran and Reformed Churches<sup>32</sup>.

Of all the communions involved in bilateral dialogue, the Anglicans and Lutherans are perhaps closest to the possibility of forming a joint communion within another generation or so. In seeking this, practical co-operation in diakonia may be a powerful stimulating factor, appreciated and received at the grass roots. Theological dialogue, important as it is, is not the only spur towards closer unity. Quite apart from that, this Report has important things to say to the rest of the oikoumene, perhaps particularly appropriately as Francis I begins a pontificate in which mission to and alongside the poor is likely to be a priority. It seems likely that Archbishop Justin Welby will also take a robust stance on issues of diakonia.

In conclusion, one may say that this report gives valuable theological underpinning to a renewed emphasis across many other traditions on both the diaconal ministry of the whole people of God and that of ordained deacons and other diaconal ministers<sup>33</sup> who assist, encourage and lead them in that ministry. One may illustrate the wide context from these final two quotations, from a Methodist and a Roman Catholic source respectively.

‘British Methodist deacons focus and represent the servanthood of Christ...The Methodist Diaconal Order exercises a leading, public and representative role of service in and on behalf of the Church...it seeks to model for the Church a way of discipleship...it pursues Wesley’s vision for the Methodist.’<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 35.

<sup>31</sup> This relates to the applicability of regional Lutheran-Anglican agreements in other parts of the two communions

<sup>32</sup> For an excellent account of such developments, see Lemaitre, Franck *Anglicans et Lutheriens en Europe* (2011), which I reviewed for *One in Christ* in 2011. Despite the title, Lemaitre also says quite a bit about North America.

<sup>33</sup> I think here of such people as the Church Community workers of the United Reformed Church and the lay diaconal ministers of the Irish Anglican diocese of Clogher, referred to above.

<sup>34</sup> ‘What is a Deacon?’ in *Over To You, Reports from the Methodist Conference* (2004), pp. 16-32.

‘In the name of Christ the servant, deacons give the witness of evangelical service in order that the entire community should be involved in living the life of service in Church and World’<sup>35</sup>.

Paul reminds us in Ephesians that all ministry is ‘for the equipping of the saints’ (Eph 4:12). That is especially true of the symbiotic relationship of the diaconate with the whole serving Body of Christ.

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<sup>35</sup> Sesboue, B. Pour Une Theologie Oecumenique (1995), p. 364.