

In Everything as the Eye of the Church

Dear listeners,

Some 16 years ago, my then-girlfriend and I bought a travel guide to Australia. My wife Annette's cousin has been living in Australia with his family for approximately 20 years and, at that moment, we wanted to visit him. But that journey never took place; a few months afterwards she went into the labour room and Vincent was born. My pleasure is all the greater to finally be on Australian soil! Thank you very much for your invitation!

In 1997 I was asked to offer theological assistance to the diaconal candidates in my diocese. Little did I suspect, at that moment, that my involvement with the theology of the diaconate would one day lead me all the way to Australia. My relationship with the men who wish to become deacons and with the women who support them in multiple, very diverse ways has developed enormously since then. Every two years we start a formation course with 6 to 15 men. And after some 2 years, at half-time as it were, these men, for the most part, let me know that they would like to see me as well prostrate in front of the altar. This constant wish never failed to have an effect! Four years ago, I made an intensive effort to clarify my vocation. At the end of this spiritual process, I reached the certainty that God called me to find and to go my way as a Christian, a theologian, a family father and a husband. I didn't discern any vocation to diaconate. And so, I have been connected to the diaconate for 20 years, without being a deacon. This is sometimes surprising for myself. The communion with so many deacons and their wives is one of the sources nourishing my commitment. Another one is the knowledge that, throughout all time, our Church has created or changed ministries, with utmost freedom- for the sake of the mission of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the Church. For the past four years or so, I have been able to say this also in my capacity as IDC Manager. Klaus has mentioned it already: the diversity, the colourfulness of the diaconate, which I have since been able to experience, is a tremendous gift. We would like to unwrap it together with you and to discover its beauty. This is the reason of our presence here.

Kindly give me your attention, as I will try to complete Klaus' statements. There are four points which I would like to consider: after a short introduction, I will take a look at your national Norms and Guidelines and at the U.S. diaconate model (1). I will then speak about the beginning of the diaconate movement and about the IDC (2), about a document from the heyday of the diaconate (3) and about some models of interaction between the degrees of the hierarchy (4).

1. Introduction

One could clearly feel nervousness of the deacons following the publication of the *Motu proprio "Omnium in mentem"* on December 15th, 2009. With this official document, Pope Benedict XVI introduced some changes in the Canon Law, affecting, among others, the Canons which referred to the serving function of the deacons and their interaction with the episcopate and the presbyterate. Would the amendments lead to a devaluation or even a degradation of the diaconate with regard to the presbyterate or the episcopate? Was there an intention to prepare an eventual exclusion of the

diaconate from the three-grade sacramental Ordo and to put into doubt the diaconate's sacramentality?¹

What had actually happened? From a purely factual point of view, Benedict XVI had adapted the wording of Can. 1008 of the *Codex Iuris Canonici* to the revised Catechism of the Catholic Church. The wording used by the Council to describe ministerial action, "*agere in persona Christi capitis*" had previously been applied to all three degrees of the hierarchy. Now it wasn't applied to the deacon anymore, but was used only in the case of the Bishop and the presbyter: "Those who are constituted in the order of the episcopate or the presbyterate receive the mission and capacity to act in the person of Christ the Head, whereas deacons are empowered to serve the People of God in the ministries of the liturgy, the word and charity".

The diverse reactions to the change goes to show that, with more than 40 years gone by since the reintroduction of the diaconate as an independent grade of the hierarchy, its theological place is still disputed. Some questions remain: How can the relationship of the three sacramental grades to each other be more precisely determined? What is the basis for their unity, how can their autonomy be expressed without compromising the unity? If the deacon does not act in the person of Christ the Head, what are then the grounds for the sacramental character of his ministry?

A study carried out by the Vatican-authorized International Theological Commission² in 2004 pointed out a series of questions which are as relevant as ever: Why is a deacon ordained if he may no longer do anything more than a non-ordained person appointed by the Bishop? Is the deacon ordained "only" for service or for a ministry of leadership as well? Are not all the ministries in the Church ministries of service? If so, what sets the service of the deacon apart? Is there a genuine task, valid for any time and place, which would make the deacon recognizable? If so: is this task determined by tradition, by the pastoral challenges and necessities of the given moment or by the charism of each deacon in part? In other words: is the deacon, then, the specialist of the non-specific, having an open profile? Is he the ecclesial jack-of-all-trades with a special closeness to the various life situations people find themselves in?³ Or is the deacon in fact, at the end of the day, the priest-helper, invested with a little bit of authority and expected to fill the gaps caused by the shortage of priests?

2. The diaconate- response to local pastoral necessities?

The Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons and Guidelines for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons, recently adopted by the Australian Bishops' Conference, primarily emphasize a close ministerial relationship of the bishop with his deacons. Functions „must be carried out in perfect communion with the bishop and with his presbytery, that is to say, under the authority of

¹ Redaktion, Kommt vielleicht doch ein Diakonat der Frau?, in: *Christ in der Gegenwart* 62 (2010) 27. Cf. also M. Kirschner, Amtlich in der Person Christi handeln – als Diakon? Zur Theologie des Diakonats aus Anlass des Motu Proprio "Omnium in mentem" vom 15. Dezember 2009, in: *Diaconia Christi* 45 (2010) 231-243; M. Mühl, Degradierung des Diakonats? Drei kurze Anmerkungen zu Ordo und Diakonat im Motu Proprio "omnium in mentem", in: *IKZ Communio* 2(2010), 205-212.

