
Deacony – Presence in the Spirit of God’s Solidarity

Diakonija – klātbūtne Dieva solidaritātes garā

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In his speech – delivered by Dr. Klaus Kießling at the ceremony of bestowment of the title of *Doctor honoris causa* at Latvian Christian Academy on June 20, 2014, in Jūrmala, Latvia, – Klaus Kießling reveals the spirituality, theology and practice of the Church’s Deacony to the people in need in Twelve Steps, seeing it as the presence in the spirit of God’s solidarity.

First step: *Spirituality*. Second step: *Solidarity*. Third step: *Solidarity as Place-Taking*. Fourth step: *Church as the First Place of Place-Taking*. Fifth step: *Baptism*. Sixth step: *Mission of the Church*. Seventh step: *Jesus Christ as THE Place-Taker*. Eighth step: *Prayers of Intercession*. Ninth step: *Deacons as Men of Prayer*. Tenth step: *Spirituality of Place-Taking*. Eleventh step: *Deacons as Place-Takers for the Poor*. Twelfth step: *Presence in the Spirit of God’s Solidarity*.

The essence of Deacony is expressed by the principle of solidarity as Place-Taking, where solidarity is beholden to the biblical notion of place-taking – in the sense that human beings stand up for each other. Solidarity does not claim to take away the place held by the person who is the object of our solidarity, but instead it gives that person room to express his own being. Place-taking means an engagement that does not replace the other person but instead sets him free. Place-taker does not reduce the other person to a null. In his love, place-taker does not force anything but he hopes for the person who has lost his ability to hope. He gives time to others to return to his or her place, to regain their powers, skills and hope for life. In that way to the mission of the Church – via deacons as place-takers – belongs advocacy for the poor and the oppressed, as well as the duty to engage itself on the part of the other and to raise its voice for those who have no voice, who go unheard, or have been reduced to silence. Thus Deacony becomes the presence of God to the people in need through solidarity of believers in the sufferings and needs of others.

Key words: deacony, solidarity, place-taking, prayers of intercession, place-takers for poor, spirituality of place-taking.

Ladies and Gentlemen, respected colleagues, dear friends, sisters and brothers in our ecumenical Christianity, before giving you my lecture, I would very much like to express my gratefulness. You invited me to come back to the Latvian Christian Academy, which I got to know when the Academy was a child of six years, a very vital and inspired child living in this privileged place where students are trained to do social work with underprivileged persons. You moved heaven and earth so that this child of six years could grow up in the open. I came back later on to see an adolescent Academy, and this year it is celebrating its maturity. Children grow up and show the others how time flies. A short while ago I felt sure that such a ceremony as it happens today is reserved for elder or even eldest persons. Now it happens to me, and I see once again how time flies. But it looks quite comfortable that time does not just fly, but also gives me the chance to fly back to Latvia and to all of you. In this joy, I may invite you to accompany me – in twelve steps. The first step is a personal story that happened several years ago.

First Step: Spirituality

During a family worship service for Thanksgiving Day in our parish, the children were assigned to proclaim the Gospel by playing out the story of the miraculous multiplication of the five loaves and two fish. Working to prepare the children for their roles, among them our two sons Ruben and Simon, the teachers proposed that the children should bring the bread and fish to the church. Ruben, our son, took the role of Jesus on the grounds that no one else dared to do so. My wife and I remember well, how Ruben, shortly before the beginning of the liturgy, remarked: “Will the teachers bring real bread and real fish? In any case, the Jesus is real!”

Often I am amazed by the grave questions that children raise, and it is with such questions that I wish to open my lecture about deaconry as presence in the spirit of God’s solidarity.

Persons who describe the spirit they live in and whose spiritual children they are, provide insight into their spirituality. Spiritual life takes place both within and without traditional religiousness, within and without our churches. The churches, however, provide opportunities to locate spiritual experiences within a given horizon and to distinguish between different spirits. My spiritual life shows itself inspired and motivated by forces and impulses which do not stem from within me and which, when they come to me, do not remain with me. To keep this spirit alive I feel urged to share these impulses – with partners in solidarity.

