

DIAKONIA, THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

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IF VATICAN II has helped Christians to rediscover the real meaning of the Church, it has done so chiefly by attempting to restore the Church's self-understanding as servant. The Church, the *ecclesia*, is called to speak Christ to the nations.¹ The Church exists for the speaking of the word of God that the kingdom may come. This is her primary service, her *diakonia*, and by this mission her vocation is defined. Unless the Church is servant, she has no justification for her existence. She is nothing without *diakonia*, her mission.

The basic reason for the existence of the Church is formulated in the decree on the Apostolate of the Laity:

For this was the Church founded: that by spreading the kingdom of Christ everywhere for the glory of God the Father, she might bring all men to share in Christ's saving redemption; and that through them the whole world might in actual fact be brought into relationship with him.²

This paragraph captures very well that tension which, in the eyes of the man of faith, is moving history forward: the Church existing for the sake of the kingdom.³ How contrary to the essence of the Church are those situations in which she begins to serve herself, to manifest anxiety about her rights, her survival, her prestige, her power, her honour. In such moments she no longer remembers who she is or why she is: the prolongation of Jesus's ministry in the world. She forgets that she is not sent for herself, but to the world. Her self-betrayal is even more evident when she ignores the suffering condition of men, including members of her own community, because her *diakonia* admits of no exceptions.⁴ According to Vatican II,

¹ Cf Mt 28, 19.

² *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 2.

³ A criticism (and one that the writer considers valid) of *Lumen Gentium* is that it did not succeed in differentiating between the Church and the kingdom. In fact, in the document the Church took precedence over the kingdom, despite Jesus's proclamation which presented the kingdom of God as 'the end, the *eschaton*'. Cf Kristen E. Skydsgaard, 'The Church as Mystery and as People of God', in *Dialogue On the Way*, (ed George A. Lindbeck, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1965), pp 167-74.

⁴ *Ad Gentes*, 5.

if she neglects this mission, she is untrue to herself, the servant-Church.

On the other hand, all service is not *diakonia*. Benevolent actions are not *per se* sufficient reason for the existence of the Church. All men are capable of such activity; but the aim of Jesus and his disciples was not to set up human orders in this world. Their main concern was with the kingdom.⁵ What is different about christian service is that it is rooted in the word. To be concerned about the kingdom requires faith, and faith comes through hearing.⁶ As the word is uttered to be heard, listening, obedience and love are integral to *diakonia*, or the christian idea of service. It is *diakonia* which makes the transcendent Word immanent.⁷ It is *diakonia* which tests the Church. It is *diakonia* which extends the kingdom.

God's calling of the Church to service as she makes her pilgrim way to him comes through very clearly at the climatic point of the first chapter of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. Despite ambiguities, and despite the gap between theory and practice, *Lumen Gentium* is a highly important document, for it reveals the Church as other than establishment, hierarchy, controlling force. From these static categories, where she has long stood immobile, the Church emerges dynamically re-interpreted in terms of mystery, pilgrim, communion. Léon Cardinal Suenens pointed out during the second session of Vatican II that, previous to the Council, references to the charisms of the christian people had become so rare as to be practically absent. He comments on the oversight in these words:

A statement about the Church then which would speak only of the apostles and their successors and fail to speak also about prophets and teachers would be defective in a matter of highest importance. It is the duty of pastors to listen carefully and with an open heart to laymen, and repeatedly to engage in living dialogue with them. For each and every layman has been given his own gifts and charisms, and more often than not has greater experience than the clergy in daily life in the world.⁸

⁵ Hermann W. Beyer, 'Diakones, Diakonia, Diakonos', in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed Gerhard Kittel (eng. trans. Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1964), vol III, pp 85-6.

⁶ Rom 10, 17.

⁷ *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, *loc. cit.*, p 86 (cf 2 Cor 5, 18ff). The highest christian office, the proclamation of the gospel, is described as the 'ministry of the word'.