² G. L. Müller (Hg.), *Der Diakonat – Entwicklung und Perspektiven: Studien der Internationalen Theologischen Kommission zum sakramentalen Diakonat*, Würzburg 2004.

³ Cf. on this topic M. Hochschild, Individualisierung – (De)Privatisierung – Professionalisierung. Der Diakon im Bermuda-Dreieck seiner Berufung, in: R. Hartmann, F. Reger, S. Sander (Hg.), *Ortsbestimmungen: Der Diakonat als kirchlicher Dienst (Fuldaer Studien)*, Frankfurt 2009, 144-160.

the bishop and the priest who is in charge of the care of souls in that place“ (p. 14). Elsewhere, it is stated that: „The deacon must be shaped by the communion with his bishop, the presbyterate and all the faithful. His position with regard to the presbyter is described as follows, in the words of Saint John Paul II: „Permanent deacons have an obligation to respect the office of the priest and to cooperate conscientiously with him and with the parish staff.“ (p. 20). And: „Deacons serve the people in the name of Christ by serving and assisting the bishop and his priests. As a helper of the bishop and the priest, the deacon should be present in the implementation of the three fundamental principles of the Church. In close connection with Lumen Gentium 29, it is emphasized: „Deacons carry out the ministry of charity in such a way as to build up the Church in communion. ... It is evident that the diakonia of liturgy and the diakonia of the word of God are also ministries that express the charity of Christ acting in his minister in the Church.“ (p. 54ff)

In the USA the concrete requirements of a diocese are the yardstick by which a deacon must be gauged. The image of a helper of the bishop or of its presbyterium is not in the foreground. “When we ... ask about the future of permanent diaconate, we cannot avoid a realistic assessment of the glaring pastoral needs in today’s church. However, even more pointedly we need to consider the concrete and glaring pastoral needs *existentially*, that is, in a given diocese and at a given moment of time, namely here and now. The permanent diaconate does not exist in a temporal-spatial vacuum. It exists in a given diocese ... and at a given moment of history. What, then, are the glaring pastoral needs of a given diocese at a given moment of history? Second, does the permanent diaconate in that diocese face up to the glaring pastoral needs of the diocese in question? If one talks about the future of the permanent diaconate and remains oblivious to the glaring pastoral needs of the existential permanent diaconate – its actual existence in a given diocese – such talk is not only out of the box but out of the line. Such a discussion on the permanent diaconate becomes unreal and totally ideological.”⁴ Flexibility and integration in the context give the diaconate its shape and protect it from an ideological narrowing, let us here Osborne again: “: „whenever the issue of context is removed from theology and pastoral practice, an ideological and nonreal conversation begins to take over. ... Such a noncontextual conversation may sound erudite and even spiritual, but it lacks historical credibility and contemporary, existential credibility. It is ideological. It is not real.”⁵

Accordingly GS opens the way for the direction to the needs of people in a certain time at a certain place to become the core of a theology of the diaconate; in keeping with the signs of the times, the shape of the ministry maybe developed and structured flexibly. . “The church is certainly free to explore further the function of deacons in relation to the needs of the church in the contemporary world.”⁶ Could the Council decision to offer the diaconate as a ministry of evangelization, liturgy and charity an open and at the same time situational direction, also have been the consistent direction for the future?

The Dutch theologian Bart J. Koet is on the same page with the Australian guidelines when he refers to Lumen Gentium 29, he sees the list of activities “as a good summary of what the New Testament means by the word *diakonia*: the connection between that task of evangelisation and the care for the poor The deacon is not only the one who cares for the poor, he is the mediator between

⁴ Osborne, K.B., The permanent diaconate. Its history and place in the sacrament of orders, New York 2007, S. 147-148.

⁵ Osborne 2007, S. 100.

⁶ Noll, R.R., The Sacramental Ministry of the Deacon in Parish Life. In: Keating, J. (Hg.), The deacon reader. New York 2006, S. 199.

liturgy, Scripture and the world, walking thus on both feet.”⁷ The American theologian Cummings thinks that this very fact preserves the continuity with the early diaconate, for “these three shapes of diaconate as envisaged in Lumen Gentium 29 – ministry of word, sacrament, and charity – encapsulate how the diaconate has been practiced and understood throughout the tradition ...”⁸.

In Germany as well, this position has been gaining support in recent times. In his thesis on the diaconate, Deacon Michael Wollek recently wrote: “The Council gives the diaconate with a civilian profession a multiple and multilateral range of responsibilities and tasks, which gives the diaconate as a whole but also each and every deacon the possibility to find in it an identity and a profile. Being restricted on a certain focal point would be in contradiction with both the declarations and the intentions of the Council.”⁹ From this position, it follows that it is his *form of life* and his *activity* which differentiate a deacon. But what he may and can do does not differentiate him from the other ranks of the hierarchy: “Today the most common question people ask about deacons is ‘What do they do?’ To this we need to answer, Deacons do all that the church asks them to do today, and whatever the church might ask them to do in future.”¹⁰

According to Lumen Gentium 18, the deacons serve “the People of God” and “in communion with the bishop and his group of priests”. The US bishops consistently follow this position: “The deacon exercises his ministry within a specific pastoral context – the communion and mission of a diocesan Church.”¹¹ On the issue of identity they say: “When the diaconate is conceived from the start as an integral part of an overall pastoral plan, deacons will have a richer and firmer sense of their own identity and purpose.”¹² Consistently, the bishops ask the following questions concerning the structuring of the diaconate: “How does the diaconate contribute to the overall pastoral plan of the diocese? (no. 257) How does the formation program prepare candidates to meet this need? What is the mission of the permanent diaconate in the diocese? (no. 41) What is the operative definition of ‘deacon’ in this local church? How are deacons utilized? (nos. 27-30). How does the diaconate reflect the cultural reality and diversity of the local church? (nos. 144-145).”