Second Step: Solidarity

Solidarity first achieved systematic theological importance with the Second Vatican Council which took place in the sixties of the last century (*see* the Council’s Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* 4, 32 & 90, and Kießling, 2005), and in point of fact solidarity came to be seen as a category of salvation. The notion of satisfaction paid to God through Jesus’ death on the cross retreated from view: there is no need any more for a sacrifice of expiation to pacify an angry God. In the place of this notion, a new motif of solidarity came to the fore – through the incarnation of God who does not need reconciliation but rather confers it (2 Cor 5:21) (*see* Janowski, 2006). Jesus Christ reveals and accomplishes God’s love and solidarity with human beings and sets them free, with his message of the Kingdom of God, to practice solidarity among themselves.

With God's becoming man, our own becoming human begins. And when the crucified one descends into the realm of death, he enters with his death and through his resurrection into solidarity with the dead and their suffering: in this way he grounds the solidarity among human beings extending beyond the pale of death; in this way he opens up a vision of a world community resting on divine solidarity. Theologically, this vision is directed to a future that escapes human control. It orients itself to a world of life in which the qualities of God have become the qualities of human living.

In this horizon, a globalization of solidarity can be held up against the ever more outreaching brutal globalization of profit, misery and disinterest, as Pope Francis pointed out (*see* New Year Sermon of Pope Francis). The global Church is entrusted as a global player with global prayer. And to its mission belongs advocacy for the poor and the oppressed, as well as the duty to engage itself on the part of other and to raise its voice for those who have no voice, who go unheard, or have been reduced to silence.

Third Step: Solidarity as Place-Taking

Solidarity is beholden to the biblical notion of place-taking – not as if a sacrificial victim were needed in order to appease God, but rather in the sense that human beings stand up for each other. Solidarity does not claim to take away the place held by the person who is the object of our solidarity, but instead it gives that person room to express his own being. Place-taking means an engagement that does not replace the other person but instead sets him free. If you have children, you might think of your role as a parent: in numerous situations you are called upon to represent your children, never in the sense that you replace them, but rather in the sense that you strengthen them to exercise themselves the role you are now acting for them.

Benedict XVI used the term “deacony of place-taking” (Ratzinger, 1970, 129). Alluding to the story of Moses and to the Suffering-Servant Songs, he wrote “that the idea of place-taking is one of the most fundamental notions of the biblical testimony. Thus its rediscovery can help Christianity in the present moment of world history to a decisive renewal and a deepening of its self-understanding” (Ibid., 137). And the longer I am a deacon, the more the practice of place-taking becomes important for my life – not the least in the hope that in this way a specific form of diaconal spirituality should develop.

Fourth Step: Church as the First Place of Place-Taking

I see the Church as the first place for a form of place-taking that makes it possible to take up responsibility in the world. The church acts as the place-taker for all peoples before God and also as the place-taker of the no longer present Jesus Christ for and before all human beings.

In the mission of the Church, the content of the message remains the measuring stick on which all the witnesses have to orient themselves. “You can evangelize only what you love with all your heart” (Schalück, 2002, 86). After all, our faith is not the condition for God's love; faith is rather the disclosure that God loves everyone unconditionally – so much that we can change, become transformed, just as we, when we are in love, feel changed; and when we love, everything opens up in new dimensions, even the things we have known for a long time. We don't have to change as a precondition of becoming children of God; we are children of God from the very beginning. But what is then the sense of baptism?

