

## Churchly or Worldly Diakonia?<sup>1</sup>

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In theology, in a broad ecumenical consensus, it has become customary to speak of diakonia, viz. the Christian practice of social ministry and charity in its various forms, as a constitutive feature of the church,<sup>2</sup> or an ‘essential manifestation of ecclesial life’.<sup>3</sup> This formulation stands in tension with the empirical fact that diaconal facilities in their practical expression are often quite far removed from the real life of the church. In the present text, I want to investigate the relationship between diakonia and the church in more detail, as exemplified by the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren (further only ECCB) and its special-purpose facility called Diaconia of the ECCB. I will open the topic by presenting a controversy which stood at the very beginning of this organisation’s development, I will then place it in the context of the relevant theological and sociological debate, and finally I will attempt to offer a preliminary evaluation of the discussion with respect to the contemporary reality in the Czech Evangelical milieu.

### Two voices

The debate over the form of diakonia in ECCB can be well represented by two distinctive voices sounded in connection with the proceedings of the 26<sup>th</sup> synod of ECCB, at whose session in the revolutionary days of 15<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> November 1989 the issue of the newly established Diaconia was discussed among others. Diaconia had emerged quite hastily already before the political changes of November 1989 in an interplay of incentives from within the church<sup>4</sup> and from the state. According to Karel Schwarz, who was entrusted with directing the newly established institution, the ministerial officials indicated to the then synod curator Miloš Lešíkar in negotiations that the state administration would not pose any obstacles to the possible establishment of an institutionalised church work in the social sphere. Based on this verbal consent and the statute of the new institution drawn up by Lešíkar, without much discussion in the church, the synod council set

<sup>1</sup> This paper is an output of the project of specific research GAJU no. 157/2016/H.

<sup>2</sup> The theory of constitutive elements of the Church comes from Catholic practical theology. See for example Michal OPATRŇÝ, *Sociální práce a praktická teologie*, in: *Teorie a praxe charitativní práce: Uvedení do problematiky, Praktická reflexe a aplikace*, ed. Michal OPATRŇÝ and Markus LEHNER, České Budějovice: Jihočeská univerzita v Českých Budějovicích, Teologická fakulta, 2010, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> This expression, originating from J. H. Wichern, appears in art. 15 of the Basic Order of the Evangelical Church in Germany (further only EKD) since its foundation in 1948, © Grundordnung der evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland (on-line), at: [https://www.ekd.de/download/grundordnung\\_fassung\\_amtsblatt\\_januar\\_2007.pdf](https://www.ekd.de/download/grundordnung_fassung_amtsblatt_januar_2007.pdf), accessed 14<sup>th</sup> June, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> According to Karel Schwarz the re-establishment of the Diaconia had been continually discussed in ECCB since 1968, as witnessed by the synod resolutions. In Schwarz the foundation of Diaconia was also linked to the activity of an ecumenical group which had been meeting since 1985 in order to think through the renewal of Christian social work in the then Czechoslovakia. Members of the informal group were, besides him, e.g. the physicians Jan Payne, Marie Svatošová, dr. Pohůnková, the secretly consecrated priest Tomáš Halík and the Evangelical pastors Michael Otrřisal and Pavel Klinecký. (*Recording of an interview with Karel Schwarz of March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016, author’s archive*).

up the special-purpose facility Diaconia on the very same day of 10<sup>th</sup> May 1989 to start operating on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1989.<sup>5</sup>

So the November synod was to make a pronouncement on an already concluded matter – furthermore, in a situation when the attention of the highest organ of the church was focused on the current events in society. Discussion of the issue of the newly established Diaconia was based on two accompanying materials (so-called prints). Their authors were professors of theology active at the then Comenius Evangelical Theological Faculty, Josef Smolík (who wrote his text together with his wife Květa, who at the time was a member of the advisory board of the synod council for Christian ministry)<sup>6</sup> and Pavel Filipi.

In their letter the Smolíks are critical of the fact that Diaconia was established ‘top-down’, regardless of the ‘democratic’ church orders, without discussion with representatives of Christian ministry, the respective representatives of advisory boards, or the Faculty. In the Smolíks’ conception, diakonia in fact coincides with pastoral care. Its place is in the congregation; to its fulfilment, preachers and presbyters are obliged. They therefore express concern over forms of diakonia that ‘do not speak of the grounding of pastoral care in the Word of God, in the sacraments, in the congregation’. They are also concerned about delegating the tasks of the congregation to a special institution and referring human need to specialists, whereby ‘we give rise to the impression that expert psychiatric or medical methods can solve human situations which can ultimately be solved only by confession of sins and forgiveness’. They emphasise the importance of proper motivation to diaconic work, since ‘only under the pressure of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist the readiness and selflessness for this ministry is born’. The Smolíks also propose ‘to avoid a mood arising from the conviction that the state made a mistake when it posed obstacles to the church in doing social work, or more precisely took over all its work, which leads to a self-righteous attitude as if we had a cure to the need of the world ready in our hands’. Since ‘people can only be helped when there is mutual trust and a community accepting those who need help’ the Smolíks believe that diakonia can be realised exclusively within the Christian congregation and cannot be ‘supracongregationally institutionalised’. The goal of pastoral care, here synonymous with Christian ministry, is the ‘ultimate aid to the human being, confirmation in faith and assisting him in living a life of faith in various situations of life, by providing the community of the congregation as a community of service, love and help’. According to them, pastoral care and diakonia must be distinguished from counselling, which applies ‘expert medical, psychiatric, and legal knowledge, which help others, though not in faith and salvation’. Diakonia belongs strictly to the congregation, counselling to the whole of society. In the conclusion, the authors of the letter criticise the unclear content of the new institution’s mission. In their view, it was ‘taking over the work of others who selflessly do it with the blind, handicapped children, etc., but had absolutely no new content element’.<sup>7</sup>

The other synod print, Pavel Filipi’s text entitled *Several Reflections on the Issue of DIACONY*,<sup>8</sup> can be perceived as a certain opposition to the letter presented above. In the introduction, Filipi

5 Cf. *Diakonie Českobratrské církve evangelické. Desetiletí obnovy diakonické služby*, Praha: Diakonie ČCE, 1999, p. 5.

6 For the sake of accuracy it is necessary to add that according to the protocol of the conversation of members of the synod council with members of the advisory board of Christian ministry, members of the curatorship of Diaconia and presidents of the related committees of the synod council of 31<sup>st</sup> October, 1989 Květa Smolíková stated that the letter was not intended for discussion by the synod, but was addressed personally to Pavel Smetana, then member of the synod council (see *Zápis z rozhovoru synodní rady s členy PO křesťanské služby, členy kuratoria Diakonie a předsedy příbuzných komisí SR konaný dne 31. 10. 1989*, Archive of Diaconia of ECCB).

7 *Dopis manželů Smolíkových synodní radě k Diakonii ze dne 3. srpna 1989*, Central Archive of Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, Archive Fund of the Synod Council of ECCB, 26<sup>th</sup> synod of ECCB, 1989.