It is therefore indispensable “that a diocese has to be clear about its expectations of the diaconate in its pastoral life. Deacons do all that the church asks them to do today, and whatever the church might ask them to do in the future. In short, the Second Vatican Council never intended to define the functions of deacons, only to point out areas of their ministry, namely service in liturgy, word and charity. The church is certainly free to explore further the function of deacons in relation to the needs of the church in the contemporary world.”¹³

Cardinal Lehmann, for many years President of the German Bishops’ Conference, partly agrees, but he speaks at the same time about a basic framework in the sense of a unitary regulation; for him it is important “that the diaconate, once regulated in a basic framework, will always and must always

⁷ Koet, B.J., Whatever became of the Diakonia of the Word? In: New Diaconal Review, (IDC-NEC), Jg. 2, Nr. 3, 2009, S. 27-29.

⁸ Cummings, O.F., Theology of the diaconate: The state of the question. In: Owen F. Cummings, William T. Ditewig, Richard R. Gaillardetz (editor.) Theology of the diaconate. The state of question. New York/Mahwah, N.J. 2005, S. 1-29, S. 20-21.

⁹ M. Wollek, „Ich bin bereit!“ Die Ausbildung zum Diakon mit/im Zivilberuf in Zeiten gesellschaftlicher und kirchlicher Transformation, Berlin 2016, S. 178.

¹⁰ Noll 2006, S. 199.

¹¹ National Conference of Catholic Bishops/Bishops’ Committee on the Permanent Diaconate, National directory for the formation, ministry, and life of permanent deacons in the United States, Washington D.C. 2005, No.. 41.

¹² National Conference, Nr. 249.

¹³ Noll 2006, S. 199.

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remain open for a specific regional and local implementation. This should not affect a unitary regulation.”¹⁴

It is with great interest that I read Nick Kerr’s interview with our host, Archbishop Julian Porteous. Archbishop Porteous says, among other things: “I think that’s a key thing for deacons – that you look at the needs of the particular parishes they’re in. The priest may see something that he’s not on top of, or see an area of need in the parish. The deacon may have the requisite gifts and abilities so that he can play a role that’s complimentary to that of the priest.” (eNews, October 2016, p.2).

In my opinion, dear Archbishop, you are touching two of the most decisive key points for the place, for the role of the diaconate in our Church: How does the deacon find his tasks? How does he get his bearings in this regard? And how is the interaction with the priest and the bishop structured? You speak of complementarity and not about a priest’s assistant.

At this point I would like to leave those two keys for a while and come back to them later. I would like to suggest to you two sources from which we can draw some inspiration and which let us see the shape the diaconate takes in different times and regions. **3. IDC – The beginnings of the diaconate movement and of the IDC in Germany**

In 1947, Forestry Office intern (*der Forstpraktikant*) J. Kramer felt touched by Acts 6, 1-7¹⁵. The vocation of the men who were supposed to help the Apostles in their charitable work captivated him. Hannes Kramer, very sensitive as he was to issues of social justice, had been confronted very early with the harshness of the Nazi regime. As a high school student he gave his school snack to an emaciated concentration camp inmate, only to be forced to witness how the man was then beaten up by camp guards. Through this occurrence and many more his inner-readiness to become a social worker in order to carry out his idea of diaconate grew constantly. Karl Rahner among others was, at this time by his side as an advisor. And so in 1950 Kramer started his formation of the Social Workers Seminary of the German Caritas Association in Freiburg.

During this formation, in 1951, he picked up on the keyword “Franciscan attitude” and asked: “Should we, the social workers at the service of the Church’s own charity work, not aim for diaconate, just as it carried out its task in early Christianity and as this service is recognizable symbolically in Acts 6, 1-7?”¹⁶ His former close connection to the German Caritas Association would become, in time, a “hot spot” without which the Council wouldn’t have come to the point of reinstating the Diaconate.

In the spring of 1952, H. Kramer presented a thesis entitled “Bases of the Ordained Diaconate”¹⁷. In it the deacon is seen as part of the Ordained Ministry, directly responsible to the Bishop or to “his representatives particularly put in charge of charitable work”. His main task is seen as a multitude of works of Christian charity. He should also stimulate the communities in performing them. Kramer gives an unusual motivation for the pastoral dilemma and, at the same time, for the

¹⁴ K. Lehmann, Die Entwicklung des Ständigen Diakonats. Beobachtungen und Überlegungen aus der Sicht des bischöflichen Amtes. In: R. Hartmann u.a. (editor.), Ortsbestimmungen 2009, S. 11-31, S. 22.

¹⁵ C.f. as to the following: M. Morche, Zur Erneuerung des Ständigen Diakonats, Freiburg 1996, p. 36 sq.

¹⁶ H. Kramer, 25 Jahre Diakonatskreis und Diakonatsbewegung, in: Diaconia XP 12 (1977), 1-2, 5-57, S. 7.

¹⁷ ADCV 058.6.025, brochure. 5

re-instatement of diaconate: It is pointless to have the priest 'fill the gap which was caused by the lack of the diaconate'.¹⁸

Over the following years, the first diaconate circles were founded, whereby the close connection to Caritas, including now the *Caritas Internationalis*, remained in place. Monsenior Rodhain, one of the co-founders of C.I., considers a close connection between Caritas and diaconate very fruitful. He said: "A Stephen or a Francis are lacking in the clergy of 1960"¹⁹. The international contacts which developed on this occasion would be bundled and further developed in the "International Diaconate Circle".