Fifth Step: Baptism

After a baptismal remembrance ceremony I asked this question to my son Simon, the youngest in our family, and he had this to say: "It is important that one doesn't only think that the child is a beloved child of God, but that one also tells it to him; that all children are told that. Because then the children can be sure of it. And also if you love a child you have to tell him that many times and remind him of that so that the child doesn't forget it, and my baptism, I can't remember that, can I? That's why one tells the child not only as a baby that God loves him and that he is God's beloved child, but also later, over and over again when he can understand it by himself when he isn't a baby any more and would not forget it." I go on to ask him about the unbaptized children and Simon already tired, lying in bed, becomes lucid again: "Why Dad, they are also God's beloved children, all children! With or without baptism! But baptism is important so that they all know it – as a sign! Now you know it, Dad, good night!"

To accept and express the quality of children of God – that is the sense of baptism. And mission is about being children of God. As Father, Son, and Spirit, God is relationship. God's mystery lives as relation and in relation: without the spiritual dependence and rootedness of mission in the love of God, which overcomes all boundaries, mission would degenerate into a mere human creation fraught with barriers.

Sixth Step: Mission of the Church

The Church does not exercise mission of its own accord. Rather it is indebted to the sending of Jesus Christ and prolongs this sending with all its powers. The Church lives through those who give witness to what they themselves have experienced. The experience of being accepted and loved without reservation can only live on, when human beings regard this experience not as something stolen to be kept to themselves but rather as something to be shared with their fellow human beings. Mission aims at the sharing of the Gospel.

The Church pursues mission neither of its own accord nor for its own sake (*see* Hilberath, 2006); instead it undertakes mission for the sake of those whose dignity is abused and who most need our solidarity – regardless of whether or not they belong to the Church. The final goal is not the Church, but the Kingdom and God's solidarity, "in order that God's ways be known on earth and his salvation among all peoples" (Ps 67:3) (*see* Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz, 2004).

Seventh Step: Jesus Christ as *the* Place-Taker

Human beings are irreplaceable, otherwise they would be betrayed. But for whom am I irreplaceable? I am irreplaceable only for those who love me – as long as they continue to love me. I am not made irreplaceable of my own nature, but only inasmuch as I remain dependent upon others. I am irreplaceable for those who put their hopes in me. And precisely at this point I can accept myself in my own weakness, without despairing because of it. But here I am and I remain – consciously or unconsciously – dependent upon the place-taker, who took a stand for me without reducing me to a null.

"If one looks for the structures of lived out place-taking, one cannot get around asking about Christ, namely in what sense should we describe the place-taking that the concrete person of Jesus freely performs for all" (Sölle, 2006, 88). My place-taker believes, hopes and loves in my place because I cannot believe, cannot hope,

cannot love, but he does not replace me in such a way that I no longer count. On the contrary, he goes ahead and I follow, and others follow because time and again he turns around and looks at us. By seeing us, he gives us standing. He suffers with and for those who do not keep up. In his love, the place-taker does not force anything but he hopes for everything. He gives time to others to return to his or her place. He does not force him or her to do so, but hopes for him or her. Love is place-taking as hope. The place-taker lets himself become dependent, knowing that he cannot effect the object of his hope; but it is precisely in this kind of powerlessness that he is free to love.

Eighth Step: Prayers of Intercession

On the cross, Christ spoke a prayer for the criminals, who had been crucified with him: “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk 23:34). With this prayer, Jesus opens up for us the possibility of making prayers of intercession and thus becoming Christ for our neighbors. Prayers of intercession mark the liturgical place for the exercise of a spirituality of Christian place-taking.

To illustrate this point, I cite the experience of a woman who went through a depressive disorder she calls a vale of tears: “Initially, in the darkest hours, faith no longer played any role for me. My intelligence and my will could continue to affirm it, but for my heart it was out of reach. Faith was no comfort, no answer to despairing, to torturing questions, no help, when I knew nothing more to do. On the contrary! Instead of faith bearing me up, I had to bear up faith. Yet in one sense, it was a help: in rare, but comforting moments, it meant a lot to me, that others were praying for the sick, for me... That in fact really did comfort me and enabled me to sleep somewhat better than I otherwise would have expected. It was not so much my own faith as the faith of others and the prayers of others that played a role in my path of recovery” (Weber-Gast, 1978, 32f).