8 *Několik úvah k tématu DIAKONIE*, Central Archive of Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, Archive Fund of the Synod Council of ECCB, 26<sup>th</sup> synod of ECCB, 1989.

defines diakonia as 'service to the poor, ill or otherwise needy' and acknowledges its fundamental importance in the life of the church. He perceives it as an 'expression of the rebelling faith, oriented on Jesus' struggle against the powers of evil', in which Jesus's disciples also participate. Diakonia is an 'expression of the faith that the object of God's interest is the entire human being, his "soul" and "body" with all the material conditions of dignified life.' So it has to do with the incarnational character of the Christian faith and stands in its expression next to the sacraments. According to Filipi, diakonia has such an important place in the church 'because in it – as nowhere else – comes to the fore the character of its existence as an ancillary existence'. In diaconic activity it is impossible to suspect the church of trying to obtain a position of power in society.

Filipi evaluates the emergence of the new structure positively. He notes that Christian ministry, which after the violent cessation of Czech Diaconia in the 1950s was the only form of diaconic work in the Evangelical Church, has not received such attention and support from the congregations as it deserves for its constitutive significance. He expects that the newly established Diaconia 'will become an opportunity to broaden the existing Christian ministry by permanently focusing the interest of the whole church on it and by facilitating cooperation with other unities of Christ's people in our country.'

In his text he further prophetically discusses four 'fields of momentum', in which the activity of the organised Diaconia will take place. The first is the tension between the local congregation and the whole church. Filipi underlines that 'diakonia is a function of a particular community, the local congregation' and presents evidence that that is how it was understood in the early days of the Reformation. Only later did supra-congregational structures begin to emerge in the Protestant milieu. In the presented text Filipi evaluates this fact critically as weakening the link connecting diakonia and 'announcing the gospel of God's love'. That is why congregations are to 'embrace the emerging Diaconia centres with a living background' and although they will not be the only agents of diaconic work, they in fact ought to regard the workers and the clients as their members and behave towards them accordingly.

The second 'field of momentum' is the relationship between ECCB and the ecumene. Filipi notes the dimension of ecumenical solidarity, which has accompanied Christian ministry since the beginning. He presents a challenge to ecumenical cooperation in the sphere of diakonia, which is still little appreciated and just as important today, since 'differences in church doctrine and order normally do not pose great obstacles to shared ministry'. A reason, of course unacceptable, why this may not be so can be, according to him, only 'ecclesial egoism and rivalry'.

The third field of momentum is constituted by the tension between ministry to the world and to persons of the same faith. Here Filipi underlines that diaconic work, which will be limited in scope, must remain open and permeable to all, because 'the church with all the elements of its mission transcends visible borders and the case is not different with diakonia'.

The last domain is constituted by the issue of the relationship of the church and the state. The practical theologian positively evaluates the fact that in the modern period the state took over care for the ill and the needy. He understands contemporary social and health care to be 'a late, secularised fruit on the tree rooted in Christ's gospel'. He thinks that the Christians' task in their diakonia is not to enter competitive relationships, but to fill the lacunas which exist in the public

systems despite its achievements. These lacunas are groups of aid recipients who are not sufficiently cared for, and at the same time the content of the aid, which is to combine a professional approach 'with a pastoral interest in the individual suffering person and his setting in a live community'.

In the conclusion of his paper Filipi considers the possibility of integrating Christian diakonia into the public system of care as part of some sort of 'anonymous diakonia' of Christians working in the spirit of the gospel in state or other institutions. In this model the newly established special-purpose facility Diaconia would take the supporting role of 'directing, coordinating, safeguarding and removing obstacles to this work of Christians and presenting competent proposals for improving the overall socio-political strategy of the society'. To the church itself he addresses a call – in connection with the church compensations still highly topical today – to reassess its financial strategy, which would lead not to investing in property but to developing the diaconic mission, with reference to the legend of the Roman deacon Lawrence who presented the poor as the treasure of the church to his interrogators.<sup>9</sup>

Let us now leave aside deeper analysis of these texts in the context of the Evangelical Church's situation and the historical development of its diakonia and note a certain significance of the arguments above for understanding the discussion on the topic of diakonia in the Protestant milieu. Although the two authors start from similar assumptions, they reach contradictory conclusions. For Smolík, no other diakonia is thinkable than the congregational one in the form that developed under the name of 'Christian ministry' in (some) evangelical congregations after the activity of institutional diakonia was violently terminated by the state power in the 1950s. This ministry is inseparably bound to the liturgical life of the church and is performed as part of pastoral care. That also implies its inward orientation to the congregation: it is care for persons of the same faith.

Filipi also cannot imagine diakonia without a close bond to the congregation. But at the same time he emphasises the holistic character of diakonia which, following the example of Jesus' 'revolt' against the power of evil, cannot be content merely with the 'spiritual well-being' of the human being, but perceives the obligation towards other human needs as well. Diakonia thus conceived cannot be limited to the congregation, but must consciously transcend the borders of the church. In his conception, the new social situation can be regarded as a challenge to developing whole-church public work in ecumenical cooperation. The socio-political dimension of diakonia also comes to the fore, as it works to benefit the whole of society. The question remains open of whether to take the path of diakonia of 'lacunae', which wants to cover the 'white spots' on the map of human needs, or whether to work 'anonymously' – in the spirit of Jesus' parable of leaven that leavens the entire quantity of the dough – in public non-church institutions without creating parallel church structures. Filipi, who wrote his text in July 1989, before the change of the social order, finds the option that Diaconia should enter a relationship of 'competition with worldly programs of remedy' totally unacceptable.

<sup>9</sup> For the sake of completeness let us add that at the cited session the synod concluded the discussion and gave heed to the emphases of both approaches with the following resolution: 'The synod welcomes the effort of the synod council, the senior committees, congregations, enterprising groups and individuals to deepen and broaden Christian ministry by the newly begun work in Diaconia. It asks the whole church to support this effort by personal participation in pastoral care, by prayer, personally and materially. It asks the persons responsible for this area of church work to rigorously orient it to its starting points in the congregational community around the Word and the Lord's table and strive for a concurrence of the congregational, whole-church, ecumenical and public element.' 26. synod ČCE, *konaný ve dnech 16.–18. 11. 1989, usnesení č. 10*, Central Archive of Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, Archive Fund of the Synod Council of ECCB, 26<sup>th</sup> synod ECCB, 1989.



So, in the indicated approaches there is a tension between the program of congregational, pastorally-oriented diakonia and the possibility of supplementing it on a whole-church basis with the institutionalised Diaconia, which works publicly to alleviate human need with the help of professional instruments.