The discussion concerning the reinstatement of the permanent diaconate by the Council was stimulated, to a large extent, by K. Rahner and by his efforts prior to and during the Council itself. Eventually, it was the International Diaconate Circle, which, even before the conclusion of the Council, seized the opportunity and organized an International Study Conference. More than 250 persons from 27 countries participated—more than half of them were bishops and Cardinals. H. Kramer, René Schaller (Lyon) and Georg Hüßler, Ph.D., were intensively involved and acted as representatives of the organizers. Reports came in from every region of the world, which were subsequently published in the first issue of the *Diaconia XP* magazine, which has been published regularly ever since. The summary of the press conference following the meeting would be in telegraphic style: Deacon's ordination—sacramental; deacon is a part of the hierarchy; formation has to be independent; a deacon with a civilian profession makes sense; service character; tasks in three basic actions of the Church not a restoration of the ministry, but a renewal within the context of modern society; age of ordination—still an open question. **The crowning conclusion of this first ever diaconate congress was represented by an audience with Pope Paul VI on October 25, 1965 at 8 p.m. in the Vatican:**

"Venerable brothers and dear sons,

We are happy to receive you and give you a warm welcome. Under the presidency of the Cardinals Julius Döpfner, Raul Silva Henriquez and Franjo Šeper you have reflected since last Friday together with zealous pastors and illustrious theologians, in an international studies meeting on the topic of what the deacon could and should be in the Church and in the society of today. In so doing, you have responded to one of the intentions of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, an intention which We have made Our own by the promulgation of the dogmatic constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*. This Constitution explicitly says, after enumerating the tasks of the deacon and declaring those as 'vital' for the Church to the greatest extent: "The diaconate may be reinstated in the future as an autonomous and permanent step of the hierarchy." You have set for yourselves the task of deepening the Council's doctrine on diaconate and have also reflected on the formation and the tasks of the deacon, celibate or married, according to the multiplicity of conditions in different countries. Who does not see the great importance that the diakonia can have in our Christian communities, in the proclamation of the Word of God as well as in the service of the sacraments and in the exercise of charity? For this reason the pastors in charge will carefully select the new deacons and give them the best spiritual, theological, professional and pastoral formation for even if it is very appropriate to take into account very different ways of life according to each particular case, it remains true that only the pious and zealous deacon, living from the Gospel, can offer the bishops

¹⁸ loc.cit., p.11

¹⁹ Quoted in M.Morche, Erneuerung, p.46.

and priests the brotherly help which they expect from him for the greater good of the people of God entrusted to their care.

Venerable brothers and beloved sons, may the almighty God stimulate your work with His grace to his greater glory and for the growth of His kingdom. Surely, the Council acted in accordance with a providential inspiration of the Holy Spirit when it decided to renew the original ministry of diaconate at the service of the People of God. Now the hour has come for this decision of the Council to be put into practice. May Stephen the first deacon, Lawrence the martyr and all the deacon saints of the Church keep watch from heaven on those who are preparing themselves to receive the Holy Ordination to the diaconate and may the Lord bless all those who, following His call wish to service the people of God following their traces and their example. This is Our heartfelt wish!

From all Our heart We impart Our special apostolic blessing as a guarantee of the fullness of God's grace (Pope Paul VI)²⁰

The International Diaconate Circle, already before the Council, came to have an enormous amount of tasks. For this reason, even before the studies conference—during the council—one came to the logical decision to found an International Information Centre for Diaconate Issues. This should “be at the service of all those who deal with the practical and theoretical problems concerning the diaconate, by means of an exchange of information and suggestions”²¹. This marked the foundation of the International Diaconate Centre. It had its headquarters in the building of the German Caritas Association in Freiburg. Its first president was the Secretary General of the GCA, Georg Hüssler, PhD, and H. Kramer was elected as its first secretary. Even before the beginning of the audience Pope Paul VI was informed about the Congress and the founding of the International Diaconate Centre. Pope Paul VI expressed agreement and encouraged further work.

Later that same year the Centre began sending out information. Models for formation were compiled; the first issue of the *Diaconia Christi* Magazine was published in 1966. In 1968 the first major diaconal conference took place in San Miguel, Argentina. Planned by the CELAM it was prepared jointly with the IDC. Five years after the foundation, the statistics are not so encouraging as originally expected. At the time there were 97 deacons: 2 in Algeria, 9 in Belgium, 13 in Brazil, 8 in Cameroon, 9 in Chile, 5 in France 45 in Germany, 2 in India, 1 in Indonesia, 1 in Paraguay and 2 in South Africa.

In the year 1969, the International Diaconate Centre was given the legal form of a registered non-profit association. In the previous four years, the Centre had proven its importance most impressively. Now came the time for its legal consolidation. The structure of the first Board corresponded to the international and ecumenical objective and orientation. The IDC, which from the very beginning has found many supporters and road companions, was also confronted with many financial impasses. Beside the publication of the magazine, it acts in an advisory capacity all over the world; it publishes guidelines for the implementation of the diaconate, supports publications, organizes conferences, forces ecumenical co-operation.