Ninth Step: Deacons as Men of Prayer

As *the* place-taker, Jesus Christ enables us to take each other’s places (*see* Fuchs, 2006, 257). And in our prayers of intercession, we include all those who have lived before us and who are thus not forgotten. Likewise, we have the saints – as intercessors for ourselves and for each other.

When someone bears another’s burden (Gal 6:2), it can happen that the few people assembled pray for the many who are not present. And, in reverse, those active in the world intercede for those who live contemplatively. Whole communities are connected with each other, local churches and world-wide communities – in mutual place-taking. It means a lot to me, that, somewhere in the world, someone is praying for me – and I for him or her.

Deacons are men of prayer, as my spiritual advisor likes to insist. But what happens, when I experience nothing in prayer, when I do not make contact with the mystery of my life? When I lament, when I perhaps cry out? Is my prayer then not already an act of freedom, freedom from all that I am involved in? Is my prayer then not an expression of my firm decision, not to settle down with things as they are but rather, with a passion, to see things with eyes open, to let myself be changed and to change things myself? Is my prayer then not a sign of hope, that my heart will be wide open and that I will find the power to take things on with ready hands? In short, to live my life differently, so that others can live?

Tenth Step: Spirituality of Place-Taking

In all that, however, I remain dependent upon the blessing, on the grace not to have to remind myself of the source of my life but instead to let myself fall into God's lap: "By the same token, the one who blesses looks away from himself. For he does not himself stand for the promise he expresses. He plays a game, for whose rules and outcome he himself gives no guarantee. That is the humility of the one who blesses: he gives something, which he does not have himself, and his own nakedness does not deter him from going all out and giving God as a promise. The one who blesses is a poor bookkeeper: he draws up no balance and he spends more than he has. He does not say only what he himself can account for, and he does not promise only what he himself can fulfill. It is thus not just the one who is blessed, but also the one who gives the blessing who must let himself fall: the blessing in language and gesture is larger than their hearts" (Steffensky, 20016, 180).

And even when the faith of the one giving the blessing and the one receiving it is weak, both of them can take out a loan on the faith of their sisters and brothers, living and dead. This is spirituality of place-taking – in a world of grace, in which this very grace lives and in which the impossible becomes possible.

Eleventh Step: Deacons as Place-Takers for the Poor

When my life threatens to sink into darkness, I need someone who can become a light for me, someone who – despite everything – puts his or her hope in me and in the possibilities of God. I need a person who temporarily and in my place constructs a bridge over the chasm between sorrow filled life on the one side and hopes on the other. Only when I can feel, that someone else has confidence in me and in my future, that there is someone who cautiously keeps the spark of hope alive in me, only then am I able to recover hope again. Hope makes life possible – for that reason it is necessary that others hope for me, until I myself again become hopeful. Loving nearness and fidelity can open up a new space and time for my own hoping and can point the way to light out of the all-destroying darkness.

Deacons see themselves as place-takers for the poor – whom they do not replace or drive away from their given place, but rather stand up for them. Jesus Christ does not live in a one-way street running from the clergyman, for example the deacon, to those in need; on the contrary, we are all in need and we are all Christ to each other (*see* Mannermaa, 1989, 171). Christ gives us himself in bread and wine. We become bread and drink. We become for each other bread for the hunger and drink for the thirst that others feel. It is the diaconal character of the Eucharist that lets God's solidarity come true.

Twelfth Step: Presence in the Spirit of God's Solidarity

In this reciprocal place-taking, we are present for each other – and really present. As with the Thanksgiving Day celebration of my son, we do not know whether the bread and fish are real, but of one thing we are certain: in any case, Jesus is real! Whether or not the others present experienced this little Jesus as real, depends on the attention and the presence of all those involved. And it is precisely this presence in the spirit of God's solidarity, this spirituality of place-taking that counts. Of what use is the real presence of God, when no human being is really present?