## Inside or out?

The discussion described above reflects a similar controversy which took place in German theology several decades earlier, between Heinz-Dietrich Wendland and the Czech theologian's namesake Paul Philippi.<sup>10</sup> The two contributions entered the new situation of German Diaconia, which began with the adoption of new social laws at the beginning of the 1960s. These incorporated Diaconia in the system of state social security, which brought about a fundamental change in the general conditions of the relationship of the church and its Diaconia.<sup>11</sup>

Wendland sees a dual threat to diakonia. The theological threat is due to the fact that in the preceding decades practical theology and ethics had abandoned diakonia to its historical development. He sees another threat in the contemporary social changes, which constitute quite different conditions than in the times of the founding fathers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to him, this implies the requirement of a new theological determination of the place of diakonia. He finds its starting point in the diaconic being of Christ (*Christos diakonos*, *Christos doulos*), especially based on the hymn of Christ's humiliation and elevation in Phil 2. Besides the traditional forms of understanding diakonia, Wendland brings in an emphasis on 'social diakonia', which finds expression in secularised institutionalised forms of social work in modern society: 'So there is also *diaconate of love* within the "normal" social existence of people in the given existing historical social conditions, as they are in each case uniquely given – in late ancient world or in the society of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.'<sup>12</sup>

As a counterpart to this conception Paul Philippi develops his theology of 'Christocentric diakonia'. He stresses the link between the gospel word of the servant Son of Man and his disciples' form of life. We do not become conformed to Christ by our own effort at imitation but by allowing ourselves to be grasped by the 'quality in which he reveals and represents the will of God'.<sup>13</sup> Or in other words, only when we are bonded by Christ do we become free for service, for diakonia to others.

Of course, for Philippi the Christological aspect is closely linked to the ecclesiological 'Sitz im Leben' of diakonia, which is the Christian congregation. Again with Lutheran justification of the doctrine of the two regiments Philippi strictly postulates 'that synthesis of the "two realms" cannot succeed even with respect to diakonia'.<sup>14</sup> Churchly diakonia and state social work can

10 In this paper I deal almost exclusively with the discussion in the sphere of evangelical theology, since the emphases of representatives of Catholic theology have already been sufficiently described in the Czech milieu especially by the works of Michal Opatrný and Jakub Doležel.

11 Cf. Gerhard K. SCHÄFER, Kirche und Diakonie, in: *Nächstenliebe und Organisation. Zur Zukunft einer polyhybriden Diakonie in zivilgesellschaftlicher Perspektive*, ed. Heinz SCHMIDT and Klaus D. HILDEMANN, Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2012, p. 136.

12 Heinz-Dietrich WENDLAND, Christos Diakonos, Christos Doulos. Zur theologischen Begründung der Diakonie, in: *Studienbuch Diakonie*, vol. 1, ed. Volker HERRMANN and Martin HORSTMANN, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2006, p. 280.

13 Paul PHILIPPI, Der diakonische Grundordnung der Gemeinde, in: *Studienbuch Diakonie*, sv. 1, ed. Volker HERRMANN and Martin HORSTMANN, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2006, p. 289.

14 Paul PHILIPPI, *Christozentrische Diakonie*, Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1963, p. 309.

merely cooperate in the form of coexistence ‘on an indirect, differentiated path with mutual delineations on both sides’.<sup>15</sup> Diakonia exists in the church as an ‘opus ad intra’. That of course, as Philippi underlines, does not mean a ‘withdrawal of the congregation from the “world”, but a task *in* the world and insofar also *for* the world. The congregation’s *mission* takes primarily the form of *assembly*.<sup>16</sup> Philippi expresses the reality of diakonia, which derives from the congregation and is essentially bound to it, simply: ‘Briefly: *In social issues the congregation owes the world itself*.’<sup>17</sup>

This polarity of views then winds through the entire theological reflection of diakonia in the evangelical perspective in the German-speaking world. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century this is developed in two basic directions. One concentrates on questions of diakonia’s relationship to the congregation, or church, and is grounded in systematic theology. The other strives to find a theory of diaconic work deriving from the form of institutionalised diakonia in modern society.<sup>18</sup> The former can also be characterised as kerygmatic, the latter as empirical.<sup>19</sup>

Among proponents of the first approach I will briefly mention, besides Philippi, the position of Jürgen Moltmann. Moltmann’s program is diakonia in the horizon of the Kingdom of God.<sup>20</sup> Also for him ‘diakonia is rooted in Christ’s congregation’,<sup>21</sup> it is the ‘life form of Christ’s congregation’.<sup>22</sup> He does not reject institutionalised diakonia, but regards it as secondary. On his view it is not possible to strive merely to remove social problems; diakonia as a holistic ‘ministry of reconciliation’ must be founded in the community, in overcoming the barriers among humans and between humans and God. From the perspective of the coming reign of God the needy are not objects of help, but subjects of the Kingdom of God. From this point of view Moltmann criticises the principle of delegating diakonia from the congregations to special institutions, since this approach ‘makes the congregations poor and ill’<sup>23</sup> and forgets about the needs that can be taken care of only by diakonia of the congregation as a community. Diakonia ought not to succumb to the temptation to allow itself to be integrated in the social systems of care, ‘which are necessary for managing the harms the social system had brought about’.<sup>24</sup> The solution that could resist the *statification* of diakonia is not *churchification* for Moltmann. ‘I see only one way out: the diakonisation of the congregation and that diakonia becomes the congregation.’<sup>25</sup>

Among the proponents of the empirical, practically-oriented and from the reality of social development deriving approach I will mention Alfred Jäger and Arthur Rich. Rich, like Wendland, theologically affirms secularisation (though of course not secularism as a false worldliness, which a Christian must oppose) and stresses that besides the personal dimension diakonia must also have a social dimension. The modern social state has taken over tasks that church diakonia could not fulfil. Diakonia should not regard the state as a competitor, but realise that ‘basically a part of diakonia, which is rooted in faith in Christ, became worldly, because only in this worldliness it

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid, p. 316.

17 Ibid.

18 Cf. Gerhard K. SCHÄFER, Aspekte und Linien der theologischen Diskussion um die Diakonie nach 1945, in: *Studienbuch Diakonik*, vol. 1, ed. Volker HERRMANN and Martin HORSTMANN, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2006, pp. 253–256.

19 Cf. Christian MÖLLER, *Einführung in die Praktische Theologie*, Tübingen and Basel: A. Francke Verlag, 2004, pp. 240–242.

20 See Jürgen MOLTSMANN, *Diakonie im Horizont des Reiches Gottes. Schritte zum Diakonentum aller Gläubigen*, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984.

21 Ibid, p. 32.

22 Ibid, p. 38.

23 Ibid, p. 37.

24 Ibid, p. 39.

25 Ibid, p. 36.

can fulfil its social ministry'.<sup>26</sup> The task of diakonia is to cooperate within the state social services: 'This form of diakonia requires Christian self-denial, since it can only be done incognito.'<sup>27</sup> But at the same time it is to be a critical counterpart to the state pointing to the fact that the Kingdom of God cannot be constructed on Earth and that even the effort to solve social problems is a penultimate matter. So, for Rich diakonia acquires a political significance.