The co-operation and support soon gained an international character and global dimensions; so, for example, as soon as 1970, a questionnaire was sent to the leaders of the African Bishops' Conference: Is there a place for diaconate in the Churches of Africa? In November of the same year,

²⁰ *Diaconia XP*, 1 (1966), p. 13-15

²¹ G. Hüssler, H. Kramer, VI. Treffen der Mitglieder und Freunde der Diakonatskreise, in: *Diaconia Christi* (1966), 2, p. 97.

a Studies' Conference was organized in Belgium, in the years around 1970, the IDC offered its assistance to many Bishops' Conferences (CELAM, Brazil, Chile, Columbia, Argentina, Canada, USA, Italy, France, France, Cameroon, Africa, Switzerland). In Pianezza, Italy, a Studies' Conference was organized in 1977, in 1978 a Symposium on Diaconate for Women took place in Freiburg. The International Diaconate Conference was hosted by Belgium in 1979.

In the Board, A. Gondan replaced H. Kramer in 1979. Various financial difficulties eventually lead to a change of headquarters **in late 1992, the IDC moved from Freiburg to Rottenburg-Stuttgart. Bishop W. Kasper integrated the IDC in the structures of his diocese;** all the while, in agreement with the IDC Board, he sought the official recognition by the Church. This was granted by the German Bishops' Conference in 1994.

On Holy Thursday of the same year, 1994, H. Kramer gave an interview in which he speaks about the beginnings of his vocation and those of the diaconate movement. What is still relevant, after all those years? Given that even the written word is still imbued with some of the charism that this pioneer brought with himself, we would like to quote here a brief excerpt from that interview. In it, **Hannes Kramer says:**

"However, there is also, a fundamental criterion of the diaconate which the Church as a whole adopted in the council: 'ordained not for the priesthood, but for service'. For the service of Jesus, at the tables of the poor, in –as I like to say- diaconal Church. **Has the Church as a whole converted to a God of the poor, to a Church of the poor and small ones, of the sick and enslaved ones?** Even in her proclamation of the Gospel, in her *diakonia*, in her approach to her own riches and to power? **What does this mean 'concretely' today...in our context: To be able to see with the eyes of the other, of the asylum-seeker, of the immigrant, to see the 'other Christ' in him and act accordingly? We deacons are still on the way towards that, together with our Church.**

Moreover; are the criteria from that time still valid today? As early as 1952, in the first Diaconate Circle... we formulated 'nine principles for the ordained diaconate'. Do these have anything to say to the deacons of today? The most important: 'Diaconate is a vocation'. To what, from whom?

'To be pervaded by God's love for all people' which also includes the 'others', non-Christians and foreigners and loving them in our concrete actions. 'To strengthen the spirit of Christian charity' and to stimulate, as well as perform oneself, such works as would correspond to it, as 'main'(but not only) task; this is what we set as the objective of the service. A modern welfare/social work formation, together with a thorough religious/catechetical formation were, for those times, a somewhat high standard as a pre-requisite for the service. In a nutshell: called, educated, competent in the social-diaconal field, spiritually well-formed, preserved in the family, chosen by the parish community, sent out and commissioned by the bishop. What of all that still has a meaning today, what doesn't and why? In our criteria, we were surely closer to Acts 6, 1-7- precisely because of their example character, than Vatican II with its catalogue of tasks (drafted, back then, by Bishop Kloppenburg, based on his memories of the lack of priests in Brazil). The deacon should live and work in the midst of the Christian people; that, for us, meant being a deacon existentially and not just functionally, 'not different in anything on the outside', 'marriage should be the natural state'- without thereby touching celibacy as a charism in all the different states, including diaconate.

For the young diaconate movement-and for those young men and their wives-the following was important, above all: *Diakonia*, charity, love of one's neighbour should be newly understood and lived in the parish communities not only as an essential ecclesial action, beside and together with liturgy and proclamation-this also; not merely as the task of the Caritas association, as a free

organization of social care-this also; **but primarily as a fundamental ecclesial dimension of the Christian life of faith and community life** ('the Seven'). A fundamental dimension means that the community services are intertwined, that they sustain the life of the community and that none of these acts, especially charity/diakonia can be split off or evacuated from the community without damage to the same. Logically, we wanted a church whose treasure is the poor (St. Lawrence), we wanted our own conversion to a simple life, full of respect for the poor and we also wanted the conversion of the Church as a whole (St. Francis of Assisi). Love to all, especially to the poor, service of the Church in the midst of society meant that the agenda of the Church had to be determined by the agenda of the world and its human and social needs. **As Karl Rahner would have it-and seconding one of Klaus' fundamental ideas: 'The primary act of love towards God is love towards one's neighbour'** (Karl Rahner). ...

The Church and the parish community should see the signs of the times and carry out their service of reconciliation in the light of the Gospel, primarily with the weak and the poor, for the life of the world, in order to save, not to judge (Jn. 12, 47). Today, one would speak, in the terms of liberation theology, about the Church turning towards the poor, about the preferential option for the poor, perhaps also about liberation from one's own chains of dependence of the social and individual power systems. For us, then, it was not so important to reinstate a ministry and secure a place for it in the organizational structure of the Church. I hope that this will not become too big of a worry for the deacons, to the extent that they establish and install themselves in that structure. Getting involved in this could become a bondage and bring an end to our cause. " ²²

4. Testamentum Domini- A Source Text from the Heyday of the Diaconate

A document from the heyday of the diaconate impressively confirms the unity between love of God and charity and situates at the centre of this context the deacon as a symbol of the Church.

Entitled The Lord's Testament (or, as it is most often called in Latin, Testamentum Domini), it is a Church Order text from the Syrian area, written in the 5th century and presumably the last community constitution of the Late Antiquity.