Dear colleagues, the Academy was a child when I came here for my very first time, and “if you love a child you have to tell him that many times and remind him of that so that the child doesn’t forget it”, as Simon told. Therefore take my presence as a sign of love for the Latvian Christian Academy and for you all present today. Thank you very much for your attention.

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Diakonija – klātbūtne Dieva solidaritātes garā

Kopsavilkums

Savā runā, ko Dr. Klauss Kīslings (Vācija) nolasīja Latvijas Kristīgās akadēmijas *Goda un atzinības doktora* grāda (*Dr. honoris causa*) piešķiršanas ceremonijā Latvijas Kristīgajā akadēmijā Jūrmalā, 2014. gada 20. jūnijā, K. Kīslings ar divpadsmit soļu palīdzību atklāj garīguma, teoloģijas un prakses aspektus Baznīcas Diakonijai, kas ir vērsta uz cilvēkiem vajadzībās, skatot Diakoniju kā klātbūtni Dieva solidaritātes garā.

Pirmais solis: *Garīgums*. Otrais solis: *Solidaritāte*. Trešais solis: *Solidaritāte kā vietnieciskā aizvietošana*. Ceturtais solis: *Baznīca kā vietnieciskās aizvietošanas pirmā vieta*. Piektais solis: *Kristības*. Sestais solis: *Baznīcas misija*. Septītais solis: *Jēzus Kristus kā vietnieciskais Upuris*. Astotais solis: *Aizlūgšanas*. Devītais solis: *Diakoni kā lūdzēji*. Desmitais solis: *Vietnieciskās aizvietošanas garīgums*. Vienpadsmitais solis: *Diakoni kā nabago vietnieki*. Divpadsmitais solis: *Klātbūtne Dieva solidaritātes garā*.

Diakonijas būtību autors izsaka ar solidaritātes principu, kas izpaužas kā vietnieciskā aizvietošana, kurā solidaritāte ir atvasināta no bibliskās izpratnes par vietniecisko aizvietošanu, izprotot to kā cilvēku praksi nostāties un aizstāvēt viens otru. Solidaritāte neuzurpē vietu, ko ieņem cilvēks, kas ir mūsu solidaritātes objekts, bet tā vietā tā sniedz cilvēkam telpu izpaust savu personību. Vietnieciskā aizvietošana nozīmē tādu iesaisti, kas neaizstāj otru cilvēku, bet padara viņu brīvu. Vietnieciskais aizvietotājs nereducē otru cilvēku, viņa spējas, un nepadara to par neko.

Savā mīlestībā vietnieks neko neuzspiež otram, bet viņš cer tā vietā, kas ir zaudējis spēkus un spēju cerēt. Vietnieciskais aizvietotājs dod laiku otram atgriezties savā vietā, atgūt spēkus, atjaunot spējas un atgūt cerību dzīvot. Šādā veidā Baznīcas misija – ar diakonu kā vietniecisko aizvietotāju starpniecību – papildinās ar nabago un apspiesto aizstāvību, kā arī ar pienākumu nostāties to pusē un runāt to vietā, kam nav noteikšanas sabiedrībā, kas dzīvo sabiedrības nesadzirdēti, vai ir spiesti klusēt. Tādējādi Diakonija caur ticīgo solidaritāti citu cilvēku ciešanās kļūst par Dieva klātbūtnes iemiesotāju pie šiem cilvēkiem ciešanās un vajadzībās.

Atslēgvārdi: diakonija, solidaritāte, vietnieciskā aizvietošana, aizlūgšanas, nabago vietnieki, misija, upurēšanās, vietnieciskās aizvietošanas garīgums.



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