Jäger conceives diakonia as a 'Christian enterprise'. With respect to the present situation of diakonia in the different power fields of society he uses the metaphor of a merry-go-round: the stronger the centrifugal powers (e.g. economic, political, legal), the more it is necessary to seek the centripetal 'inner axis' of diaconic enterprise. According to Jäger, the task to be this 'inner, supporting, stabilising and at the same time dynamicising, towards the future oriented centre'<sup>28</sup> is proper to theology. Of course, the encounters of theology and other approaches in diaconic practice can take a number of forms. The author's ideal within the integrative model is the figure of the 'diaconic manager', in whose person theology and economy together play equal roles.<sup>29</sup>

It is possible to say that the debate on diakonia in the German-speaking world is determined especially by the tension between an effort to give it a clear systematic-theological grounding and resigning on this effort as part of a 'theory of practice', which starts from the real situation of diakonia in society and seeks rather a theological legitimation of the given state.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, in the background of the struggle for an adequate Christian situation of diakonia in modern society between the Christologically- and ecclesialogically-focused Philippi and Wendland emphasising the secular context, or other authors with a similar view, an echo of the tension between the basic systematic-theological approaches in the evangelical theology of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can be heard, in particular between representatives of dialectic theology and theologians giving space to approaches of natural theology. This debate can be documented with the often passionate exchange of opinions especially between Karl Barth on the one side and Emil Brunner, Paul Tillich, or Paul Althaus on the other.<sup>31</sup> The program of the 'worldly' or 'non-religious' interpretation of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, sketched out in his letters from a Nazi prison, was also important for reflecting on the mission of Christians in society. Facing the experience of progressing secularisation he sees the fulfilment of Christian existence in participating in Jesus' 'being for others', which is an 'experience of transcendence'.<sup>32</sup> It is evident that diakonia reflected only within the programme of dialectic theology is limited by impracticability, unless it narrowly limits its activity to the Christian congregation. On the other hand, diakonia seeking its grounding on foundations of liberally-oriented theology, taking into account only purely pragmatic aspects, faces the threat of 'dissolving' in society.

This debate testifies to the complicated situation of diakonia, which is deeply rooted in Christianity. If – to put it in a simplifying way – in the person of Jesus announcing the Kingdom of God and acts of help as signs of its coming coincide, as early as in the early church the cultic sphere

26 Arthur RICH, *Die Weltlichkeit des Glaubens. Diakonie im Horizont der Säkularisierung*, Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1966, p. 60.

27 Ibid, p. 73.

28 Alfred JÄGER, Die theologische Achse diakonischer Unternehmenspolitik, in: *Studienbuch Diakonie*, vol. 2, ed. Volker HERRMANN and Martin HORSTMANN, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2006, p. 177.

29 Alfred JÄGER, *Diakonie als christliches Unternehmen. Theol. Wirtschaftsethik im Kontext diakon. Unternehmenspolitik*, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1986, pp. 29–30.

30 Cf. Gerhard K. SCHÄFER, Aspekte und Linien der theologischen Diskussion um die Diakonie nach 1945, p. 255.

31 Cf. Jan ŠTEFAN, *Karl Barth a ti druží. Pět evangelických teologů 20. století. Barth – Brunner – Tillich – Althaus – Iwand*, Brno: CDK, 2005.

32 Josef SMOLÍK, *Současné pokusy o interpretaci evangelia*, Praha: ISE, 1993, p. 43.

and the sphere of charity came to be gradually separated. This is witnessed by the separation of the ministry of the apostles and the deacons in Acts 6, but according to Hanns-Stephan Haas also by the separation of the Eucharist and agape in Christian assemblies, whereby the 'cultic' celebration of the Lord's table is now the centre of the congregation's life and diakonia becomes a mere addendum.<sup>33</sup> Beate Hofmann summarises the consequences this has for service to the needy: 'Diaconic convivence becomes a leaning towards the needy, solidarity within the community becomes helping others.'<sup>34</sup>

The process of the already very early differentiation of religion and its situation in a functionally differentiated society is described in detail by Niklas Luhmann from the point of view of sociology of religion.<sup>35</sup> Within his theory of social systems he conceives diakonia as one of the spheres of the social system of religion, which constitutes a subsystem of modern society. In the system of religion, differentiation of three system references takes place as part of the process of functionalisation: church, diakonia, and theology. The church as a system of spiritual communication relates to the society as a whole, while diakonia represents the function of religion with respect to the other subsystems of the society, and the function of theology is the relationship of the system to itself, i.e., reflecting on the church and diakonia. From this perspective, a tension necessarily arises between diakonia and the church, but also between diakonia and theology. If diakonia is to be of use for extra-religious social systems and accepted by them, it must be subordinated to their norms, i.e., to criteria foreign to religion.<sup>36</sup> That is why the church takes diakonia into consideration in only a very limited number of cases, in which diaconal action can be integrated into spiritual communication.<sup>37</sup> Theology's task to reflect on diakonia is also problematic, if it is essentially bound to other systems than the religious one. Of course, the same logic works in the opposite direction. In diaconal action it is also possible to perceive the tendency to profess the church and theology only when it helps its 'performance'.<sup>38</sup> So it is characteristic for diakonia in the modern period that it develops in a dual bond – to the religious system and to the other subsystems of the functionally differentiated society. This 'intermediary' understanding of the grounding of diakonia also corresponds to a number of theological concepts developed since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>39</sup>

In these the relationship of diakonia and the church becomes problematic. The doubts concerning the ecclesial bond of diakonia in its contemporary prevailing social forms are not few. For example, Eberhard Hauschild – following Luhmann, who also recommended reinforcing the autonomy of the individual functional subsystems of religion in order to increase their efficiency – proposes the model of mutual relief. With reference to Schleiermacher, he understands the activity of the church as that which represents action and the action of diakonia as effective action. In his view organised diakonia liberates the church, especially in the form of its congregations, from the task of offering the whole spectrum of diaconic action, and on the other hand the church dispenses diakonia from the need of an explicit profession of faith: 'This theory of ecclesial action,

33 Cf. Hanns-Stephan HAAS, *Diakonie Profil. Zwischen Tradition und Innovation*, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2004, p. 30.

34 Beate HOFMANN, *Ekklesiologische Begründungsansätze von Diakonie*, in: *Helfendes Handeln im Spannungsfeld theologischer Begründungsansätze*, ed. Heinz RÜEGGER and Christoph SIGRIST, Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 2014, p. 96.

35 More in Karel ŠIMR, *Diakonie v perspektivě teorie sociálních systémů*, *Studia theologica* 1/2016, pp. 81–95.

36 Cf. Niklas LUHMANN, *Funktion der Religion*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1977, p. 59.

37 Cf. Dierk STARNITZKE, *Diakonie als soziales System: Eine theologische Grundlegung diakonischer Praxis in Auseinandersetzung mit Niklas Luhmann*, Stuttgart, Berlin, Köln: Kohlhammer, 1996, p. 191.