Let us listen to the three fragments of this document which are relevant for our topic; they give us an insight into the form the diaconate had and tell of the importance it had for the Church and for the ordained ministry within it:

I.34, 1 First, let him (the deacon) do only those things which are commanded by the bishop as for proclamation; and let him be the counsellor of the whole clergy, and the mystery [sacrament] of the Church; who ministereth to the sick, who ministereth to the strangers, who helpeth the widows, who is the father of the orphans, who goeth about all the houses of those that are in need, lest any be in affliction or sickness or misery.

So, in the flourishing period of the diaconate, the deacon was closely connected to his bishop and received his assignments from the latter. The very close link between the two ranks, repeatedly formulated by tradition, appears here as well. The deacon is, at the same time, an advisor to the whole clergy. This astonishingly strong appreciation for the role of the deacon was, however, even in those times, not unopposed. Quite contrary to what we read here, several related Church order

²² M. Morche, Erneuerung, p. 215 sq.

documents state clearly that the deacon is not the advisor of the whole clergy. The formula preserved in the *Testamentum Domini* appears to be archaic and original.²³ Hierarchical disputes seem to have marked the interaction between the ranks at all times, although in this case it is not about standing. The deacon becomes the advisor of the clergy and a symbol of the Church, due to his ministry of charity, his care for the forgotten ones, for the lost and the poor, for the widows and the orphans-which were marked typologically also in earlier times as altar of God-to whom he offers his help and love. In his charitable service, the deacon becomes, to some extent, a symbol of the Church-surely, the most impressive statement the document makes about the deacon. Through his care for the suffering, from his ministry comes a “non-verbal sort of ‘advice’. An advice like that which comes from an ‘icon’ which one looks up to and from which one can read what one can be and remain.”²⁴ Let us listen once again to the Testament of the Lord; for us Europeans it has, in this point, a striking and almost pressing relevance:

I.34,3 If he be in a city on the seashore, let him go quickly about the place on the seashore, lest there be any one dead in the sea; let him clothe him and bury him. Similarly also let him search out the guest house, lest there be any one who is staying in the place sick or in need or dead; and let him make it] known to the church, so that it may provide what is right for each one.

And then comes the often quoted and extremely evocative image:

I.35 Let him be in everything as the eye of the Church, with fear admonishing, so that he may be an example to the people of piety.

The deacon should be the eye of the Church! Even today, many deacons, exercising their ministry in such diverse places, in different regions of the world, receive inspiration from these words. The eye of loving care, the eye of pastoral sensitivity, which recognizes people’s needs, raises the awareness of the Christian community and of other ministers, motivating them to react adequately to it. As always, the deacon feels indebted to people; their plight gives him no rest, even if he may not be able to immediately eliminate or alleviate their need. In the spirit of loving care, meekness and generosity, which was invoked upon him at his ordination, he represents the one who came to seek and save what was lost (Lk. 19, 10). “Against this backdrop...the liturgical functions of the deacon gain their initially conceived sense of ‘coronation’ ”²⁵ In this spirit he gives a voice to the voiceless ones in our society, he becomes a prophet who speaks the truth and demands justice!

According to *Testamentum Domini*, the deacon is and advisor to the whole clergy, he becomes the eye of the Church in her care for people in need and he is closely connected to his bishop. His open visor is filled by at least one concrete task, the picture gets a frame from which it must not fall: the care for widows and orphans, for those in need, for the sick and the poor. He cannot possibly be dispensed of that if he wants to be and to stay a symbol of the Church.

At this point, I would like to interrupt my talk and invite you to have a conversation with each other. We have prepared some questions for you in order to inspire your discussion.

5. Ministerial Theological Models

²³ Cf. Fischer 2000, page 196

²⁴ Fischer 2000, page 202.

²⁵ Fischer 2000, p. 201.

Talking to many deacons in Germany, but also in other countries, one preoccupation is recurrent: is the openness and flexibility the strength and the trademark of the diaconate? Or is it in fact a confirmation of the marginal character of this rank of the hierarchy? Isn't the deacon sinking in an ocean of diffused expectations on the part of parishes, local Church, pastoral plans and episcopal considerations? Does he have the role of a mere assistant, gap-stopper, girl Friday? Does the diaconate suffer from too little own competence, does the deacon who depends on a parish priest actually lose his place and his independence?

The still unclarified questions concerning a theology of the diaconate find one of their bases in the theological fluctuations of the Council texts which refer to the diaconate. Not negligible, in this regard, the ambivalent ecclesiology of the Council²⁶ which makes room for various ministerial theological models and options. I would like to present them to you now.

5.1 The deacon is the priest's helper – the hierarchical model

The hierarchically structured ministerial model draws from the classical ministerial terminology and ascribes to the deacon the lowest level of the sacramental ministries and hence the position of assistant to the other two.²⁷

The sacramental representation of Christ, the Head of his Church, pertains to the life of the Church as a sacrament. Presbyters and bishops, succeeding the Apostles, symbolically make present Christ, the Priest and Shepherd. We see these two ranks fused together in the late writings of the New Testament, so much so that we can assume an initial identity of the two. Therefore, since the beginning there was, in the local Church, an episcopal-presbyteral college. The president thereof, i.e. the bishop, and his presbyterium receive a group of persons as their subordinates, officially called deacons. The deacon represents the level of the office of service; his task is first and foremost to help and serve the leadership ministry of the bishop and of his presbyterium. He receives the imposition of hands for the service in the fundamental fields of *martyria*, *diakonia* and *leiturgia* and represents the service of the head to the body.