⁸ *Council Speeches of Vatican II*: ed Hans Küng, Yves Congar, Daniel O'Hanlon (Glen Rock, New Jersey, 1964) pp 32-3. This charismatic understanding of the Church, based on the pauline letters (especially 1 Cor and 1 & 2 Thess), is several times revealed in the council documents. Cf e.g. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 1, and *Lumen Gentium*, 8.

We must not imagine, however, that a consideration of charismatic structure will expose the Church's full meaning, helpful as such a consideration is in revealing her dynamic nature; for a complete understanding of all that she is in the divine economy is impossible. The very title of chapter one of *Lumen Gentium* reveals this fact: 'The Mystery of the Church', the mystery of God's active, merciful presence among men for all time.⁹ But, though limited, the view of the Church as charismatic structure is necessary, even indispensable, if we are ever to understand the Church's mission of *diakonia*. For this view sees the Church as the People of God, each member with his special gifts, his charisms entrusted to him for the building up of the whole body in Christ.¹⁰

The first chapter of the Constitution alerts us to the core of Jesus's mission: 'I am in the midst of you as one serving'.¹¹ If the Church wishes to continue that mission, she must have a constant vision of herself as servant. Thus Christ's Church is above all a servant-Church; in fact, the love which marks her as Christ's is ascertained first of all through a recognition of authentic *diakonia*. It is in this same context that the document, in trying to express the reality of the mystery of the Church, lists biblical images which reveal to some extent the Church's inner nature. No one image adequately conveys the reality; but taken together, the images make clear the relationship between Christ and his members, as well as the relationship of member to member. The Church is compared variously to a sheepfold, the chosen vineyard, the edifice of God, the new Jerusalem, and Christ's Body. The use of these images gives us some insight into how we must continue Christ's ministry of service: 'to bring good news to the poor, to heal the contrite of heart',¹² and to seek and 'to save what was lost'.¹³ Because the Church is continuing Jesus's life and ministry on earth she must be pastor, caretaker, builder, a holy community; she must be servant.¹⁴ God calls all men, then, to seek the kingdom by devoting all their being to the salvation of men through the service of their neighbours. Thus the mission of the People of God is *diakonia*. This mission of service is the one reality which best captures the essence of christianity. In a world dominated by the greeks, who affirmed that the most out-

⁹ Cf Gregory Baum, *Commentary on The Constitution on the Church of Vatican Council II* (Glen Rock, New Jersey, 1964), p 18.

¹¹ Lk 22, 27.

¹² Lk 4, 18.

¹⁰ *Lumen Gentium*, 9.

¹³ Lk 19, 10.

¹⁴ Cf *Lumen Gentium*, 8.

standing man, the most fitted, the most ready should rule,¹⁵ the norm proposed in christian circles, that 'the servant is the one who is greatest',¹⁶ was indeed revolutionary. Thus, from the beginning, christians recognized service as the touchstone of true greatness, indeed as the crucial test of discipleship.

In various ways the council fathers challenged christians of today to meet the same demanding standards of discipleship. To all the faithful we hear them say:

Each must apply himself constantly to prayer, self-denial, active brotherly service, and the exercise of all the virtues . . . Hence it is the love of God and neighbour which points out the true disciple of Christ.¹⁷

. . . the unmistakable work of the holy Spirit is making the laity today even more conscious of their own responsibility and inspiring them everywhere to serve Christ and the Church.¹⁸

Seminarians should understand very plainly that they are called not to domination or to honours, but to give themselves over entirely to God's service and the pastoral ministry.¹⁹

'*Diakonia* is both a distinct function of the Church and at the same time inseparable from all other functions of the Church',²⁰ for the mission of the Church, which is one of reconciliation, can be carried out only insofar as her life is a living on of the Servant-Son, the Christ who 'came not to be served, but to serve',²¹ 'that all might be one'.²² Jesus himself, at the meal which inaugurated his new covenant with men, showed his followers for all time the one way to carry on the work of the Son. 'I am in the midst of you as one who serves'.²³ Renewal means nothing if it does not mean recapturing this vision. Christ was the Servant-Son in concrete situations which demanded the concrete responses which we too are called on to make. Thus it is only in evaluating the actual human situation that the Church finds clues or hints which will tell her how and

¹⁵ Plato, *The Republic VI* (trans. B. Jowett, New York, 1941), pp 243-44.