38 Gerhard K. SCHÄFER, *Kirche und Diakonie*, pp. 133–134.

39 Cf. Karel ŠIMR, *Diakonie v perspektivě teorie sociálních systémů*.



so I believe, provides space in which the church and diakonia, instead of mutual accusation and burdening (diakonia must be more churchly, the church must be more diaconic), can admit the model of mutual relief of the church through diakonia and diakonia through the church.<sup>40</sup>

Here one is forced to ask whether the idea of relief does not rather mean alienation and is not merely trying to find a theoretical justification for the present state. Functional differentiation is not the same as separation. In the perspective of social systems theory the church and diakonia belong to the one system of religion. In Schäfer's words, proclamation and worship that are not in tense contact with diakonia become sterile and untrustworthy. Diakonia without contact with representing ecclesial action faces the danger of becoming blind for interpretative tasks that arise in helping to cope with life.<sup>41</sup> The different functional orientation of the individual system references of religion is not the same as strict institutional separation. In Luhmann's theory social systems do not copy the borders of institutions, but consist of communication. As what takes place in the congregation is not pure inward spiritual communication but in some, perhaps even minimal form also outwardly open diakonia and reflection of the two levels in the form of theological reflection, so also in organised diakonia there can and should be space for spiritual communication and theology in various forms.

However, coordinating or even subordinating diakonia to the church appears highly problematic. Well-meant efforts to 'churchify' diakonia, to limit it to the mere issue of searching for the diaconic congregation or to define it merely as a functional characteristic of the church or an essential manifestation of its life clashes against its limits not only in theological reflection or historical view, but also in practice. That is why Michael Bartels emphasises the need to 'transcend the morphological fundamentalism of diakonia as an essential manifestation of the life of the church'.<sup>42</sup> Of course, for the same reason diakonia principally cannot be fully secularised, perhaps with reference to social diakonia, since grounding in the religious system belongs to its essence. The effort to loosen diakonia from one or the other pole of its grounding between the system of religion and other social systems would result in diminishing its significance or in a total negation of its identity.

Obviously, it is not simple to harmonise all the requirements placed on diakonia in practice and in definitive form not even possible. What Niklas Luhmann says of religion holds also for the lot of diakonia as part of the religious system: 'Precisely because religion as a subsystem has reached a high level of functional differentiation it has become a prominent, semantically leading subsystem of society and by differentiation of other subsystems has experienced complicated structural and semantic changes'.<sup>43</sup> The essence of diakonia comprises its 'multilingual', intermediary character, existence 'in-between'. Theologically speaking: 'There is not and must not be a "chemically pure", theological grounding of diakonia, because Christ's love is love for the world, because diakonia as sent to the people is diakonia between the church and the world'.<sup>44</sup>

40 Eberhard HAUSCHILD, Wider die Identifikation von Diakonie und Kirche. Skizze einer veränderten Verhältnissbestimmung, *Pastoraltheologie. Wissenschaft und Praxis in Kirche und Gesellschaft* 89/2000, p. 414.

41 Gerhard K. SCHÄFER, Kirche und Diakonie, p. 141.

42 Michael BARTELS, *Diakonisches profil & universal design, Diakonie zwischen Verkirklichung und Verweltlichung des Christentums*, Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2015, p. 548.

43 Niklas LUHMANN, *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik. Studien zur Wissenssoziologie der modernen Gesellschaft*, vol. 3, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1989, p. 291.

44 Hermann RINGELING, Der diakonische Auftrag der Kirche – Versuch eines Konzeptes, in: *Studienbuch Diakonie*, vol. 2, ed. Volker HERRMANN and Martin HORSTMANN, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2006, p. 111.

For further reflection of issues associated with organised diakonia in modern society it therefore appears feasible to describe it as a 'hybrid organisation', which Heinz Schmidt defines as a 'structured interaction system combining different principles of creation and communication',<sup>45</sup> which must be taken into account in every deliberation. According to Bartels, this discourse 'involves no less than looking for a theological position that can still classify diakonia as an expression of the visible church, but which at the same time transcends the preferred and limiting relatedness to the church, nonetheless standing firmly in the primacy of orientation to the gospel of Jesus Christ'.<sup>46</sup> Or, in Schäfer's words, there remains the provocative question of 'how the subspheres can be integrated and the differences and tensions become fruitful'.<sup>47</sup> I will attempt to open the search for an answer to this question by returning to the historical development of Diaconia of ECCB and how it was reflected upon.

## Christianity between the church and the world

'As far as its theoretical bases as well as its historical and present form are concerned, diakonia finds itself in an indivisible polarity of churchification and secularisation of the Christian religion',<sup>48</sup> writes Michael Bartels and in that way sheds new light on the question of the churchification or secularisation of diakonia. The tension between 'churchliness' and 'worldliness' is not a problem proper for diakonia, but is tied to the system of Christianity as a whole. One can ask whether one of the problems of Christianity in the modern period is not precisely its excessive 'churchification'. Evangelical theology also offers resources for a positive evaluation of the 'worldliness' of Christianity. In this context Bartels names, for example, Friederich Gogarten or the already mentioned Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

It is characteristic of the modern history of organised diakonia that it takes place outside the church. The inner mission, founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by J. H. Wichern, which is regarded as the beginning of the modern forms of organised diakonia, did not arise inside the church, in connection with congregations, and not even by decision of the church leadership, but as an expression of the self-sacrifice of charismatic individuals motivated by faith on the basis of community life.<sup>49</sup> The trend to churchify diakonia, as Bartels further notes, is a fairly recent phenomenon.<sup>50</sup> In the case of Germany it culminated as late as 1975 with the founding of Diaconic Work of EKD.

Diaconia of ECCB has gone through a similar, albeit much shorter process in the tension between separation and association. At the beginning it quickly became independent and strove to gain as much autonomy for diaconic work as possible, as testified, for example, by the minutes from the curatorium meeting of 12<sup>th</sup> February 1991. They say that 'the option that Diaconia exists outside the church is not realistic at present, though it must be reckoned with for the future and prepared for. But it is necessary to strive for as great autonomy of Diaconia within the church as possible'.<sup>51</sup> Then at the turn of the millennium, in a contrary spirit, the 1999 Report of Diaconia

45 Heinz SCHMIDT, Zur Einführung: Nächstenliebe in polyhybriden Organisationen, in: *Nächstenliebe und Organisation. Zur Zukunft einer polyhybriden Diakonie in zivilgesellschaftlicher Perspektive*, ed. Heinz SCHMIDT – Klaus D. HILDEMAN, Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2012, p. 18.

46 Michael BARTELS, *Diakonisches profil & universal design*, p. 548.

47 Gerhard K. SCHÄFER, *Kirche und Diakonie*, p. 134.

48 Michael BARTELS, *Diakonisches profil & universal design*, p. 23.

49 Cf. Karl-Fritz DAIBER, Christliche Religion und ihre organisatorischen Ausprägungen, in: *Paradoxien kirchlicher Organisation*, ed. Jan HERMELINK – Gerhard WEGNER, Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2008, p. 48.