The hierarchical, level-structured model places the deacon in the unity of the sacramental ministries as an ordained assistant. A fundamental factor in the Council texts, which sometimes shimmers through them, is a certain hierarchical-judicial understanding of the Church. The *sacerdotium* constitutes the core of a sacrament of Holy Orders defined by its authority. The bishop and the presbyterium have a share in it.

It arouses scepticism that the deacon hardly finds a place between the hierarchical priesthood endowed with cultic-sacerdotal authority and the universal priesthood of all the faithful. How can one prove, anyway, within the scope of sacramental understanding of ministry which operates on basis of authority, the sacramentality of a rank which is not endowed with any explicit authority coming from the ordination itself? Consequently, the very sacramentality of the diaconate should be questioned.

Moreover, the deacon appears before the community as an ordained assistant as if, the ordination would bring about a qualitative change in the ministries which were already exercised. But why must the deacon be ordained if what he performs are just some diaconal functions which he could perform even without the ordination? Does that not lead to a theological lack of importance of the

²⁶ Cf. H. J. Pottmeyer, Die zwiespältige Ekklesiologie des Zweiten Vaticanums – Ursachen nachkonziliarer Konflikte, in: TThZ 92 (1983), 272-283.

²⁷ Cf. G. L. Müller, Die Einheit der drei Ordostufen im apostolischen Ursprung, in: LebZeug 57 (2002), 14-21.

diaconate? Moreover, the model presupposing the authority of consecration and absolution as reserved to the sacerdotium seems to be justifying the sacramentality of the ministry. But this theological option was actually rejected by the Council. Therefore, many theologians are inclined to favour the complementary ministerial model.

5.2. The deacon acts in the person of Christ the Servant – the complementary ministerial model

Immediately after the Council, the first attempts at a complementary interpretation of the ministry started to appear. From then on and up to the present day, they have received ever-new accents and, in many local Churches, they became the basis for the formation of permanent deacons and the way they are utilized.

The departure point for this model, one which has been stressed by, among others, Cardinal Kasper during his tenure Bishop of Rottenburg-Stuttgart, is the sacramental fullness of Holy Orders which resides in the episcopate. It is the episcopate and not the sacerdotium which represents the construction point of ministry. Deacons and presbyters share in the one and only sacramental order in their own specific way. Both are collaborators of the bishop and act locally as his representatives. That is to say, the bishop, the presbyter and the deacon all have, in different ways, a share in the one mission of Jesus Christ. In accordance with the new approach of the Council, all are instituted for the good of the Body as a whole, of the People of God. The structuring of the Ordo is realized through the different shares in the fullness of Jesus' mission.

This model draws from the Council's *communio*-ecclesiology and infers from it a differently accented general representation of the one mission of Jesus Christ. The deacon has a smaller share than the presbyter in the sacramental fullness given to the bishop.²⁸ He is ordained for service (*ad ministerium*). Unlike the presbyter who represents Christ the Head of the Church (*repraesentatio Christi capitis ecclesiae*) the diaconate can be described as *repraesentatio Christi diaconi*. The deacon represents the bishop locally and, in cooperation with the priest, he is given the responsibility of leadership in the social-diaconal field, in which he inspires and motivates people for the parish level diakonia.²⁹ At the same time, his ministry is exercised in the three respectively four fundamental actions of the community (*martyria, leiturgia, diaconia, koinonia*). The presbyters represent the bishop locally, they represent Christ as the Head of the Church in the function of community leader and presiding over the Eucharist.

At this point, the serious tension inherent to this model becomes manifest. What we see in practice is that locally there is also a subordination of the deacon to the leadership ministry of the presbyter which generally results in a formal and practical subordination. Given the multiplicity of pastoral necessities, he is quickly relegated to the position of a diffuse gap-stopper, or mere assistant of the community leader, his autonomy is almost absorbed. The community models³⁰ – which continue to be weak with regards to diakonia could be a contributor to the situation that social-diaconal tasks are seen as but a marginal appearance in the broad field of classical ministry.

²⁸ Lumen Gentium 29 speaks of the ordination "*non ad sacerdotium sed ad ministerium*".

²⁹ Cf. W. Kasper, Der Diakon in ekklesiologischer Sicht angesichts der gegenwärtigen Herausforderungen in Kirche und Gesellschaft, in: *Diaconia Christi* 32 (1997), ¾, 13-33

³⁰ Cf. in this regard the instructive article by I. Baumgartner, "Seht, wie sie einander lieben". Wirkmächtig oder folgenlos? Überlegungen zu einer diakonischen Pastoral, in: P. Klasvogt, H. Pompey (Hg.), *Liebe bewegt ... und verändert die Welt*, Paderborn 2008, 99-112.

The episode of the washing of the feet from the Gospel of John (Jn. 13, 1-20) becomes in this model the quality of an institutional narrative for the diaconate. What is specific to the diaconate should be recognized in a basic attitude of service. But we must make the critical remark that the inner unity between grandeur and lowliness is broken. Christologically, to serve and to rule are closely linked. "Serving is the true way of ruling and lets one sense something from God's way of lordship, from the 'rule of God'."³¹ The Gospel of John reads: "You call me 'teacher' and 'master,' and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet (Jn. 13,13.14). "To separate, in the ministerial action in the person of Christ the Head and service and make from the two a differentiating principle, does not seem plausible from this perspective".³² Christ as Lord is everybody's servant and in his service, in his pro-existent way of being, he manifests Himself as Lord. Acting in his name is always concomitantly an "*agere in persona Christi capitis et diaconi*".