¹⁶ Mt 23, 11.

¹⁷ *Lumen Gentium*, 42.

¹⁸ *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 1.

¹⁹ *Optatum Totius*, 9.

²⁰ *The Role of the Diakonia of the Church in Contemporary Society* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1966), p 19.

²¹ Mt 10, 44. A reference to this passage occurs at least twelve times in the documents of Vatican II. In view of this, it is interesting to note that the recent publication, *Dictionary of the Council* ed. by J. Deretz and A. Nocent (Washington, D.C., 1968), makes no significant mention of the topic 'service': By contrast *Editions du Centurion*, in their *Table Analytique du Concile Oecuménique Vatican II*, devote almost three columns to the topic. The writer wonders if this comparison reflects the attitude of the english-speaking world towards *diakonia*.

²² Jn 17, 22.

²³ Lk 22, 27.

where she must be in order to accomplish her destiny as servant. This continual evaluation is an indispensable means of prolonging the ministry of her Lord into the twentieth century. And essential to such evaluation is dialogue – itself a form of *diakonia*.

Dialogue as Diakonia

A broad basis for the development of a new dimension of service can be found in several places in the council documents. We read, for example, in the constitution on the Church in the modern world:

Their purpose (i.e. of the Council's proposals) is to help men to gain a sharper insight into their full destiny, so that they can fashion the world more into man's surpassing dignity, search for a brotherhood which is universal and more deeply rooted . . .²⁴

Such insight will be achieved only through that dimension of *diakonia* known as dialogue. The first encyclical of Pope Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, explicitly related the mission of the Church ('to make disciples of all nations') to dialogue, that 'external gift of charity', which the Pope calls 'the art of spiritual communication', and which he considers essential to the accomplishment of the apostolic mission.

The Church's obligation to engage in dialogue and the all-inclusiveness of this service is clearly expressed by the holy Father in terms strongly akin to the Vatican II documents:

Speaking in general on the role of partner in dialogue, a role which the catholic Church must take up with renewed fervour today, we should like merely to observe that the Church must ever be ready to carry on the dialogue with men of good will, within and without its own sphere. There is no one who is a stranger to its heart, no one in whom its ministry has no interest. It has no enemies except those who wish to be such.

Thus the Church's mission demands that she converse with the whole of human society. The dialogue in which she engages is a pastoral concern, and all ecclesial bodies should look upon dialogue as a form of *diakonia*, convinced that it is one way in which the Church accomplishes her task: 'to uncover, cherish and ennoble all that is true, good and beautiful in the human community'.²⁵

²⁴ *Gaudium et Spes*, 91.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 76.

To accomplish this particular *diakonia*, the Church first of all must understand that she is both *in* and *with* the world. No dialogue between the Church and the world is possible unless the concern of God's people with humanity is real enough for them to be willing to be involved in the pain and trouble which will inevitably be theirs as a result of carrying out her mission 'to converse with the human society in which she lives'.²⁶

Such willingness has not been a consistent part of the Church's attitude throughout her history. In fact, from the time of Paul, the world has been considered the foe of the christian,²⁷ and rightly so, for the roman world was out to exterminate the christian community.²⁸ The first christians' apocalyptic awareness did colour their world view because they believed that the world was about to be transformed by the returning Christ. Later encounters of the Church and the world tended to obscure the identity of the world, to make it subservient to the Church, to confuse tasks, to foster an ecclesiastical imperialism by the stance of a property-holding, law-making corporation.²⁹ Due to the political power structure of the middle ages, the Church was no longer recognizable by a clear evangelical orientation, and even when the world seemed christian, this was not so much the result of a free decision as something acquired through passive obedience or thrust upon people as their inheritance. Adherence to the Church was often a matter of superstition, routine, the path of least resistance, immaturity or simply fear of the powers that were.³⁰

Enlightenment man outgrew his christianity as many new discoveries about man and his environment erupted in the scientific, political and social revolutions which shaped the history of the world. Earlier pessimism about the 'world' yielded to a new view where progress did not depend upon the Church's direction; for it was the Church who, ironically, failed to see herself involved in the very events which constituted her own as well as the world's history. The sixteenth century reformers took openly aggressive measures to confront the Church concerning her limitations. Their voices have

²⁶ *Christus Dominus*, 13.