50 Cf. Michael BARTELS, *Diakonisches profil & universal design*, p. 25.

51 *Minutes from the session of Diaconia curatorium of 12<sup>th</sup> February 1991*, Diaconia of ECCB archive.

of ECCB cites the words of the then President of the Diaconia's Board of Directors Zdenek Bárta saying that the 'ten-year-long gradual incorporation of Diaconia into the body of the church and the subsequent legal adoption of Diaconia by the church were correct steps in a good direction.'<sup>52</sup>

The landmark in which this process culminated was the Order of Diaconic Work (further only ODW),<sup>53</sup> one of the collection of Church Orders and Constitutions, adopted in 1998, which can be understood as the 'incorporation of Diaconia to the body of the church' mentioned above – at least at the legal level. This order first of all attempts to define and ground the diaconic mission of the church and integrate its two basic forms – congregational diakonia (Christian ministry) and institutional diakonia (Diaconia of ECCB). In its preamble it stresses that diakonia 'is, together with proclaiming the Word of God and administering the sacraments, the basic mission and task of the church and of each of its congregations'. The Preamble's claim that 'the focal point of the church's diaconic work is in the parish congregations' and only 'where there are conditions for it diaconic facilities are established within ECCB as centres of variously specialised help to the needy' corresponds to the principle of subsidiarity. The responsibility for Christian ministry in the congregations is carried by their administrative bodies (art. I.3.1). The responsibility for institutional diaconal work is carried by the general congregation, which expressed it by establishing Diaconia of ECCB, to which it delegated these rights and responsibility (art. I.3.5).

For the present issue it is crucial that in art. 11 ODW establishes Diaconia's cooperation with the church congregations: 'Diaconia of ECCB cooperates closely with the congregations of ECCB and finds its spiritual background in them.' This partnership is grounded in a contract with a particular cooperating congregation, or with several congregations at once. This contract defines the specific way of fulfilling the cooperation for both sides. So the relationship of church and diakonia is concretised also at the local level.<sup>54</sup>

But of course reality is much more complex than the logic of a legal decree. In the development of Diaconia of ECCB the tension between churchification and secularisation, already expressed at Diaconia's birth against the background of the theological polarisation of the Smolíks and Filipi mentioned above, is continually present. Should Diaconia be subordinated to the church? Or does autonomy belong to it by right as to a mature offspring? And in what respect? To illustrate I will mention two moments testifying to a process of often painful searching for answers to these questions. An important step towards reinforcing the autonomy of Diaconia was the amendment of ODW, valid since 2007. As a result, the boards of directors, which up to that time had directed the individual centres and were composed mostly of representatives of the church, were replaced by executive councils and supervisory councils, thereby separating the executive function and the supervisory function. The centres' lives are directed by the executive councils, consisting of its senior workers, while representatives of the cooperating congregation are elected to the supervisory councils, which are merely advisory and supervisory bodies.<sup>55</sup>

52 *Report of Diaconia of ECCB for 1999*, Diaconia of ECCB archive.

53 © Order of Diaconic Work of ECCB (on-line), at: <http://www.evangelnet.cz/cce/czr/rdp.html>, accessed 14<sup>th</sup> June 2016.

54 This situation, though of course it is not without problems or always functional, is an ecumenically inspiring model of how the partnership of church and diakonia can be concretised. For example, Jan Hermelink notes in this context that EKD in its conceptual document 'Kirche der Freiheit' of 2006 mentions reaching such a state as the vision for 2030. Cf. Jan HERMELINK, *Diakonie – die Nemesis der kirchlichen Organisation. Einige Beobachtungen zur kirchentheoretischen Wahrnehmung diakonischer Praxis*, *Praktische Theologie* 4/2015, p. 234.

55 However, in this context it is important that according to the Order of Diaconic Work (art. 15) the supervisory council of the centre is entrusted with the important task 'to attend to the framing and maintaining of the Christian character of the organisation, encourage and develop active cooperation between the centre and the partner congregation and involvement of ECCB members in the service of

A manifestation of the opposite tendency to control Diaconia's activity on the part of the church<sup>56</sup> was the election of Diaconia's Supervisory Council at the 1<sup>st</sup> session of the 32<sup>nd</sup> synod in May 2007. Although Diaconia's Assembly, as ordered by ODW, nominated candidates to the new council among others from among Diaconia's employees (and at the same time in all cases also ECCB members), the synod did not respect the nomination and did not elect any of the candidates who were at the same time Diaconia employees.<sup>57</sup> According to Pavel Vychopeň, who was at the time Diaconia's director, the alleged conflict of interests gave rise to the curious situation when none of the Council's members was an expert with qualified knowledge of the organisation's problems. Furthermore, the Supervisory Council's sessions were closed and it informed the Executive Council of its resolutions only when the sessions had been concluded. That situation, caused by distrust of Diaconia's management on the part of church leadership, heavily paralysed Diaconia's work as well as mutual relationships.<sup>58</sup>

So in the practice of Diaconia of ECCB constant tension can be observed between the church and 'its' institutional Diaconia, which is – usually according to the individual directors' periods in office – reinforced or suppressed. It is doubtful whether in the perspective of diaconic management it is possible to restrict the organisation's life by orders of the church, which functions in a different culture and within an incomparably smaller and more ordered structure. David Šourek, director of Diaconia of ECCB in 2008–2013, proposes – based on the German model – to realise a form of the relationship in which Diaconia is 'organisationally independent of the church, but bound to it mentally and theologically'.<sup>59</sup> That raises the question of how one is to imagine 'framing and maintaining the Christian character of the centre'. This does not comprise only what could be summarised under the concept of pastoral care, which can by right be perceived as a task and possibility of the congregation, or the introduction of a preaching ministry being discussed at present. The Christian character of the organisation is expressed also in its strategic orientation and everyday deliberation, in defining and applying values. Searching for a 'Christian character' in these issues is not in the powers of the local congregation. It is rather a task for theologians. And in this sense the call of Diaconia of ECCB directors has continuously been heard throughout its existence, addressed especially to the Protestant Theological Faculty of the Charles University in Prague, requesting the development of a specific theology of diakonia, which has as yet not been satisfactorily answered.

I will now briefly mention two contexts which need to be taken into account in reflecting on the relationship between Diaconia of ECCB and its parental church. A specific sphere is constituted by the tension between institutional Diaconia and Christian ministry, whose mutual communication after Diaconia was founded was unhappily marked by the first formulation of its Statute of 1989, which can sound as an effort to subordinate congregational diakonia under the organisational unit of Diaconia of ECCB. The article 'Diaconia's Mission' in paragraph 2 states that 'Diaconia can perform all pastoral care and Christian ministry'.<sup>60</sup> Karel Schwarz, the first director of Diaconia of ECCB, also notes the fact that 'Diaconia sprang up where Christian

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the Diaconia of ECCB centre'. See © Order of Diaconic Work of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren.

56 So, for example, on behalf of the Supervisory Council Jiří Gruber states: 'It is important that the church can look after things in Diaconia, otherwise the consequences will be catastrophic.' *Minutes from Diaconia Assembly in 2007*, Diaconia of ECCB archive.

57 © Resolution of the 1<sup>st</sup> session of the 32<sup>nd</sup> synod of ECCB, 10<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> May 2007 (on-line), at: [http://www.evangelnet.cz/cce/czr/us-nesení/u\\_32\\_1/u\\_32\\_1.pdf](http://www.evangelnet.cz/cce/czr/us-nesení/u_32_1/u_32_1.pdf), accessed 27th June 2016.

58 Audio recording of interview with Pavel Vychopeň of 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2016, author's archive.