5.3. The Bishop's ministry in communion with the priests and the deacons

A third model simply draws from the Council's statements and from ministerial experiences made in various regions of the world. In addition, it takes the findings of traditions seriously. The documents show a variety of interactions between the ranks of hierarchy. In matters of informative value, they are like a kaleidoscope which presents a new picture every time it is powerfully shaken. The theologian, later Cardinal Kasper is certain: "the historical variations, as well as the multiple lines of development in ministerial theology as well as the theological fluctuations in the Council texts show that the Church is free, 'to rethink the shape of the Church's ministry in accordance with the needs of the concrete Church and of the historic present'".

As the Council says: "For the nurturing and constant growth of the People of God, Christ the Lord instituted in His Church a variety of ministries (*varia ministeria*), which work for the good of the whole body." (Lumen Gentium 18,1) The ministries, therefore, are measured according to the good of the people. The ministers are not primarily dignitaries but they protect the dignity of all. Vatican II's motivation reads: "for those who are endowed with holy authority (*sacra potestas*) are at the service of their brothers". From time immemorial these are bishops, priests and deacons. "Bishops enjoy the fullness of the sacrament of orders." (Christus Dominus 15,1; cf. also Lumen Gentium 21,2). "Bishops with their helpers, the priests and deacons, have taken up the service (*ministerium*) of the community (Lumen Gentium 20,3). So we see neither the word *sacerdotium* used exclusively for bishops and priests – Klaus already touched on this point – nor the word *ministerium* used exclusively in the case of deacons!

These thoughts lead to a bi-polar ministerial model. In the Council documents, furthermore, the idea of *communio* serves to characterize ecclesial features both a universal and at a local level. It also characterizes, therefore, the relationship between presbyters and deacons in the bi-polar connection between presbyterate and diaconate, these features find their ministerial-ecclesial reflection. The diaconate is an independent rank of the hierarchy which has a particular closeness to the social-diaconal field. It follows that each parish should have a deacon as well as a presbyter.

I shall not conceal the fact that this is my favourite model. I am convinced that a fruitful future for the diaconate depends on whether or not the ordained ministries will develop a *communio*-type way of coexistence which would ensure that the deacon does not remain forever the younger brother, which always has to listen to the elder ones.

³¹ J. Ratzinger, *Jesus von Nazareth*, Freiburg 2006, 381ff.

³² Such is also the unambiguous statement by Müller (2004), 80.

6. Perspectives

In its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, the Council resolutely formulates the missionary task of the Church: "Christ was sent by the Father "to bring good news to the poor, to heal the contrite of heart", "to seek and to save what was lost". Similarly, the Church encompasses with love all who are afflicted with human suffering and in the poor and afflicted sees the image of its poor and suffering Founder. It does all it can to relieve their need and in them it strives to serve Christ." (*Lumen Gentium* 8). In his first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*³³, Benedict XVI also reminds, referring to the Discourse on the Last Judgement from the Gospel of Matthew (Mt. 25, 31-46) of God's presence in the poor and marginalized. For him, the parable entails Jesus' identification with the needy and the unity between love of God and love of one's neighbour. Jesus comes to meet us in the least ones and in Jesus God comes to meet us.³⁴ And referring to 1 John, 4, 20, Benedict XVI states: "The unbreakable bond between love of God and love of neighbour is emphasized. One is so closely connected to the other that to say that we love God becomes a lie if we are closed to our neighbour or hate him altogether. Saint John's words should rather be interpreted to mean that love of neighbour is a path that leads to the encounter with God, and that closing our eyes to our neighbour also blinds us to God."³⁵

The Church's ministry is, from the very beginning, a ministry to the mission of the Church. Just like the Lord, by his whole existence, lived in closeness to God and closeness to people, the unconditional discipleship of the community lives out of an all-encompassing solidarity as an unconditional being-for-the-other. The remembrance and the proclamation of the equality and indissoluble connection between love of God and love of one's neighbour constitute, therefore a fundamental task of the ordained ministry. This dual essential structure of the Church could also be reflected in the sacramental-ministerial structures by the equality of the presbyteral and diaconal ranks.³⁶

Our plea is aiming at making Jesus' identification with the coming Judge of the World (Mt.25, 31-46) the fundamental departure point for the determination of ministerial identity. The deacon would then advocate for the sacramental value of the others, of the suffering and the forgotten. It is in them that Christ comes to meet us. The Church itself cannot forsake the service to the poor any more than it can forsake the Eucharistic communion to her Lord without losing the very core of her identity. But it is exactly this mission that the Church has constantly been in danger to forget, marginalise, pronounce as mere preparatory work or exclude from the job description of ordained ministry. Is there a loftier task for the deacon as to remind everyone that God Himself comes to meet us in those who suffer?

³³ Enzyklika *Deus caritas est* von Papst Benedikt XVI. an die Bischöfe, an die Priester und Diakone, an die gottgeweihten Personen und an alle Christgläubigen über die christliche Liebe, Bonn 2006 (VApS 171 Nr. 24), 24.

³⁴ Cf. DCE 15

³⁵ DCE 16

³⁶ Cf. in this respect the ministerial-theological explanations of O. Fuchs *Das kirchliche Amt*, in: the same., N. Greinacher et al. (Editors), *Der pastorale Notstand. Notwendige Reformen für eine zukunftsfähige Kirche*, Düsseldorf 1992, 67-96; the same., *Martyria und Diakonia: Identität kirchlicher Praxis*, in: H. Haslinger (Ed.), *Praktische Theologie*, Vol. 1, Grundlegung, Mainz 1999, 178-197.