²⁷ 2 Cor 6, 14-16.

²⁸ H. Daniel-Rops, *The Church of Apostles and Martyrs* (trans. Audrey Butler, New York, 1960), pp 149-53.

²⁹ Summerfield Baldwin, *The Organization of Medieval Christianity* (Gloucester, Mass., 1962), pp 43-46; 72-75.

³⁰ John R. H. Moorman, *Church Life in England in the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge 1955), pp 74-89; Arthur Mirgeler, *Mutations of Western Christianity* (trans. Edward Quinn, New York, 1964), pp 44-81; 92-102.

re-echoed for four centuries, making the same accusations: the Church had not sufficiently respected man and the value of human endeavour, and, in spite of appearances, it had not lived the gospel authentically. Maintaining the *status quo*, the Church, in self-defence, found herself carrying on a 'cold war' with the world.³¹

Little by little the Church has cautiously turned to the world. Even when she entered its arena, she did so sometimes as a disciplinarian, sometimes as a teacher, sometimes as a father, but never as an equal partner trying to achieve common goals. That the Church is unambiguously in the world in the 'seventies is due to Pope John's encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, which has been styled a genuine edict of freedom which in effect turned roman catholics into citizens of the world. Vatican II endorsed this 'liberation' with such directives as this one: 'By unremitting study, they (pastors) should fit themselves to do their part in establishing dialogue with men of all shades of opinion'.³²

As the world asks the Church some soul-searching questions, she herself becomes a listener. When the Church responds, she explains herself, justifying a change of attitude as a return to the gospel because of the world's criticism.³³ No longer does the Church regard the world as enemy.

She gratefully understands that in her community life no less than in her individual sons, she receives a variety of helps from men of every rank and condition. For whoever promotes the human community at the family level, culturally, in its economic, social, and political dimensions, both nationally and internationally, such a one, according to God's design, is contributing greatly to the Church community as well, to the extent that it depends on things outside itself. Indeed, the Church admits that she has greatly profited and still profits from the antagonism of those who oppose or persecute her.³⁴

Actually, the vitality of apostolic activity has its foundation on dialogue at all levels within the Church, as well as between the Church and the world. Thus, the Council admonishes ordinaries: 'For the sake of greater service to souls, let the bishop engage in discussion with his priests, even collectively, especially about pastoral matters'.³⁵ What is said of those priests who are explicitly promoting the apostolate of the laity is really applicable to all situations and to all 'partners in dialogue' within the Church:

³¹ P. A. Liégé, 'Church of the World', in *Discerning the Times* (Tehny, Illinois, 1968), pp 131-2.

³² *Gaudium et Spes*, 43.

³³ Liégé, *op. cit.*, p 145.

³⁴ *Gaudium et Spes*, 44.

³⁵ *Christus Dominus*, 28.

Through continuous dialogue with the laity, these priests should carefully search for the forms which make apostolic activity more fruitful. They should promote the spirit of unity within the association as well as between it and others.³⁶

The really open person must be open to the meaning and influence of the dialogue itself. The content of the dialogue between the Church and the world is a relevant part of the direction which their relationship will take. Once the willingness to be involved in the encounter has been established, dialogue requires 'a disciplined attention to and acceptance of the content and of the exchange and its meaning'.³⁷ It is in dialogue with the world that the Church will come to understand her passivity, her isolation, and even, perhaps, forge new relationships among the members of her own community as she manifests her openness to the world.