59 Audio recording of interview with David Šourek of 11<sup>th</sup> March 2016, author's archive.

60 Statute of Diaconia of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, archive of Diaconia of ECCB.



ministry was not functional. Where Christian ministry was strong, centres could not be set up.<sup>61</sup> Paradoxically, those who are at present voicing the loudest call for an intensification and renewal of congregational diakonia are persons from the leadership of institutional Diaconia, who are aware of the limits of church-conducted social work financed from public funding. According to David Šourek, Christian ministry and institutional Diaconia can not only mutually complement, but also practically support each other,<sup>62</sup> and the present director Petr Haška states specific co-operation possibilities – for example, the current project ‘Care at home’, aimed at supporting lay caregivers, or the possible development of cooperation with elderly persons in parishes, who can give their social care benefits to the congregation or a volunteer from its midst.<sup>63</sup>

Pavel Vychopeň, the second director of Diaconia (1998–2007), notes the confessional contexts of the issue. While Lutheranism directed diakonia from the very beginning to the sphere of worldly power, or tried to frame it within the church ‘episcopally’ top-down, the Reformed tradition has maintained its connection to the local congregation.<sup>64</sup> According to Vychopeň, a hierarchically directed Diaconia as it is in Germany cannot work in ECCB, which is a formally united church but rather a Reformed one in character. The congregational emphasis corresponds rather to diakonia framed bottom-up, bound to the local congregation.<sup>65</sup>

## Diakonia and ‘its’ church

Engaging the example of Diaconia of ECCB I have sketched out some of the tensions arising between the church and the modern organised form of diakonia, which can be perceived as tensions between churchification and secularisation, the two poles proper to Christianity itself.

In the spirit of the hybrid model of diakonia outlined above, different spheres and their professional reflections meet in the space of diakonia. So in theological and sociological reflection the worldly dimension of diakonia can be positively evaluated as an expression of the awareness that Christianity is not realised merely in the form of church, but also – said with Luhmann – in the form of diakonia (and theology). Of course, if diakonia is to fulfil its task of mediating between the system of religion and the other systems in society, its secularisation cannot be absolute. Reflection on the development of organised diakonia in the German-speaking world speaks first of all of the threat posed to diakonia by its economisation and subordination to market criteria.<sup>66</sup> It is desirable to respect diakonia’s bond to the different systems of society, which constitute the milieu of religion, and at the same time account for the necessity of grounding it within the framework of religion, viz. especially in its relationship to the other subsystems – within the scope of this text especially to the church.

In her summary of the historical developmental lines of the relationship of the church and diakonia, Beate Hofmann speaks of ‘diakonia’s differentiation from being-church [Kirche-Sein] based

61 Audio recording of interview with Karel Schwarz of 29<sup>th</sup> March 2016, author’s archive.

62 Audio recording of interview with David Šourek of 11<sup>th</sup> March 2016, author’s archive.

63 Audio recording of interview with Petr Haška of 19<sup>th</sup> April 2016, author’s archive.

64 Cf. Christian MÖLLER, *Einführung in die Praktische Theologie*, Tübingen: A. Francke Verlag Tübingen und Basel, 2004, p. 236.

65 Audio recording of interview with Pavel Vychopeň of 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2016, author’s archive.

66 Cf. Johannes EURICH, Zwischen Theologie und Sozialwissenschaft, *Praktische Theologie. Zeitschrift für Praxis in Kirche, Gesellschaft und Kultur* 4/2015, p. 226.

on theological and pragmatic arguments' and its modern adoption as 'foster-sister of the church'.<sup>67</sup> This model of diakonia, conceived not as a daughter of the church (whether adult and sent out to the world with a blessing or prodigal and estranged), but as its sister, apparently best corresponds to the contemporary situation, in which the church and diakonia are two relatively autonomous subspheres of the 'maternal' system of Christianity. In determining the relationship of the church and diakonia the model of 'the church guardian of diakonia' certainly appears non-functional.<sup>68</sup> Even though in theological discourse it is customary to conceive diakonia as a constitutive mark of the church, it is also possible to reverse this perspective: 'It is not diakonia that is a dimension of the church but quite the other way round: the church is a dimension of diakonia.'<sup>69</sup> Such a claim is theologically justified by the diaconic being of Christ, which comprises word and deed, or by the ministry of reconciliation (*diakonia tés katallagés*, 2 Cor 5:18) emphasised in reflecting diakonia by Theodor Strohm and conceived by him as the central concept comprising the whole of Christianity: 'Witness, community and ministry are independent and mutually related manifestations of the "diakonia of reconciliation"'.<sup>70</sup>

Although the description so far may have given rise to the impression that at present the relationships of diakonia and the church are characterised by mutual divergence, with respect to contemporary social development, signs of movement in the opposite direction can also be observed. A new emphasis on a narrow link between the church and diakonia is requested, for example, by the concept of community-oriented diakonia.<sup>71</sup> This concept expresses a 'form of church-diaconic work carried out by the church congregations and geographic wholes together with diaconic ministries and facilities, in which they cooperate with other agents. It focuses on neighbourhoods, the living situation of their inhabitants and opens up to the polis. Common action of the church and organised diakonia presupposes strategic cooperation to even out the orientation on clients, members and the community.'<sup>72</sup> This form of social cooperation is frequently associated with the paradigm of 'network society' and derives from the complexity of the modern differentiated and polycentric society, in which 'social groups, organisations and state institutions no longer have all the necessary resources for their tasks or interests at their disposal. These consist of information, financial and personal resources, know-how, legitimation, expertise and many others. The agents are mutually dependent.'<sup>73</sup>

Georg Singe places indirect emphasis on the closeness of diakonia and the church from another point of view. In observing the present state of the system of diakonia, he finds three principal impulses emerging for a new determination of the identity of diaconic action: solidarity, ecology and spirituality.<sup>74</sup> Singe recalls Lehner's principle to 'solidarise rather than help',<sup>75</sup> which the reality of organised diaconic work done by the churches frequently contradicts, and the analysis

67 Beate HOFMANN, *Ekklesiologische Begründungsansätze von Diakonie*, p. 98.

68 According to Luhmann the task to reflect on diakonia within the system of religion belongs to theology.

69 Paolo RICCA, Diakonie als Dimension der Kirche. Eine Vision für Zukunft, in: *Diakonie als Dimension der Kirche. Diakonisch-theologisches Symposium 6. bis 8. Mai 1994 in Neuendettelsau*, ed. Annamaria BÖCKEL Neuendettelsau: Freimund – Verlag, 1995, p. 58.

70 Theodor STROHM, *Diakonie und Sozialethik. Beiträge zur sozialen Verantwortung der Kirche*, Heidelberg: Heidelberger Verlagsanstalt, 1993, p. 128.

71 According to Volker Hermann and Martin Horstmann this concept (*Gemeinwesendiakonie*) appeared in Germany in 2007, when Diaconic Work of EKD published the document 'Handlungsoption Gemeinwesendiakonie'. Cf. Volker HERMANN and Martin HORSTMANN, *Wichern drei – gemeinwesendiakonische Impulse*, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlagsgesellschaft, 2010, p. 10.