The *sine qua non* of dialogue is not agreement beforehand, but the mutual respect which allows the parties to accept each other as persons. Each must listen to the other with the expectation of learning. The fruitfulness of the encounter will depend on the honesty of the self-presentation. Perhaps the reason why this ideal has not been achieved is that dialogue presupposes that each party be what he is and speak the truth. Participants in dialogue must be convinced that the hearer is of as great importance as the speaker. Mutuality is the key to dialogical encounter. If it prevails between the Church and the world, the world will be able to ask from the Church answers to questions they have long wanted to pose.

From the answers it will be increasingly clear that the People of God and the human race in whose midst it lives render service to each other. Thus the mission of the Church will show its religious, and by that very fact, its supremely human character.³⁸

The dialogical word which the Church utters is not an apologetic word, not a defensive word, nor a final word. On the contrary, it is an open word, one awaiting, even inviting, a response. 'In speaking the word of dialogue a person puts himself on the threshold of truth and becomes the servant of God . . . It is imperative, therefore that a christian be a dialogical person through whom the Word that gives life speaks'.^{38a} The christian engaged in true dialogue remembers that Christ came to give witness to the truth, to exercise mercy and

³⁶ *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 25.

³⁷ R. Howe, *The Miracle of Dialogue*, (New York, 1963), p 76

³⁸ *Gaudium et Spes*, 11.

^{38a} Howe, *loc. cit.*, p 83.

to serve. Through dialogue the christian continues this ministry in and to the world. The ministry of each one takes place in the actual concrete historical situation where broad human values provide ground for dialogue, areas of concern shared by believers and non-believers alike.

Those who are charged with proclaiming the word of God have a prior responsibility to understand the words of men. Failing this, the tradition is passed on from generation to generation without really engaging men. Dialogue demands truth and vitality. The Good News is not a formulation which a man simply accepts intellectually; it must be given and received dialogically in order that a man may affirm it with his whole life. Even the latest scientific and technological advances, while an asset in achieving unity among men, cannot replace what occurs through inter-personal dialogue.

One of the salient features of the modern world is the growing interdependence of men one on the other, a development very largely promoted by modern technical advances. Nevertheless, brotherly dialogue among men does not reach its perfection on the level of technical progress, but on the deeper level of interpersonal relationships.³⁹

To exercise her mission in today's world, the servant-Church realizes that human conditions must be known if men are to work as brothers rendering service. The exercise of *diakonia* as dialogue, we have pointed out, is a mandate to the whole Church. As *Perfectae Caritatis* tells religious very clearly:

Institutes should see to it that their members acquire an adequate knowledge of human conditions in their various circumstances, as well as of the Church's needs. For they will be able to help mankind more effectively according to the fervour of their apostolic zeal and their ability to discern wisely, in the light of faith, trends and situations in the world of today.⁴⁰

What is said about priests is equally applicable to apostolic religious:

By their vocation and ordination, priests of the New Testament are indeed set apart in a certain sense within the midst of God's people. But this is so, not that they may be separated from this people or from any man, but that they may be totally dedicated to the work for which the Lord has raised them up. They cannot be ministers of

³⁹ *Gaudium et Spes*, 23.

⁴⁰ *Perfectae Caritatis*, 2.

Christ unless they are witnesses and dispensers of a life other than this earthly one. But they cannot be of service to men if they remain strangers to the life and conditions of men.⁴¹

Vatican II, in citing dialogue with the modern world as a specific pastoral goal,⁴² gives all christians a 'new' dimension of service to reflect upon, another means of building up the body so that the Church may truly become the sacrament of the kingdom. In dialogue, an essential element of *diakonia*, all have the opportunity to be servants to all, manifesting to the world that 'cooperation among all christians vividly expresses that bond which already unites them, and sets in clearer relief the features of Christ the Servant'.⁴³

Diakonia as Ministry of Gifts

Because the Church is meant to be the sacrament of the kingdom, she is also the 'sign and safeguard of the transcendence of the human person'.⁴⁴ Sometimes in the past the Church lost sight of the individual in a great concern to present herself as a political force through her hierarchical structure. Yet this is not to deny that, throughout all ages, the holy Spirit gives the entire Church 'unity in fellowship and in service; he furnishes her with various gifts, both hierarchical and charismatic'.⁴⁵