72 Kirche findet Stadt, pp. 39–45.

73 Holger BAUMGARD, *Kirche in der Netzwerkgesellschaft. Gesellschaftsdiakonie als Herausforderung der Kirche*, Münster: LIT Verlag, 2005, p. 252.

74 Cf. Georg SINGE, *Chaos und Selbstorganisation: Systemtheoretische Impulse für eine diakonische Praxis*, Münster: LIT Verlag, 2001.

75 Markus LEHNER, *Caritas – Die soziale Arbeit der Kirche: eine Theoriegeschichte*, Freiburg i. B.: Lambertus-Verlag, 1997, pp. 297–369.

of the ecumenical document *Opportunities and Forms of Solidarity in Renewed Social Culture*<sup>76</sup> penned by Norbert Mette,<sup>77</sup> who resists lamentations over the decline of solidarity. In the modern individualised period, it takes only a new, often bottom-up form as ‘leaven in the dough’: ‘Global ethics of responsibility (“think globally”) must originate at the bottom (“act locally”) in order for anything to move at the top at all.’<sup>78</sup> Another paradigm Singe perceives as a challenge for diakonia is ecology. According to Luhmann, the endangered environment is connected in ecological communication with individual and social systems. According to Singe, deploying ‘diakonia for the whole creation’ is one of the tasks that must be transferred especially to the diaconic practice of congregations.<sup>79</sup> The third challenge for diakonia and its theological reflection Singe finds is spirituality. According to Schibilsky, the defining feature of the diaconic profession is developing religious competence, which is manifested ‘precisely at the borders of the structures of everyday life, it means the ability to act also in the experience of an endangered foundational sense’.<sup>80</sup> Singe thinks that ‘perhaps it will soon be possible to speak of a new historical phase of social work, which will no longer be determined by economisation, but by spiritualisation’.<sup>81</sup>

This view corresponds to the reflections of the late Luhmann, according to whom it is possible to speak of the inclusion of ‘diakonia, activism of love, social work’ in the system of religion only ‘when the function and code of religion, i.e., traditionally said, the church in the sense of a community of faith, is successfully activated’.<sup>82</sup> It therefore needs to be asked whether it is possible to develop an independent code for diakonia as one of the system references of the religious system, as Dierk Starnitzke attempted already twenty years ago, employing the formula *ministry in power/non-ministry* (vollmächtiger Dienst/Nichtdienst).<sup>83</sup> For Michael Bartels ‘the distinguishing line of the binary code ministry in power/non-ministry, which is the essential foundation for the opening and self-closure of the system (What is not diakonia?), is so indistinct from the organisational point of view that no visible form of diakonia can be deduced from it (any more)’.<sup>84</sup> That is why further reflection of the situation of diakonia in its organisational form may find it more interesting to define it – from the point of view of social systems theory – rather as a ‘phenomenon of structural connection between the religious system and system of social assistance’.<sup>85</sup> Dierk Baecker regards social assistance as an independent social system in modern society and proposes to use the code *help/non-help* for it.<sup>86</sup> For diakonia it means that besides this code it is also necessary that the *immanence/transcendence* code of religion must be activated within its communications.

The discussion of the churchliness or worldliness of diakonia suggests that fulfilling its mission takes place and probably will take place precisely within this tension, which is constitutive for it and need not be merely a source of conflicts, but can also be fruitfully utilised. I find the contribution of Luhmann’s reflection of observing the development of the religious system to consist in

76 *Für eine Zukunft in Solidarität und Gerechtigkeit. Wort des Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschlands und der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz zur wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Lage in Deutschland*, München: Bernward bei Don Bosco, 1997.

77 Norbert METTE, Solidarität: Verfall oder Wandel?, *Concilium* 4/1999, p. 478.

78 This trend is testified, for example, by the spontaneous movement of refugee aid in the course of the refugee wave in 2015.

79 Cf. Georg SINGE, *Chaos und Selbstorganisation*, p. 102.

80 Michael SCHIBILSKY, Spiritualität als religiöse Kompetenz, in: *Spiritualität in der Diakonie. Anstöße zur Erneuerung christlicher Kernkompetenz*, ed. Beate HOFFMANN and Michael SCHIBILSKY, Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2001, p. 143.

81 Georg SINGE, *Chaos und Selbstorganisation*, p. 104.

82 Niklas LUHMANN, *Religion der Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2000, p. 243.

83 See Dierk STARNITZKE, *Diakonie als soziales System*, p. 296.

84 Michael BARTELS, *Diakonisches profil & universal design*, p. 538.

85 I owe this formulation to a personal consultation with Ellen Eidt, who conceives diakonia in this way in the dissertation she is working on.

86 Cf. Dirk BAECKER, Soziale Hilfe als Funktionssystem der Gesellschaft, *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 2/1994, pp. 93–110.

that on the one hand it relieves diakonia from belonging to the church, while at the same time anchoring it within religion. Diakonia cannot be simplistically characterised as churchly or worldly, as it is defined by its intermediary character,<sup>87</sup> concurrent participation in the social systems of social work, health care, economy, etc., and at the same time in the system of religion. Although fulfilling the mission of diakonia in the world comprises the necessity of following the interests of other social systems, it cannot give up its Christian character, which cannot be maintained without some form of participation in spiritual communication, i.e., the church, and in reflecting its work within the system of religion, i.e., theology. In this context, churchliness and worldliness appear not as mutually contradictory tendencies, but rather as complementary characteristics.

Precisely the church – and so especially the local church as a community of spiritual communication and social interaction – may be a necessary partner for modern diakonia for its anchoring not only in the system of religion, but also in society, which functions on network principles. In the spirit of the paradigms of the future sketched out by Singe, the church is a unique potential and space for developing solidarity in mutual help, global responsibility and spirituality, although it cannot monopolise their realisation in contemporary pluralist society. Precisely these values can balance out the often-criticised functionalisation, economisation and excessive institutionalisation of diakonia and ‘levelling out’ the systems of help and views of human need. And in this context the tension formulated in the beginnings of the renewed Protestant Diaconia between Filipi’s ‘rebellious’, wide-open diakonia and the pastorally-oriented Christian ministry of the Smolíks, which is grounded in communicating the gospel, community of the congregation and an awareness that the human situation includes needs that cannot be solved by ‘worldly’ methods of social work, finds new rapprochement.

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<sup>87</sup> See also the New Testament understanding of deacon as mediator in Karel ŠIMR, *Diakonie v perspektivě teorie sociálních systémů*, pp. 82–83.



## Churchly or Worldly Diakonia?

### Abstract

The paper attempts to reflect on the subject of 'worldliness' and 'churchliness' of diakonia from a theological standpoint based on the example of the development of the Diaconia of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren. It first lays out two different attitudes present at the inception of this institution in 1989. The two attitudes are subsequently placed in the context of the theological discussion of diakonia in the German Protestant environment since the second half of the twentieth century. Engaging N. Luhmann's Social Systems Theory, which conceives diakonia as a function of the religious system in relation to other subsystems of society, the paper seeks to transcend the dichotomy between the two characteristics as phenomena inherent to Christianity itself and enquires about the possibilities of drawing the church and diakonia closer together.

**Keywords:** diakonia, systems theory, Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren

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