All charisms are gifts of God bestowed for the sake of *diakonia*. Hans Küng has provided a brief theological description of charism: 'In the widest sense, it is God's call to the individual person in view of some specific service within the community, including the ability to perform this service'. Küng's analysis conforms to the view of the Church as servant, having a mission none other than *diakonia*. All her charisms are directed to the accomplishment of this mission, whether that be connected with teaching, practical aid or leadership.⁴⁷

For the nurturing and constant growth of the People of God, Christ the Lord instituted in his Church a variety of ministries, which work for the good of the whole body.⁴⁸

Since this view of the Church is so central in the council documents and so relevant to the notion of Church as servant, it is worth

⁴¹ *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 3.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴³ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 12.

⁴⁴ *Gaudium et Spes*, 76.

⁴⁵ *Ad Gentes*, 4.

⁴⁶ Hans Küng, 'The Charismatic Structure of the Church', in *Concilium* Vol 4 (1965), p 51.

⁴⁷ Küng gives these three divisions in answer to the question: Is there more than one kind of charism? *op. cit.*, p 52.

⁴⁸ *Lumen Gentium*, 18.

looking at the documents in more detail to see how the council fathers viewed the charismatic life of the Church. One place for such insight is the decree on the ministry and life of priests. Recognizing that the charismatic element, while always existing in the Church, has not always given appreciable direction to the shape of the priestly ministry, this document urges that:

... priests should discover with the instinct of faith, acknowledge with joy, and foster with diligence the various humble and exalted charisms of the laity . . . allowing them freedom and room for action . . . (inviting) them to undertake works on their own initiative.⁴⁹

Lumen Gentium, too, indicates the mutual help deriving from a proper understanding of roles as constitutive of the Church:

... pastors know how much the laity contribute to the welfare of the entire Church. Pastors also know that they themselves were not meant by Christ to shoulder alone the entire saving mission of the Church toward the world. On the contrary, they understand that it is their noble duty so to shepherd the faithful and recognize their services and charismatic gifts that all according to their proper roles may cooperate in this common undertaking with one heart.⁵⁰

Underlying this directive to pastors is the conviction that the mission of the Church, the charismatic Church, to preach the Good News, is not restricted to priests in the pulpit. The laity, too, carry this mission wherever they love, work, go. Their apostolic activity, their *diakonia*, is essential to the kingdom. Thus, Vatican II reminds all christians that, to carry out their vocation of *diakonia*, there are a variety of ministries in the Church which work for the good of the whole body.

Pastors of the Church, following the example of the Lord, should minister to one another and to the other faithful. The faithful in their turn should enthusiastically lend their cooperative assistance to their pastors and teachers. Thus in their diversity all bear witness to the admirable unity of the Body of Christ. This very diversity of graces, ministries, and works gathers the children of God into one, because 'all these things are the work of one and the same Spirit'.⁵¹

Thus, the vitality of the christian community depends in some way on the recognition and use of the gifts of each member. In Christ's plan, the Church is to reach beyond herself, to mediate salvation to all men, making the fullest possible use of the gifts of

⁴⁹ *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 9.

⁵⁰ *Lumen Gentium*, 30.

⁵¹ *Lumen Gentium*, 32.

its members. 'There, everyone, as members one of the other, would render mutual service according to the different gifts bestowed on each',⁵² for 'since christians have different gifts, each one must collaborate in the work of the gospel according to his own opportunity, ability, charismatic gifts, and call to service'.⁵³

Both Peter and Paul insisted that no one is denied a gift.⁵⁴ Nor must these charisms be looked for in dramatic displays, but rather they should be recognized in the common everyday occurrences that build up the sense of community. We should certainly strive after the better gifts, but these are the ordinary, not the exceptional or the dramatic ones. The 'most excellent way' is the most ordinary way, the most possible for all men, the way of love. 'This love is not something to be reserved for important matters, but must be pursued chiefly in the ordinary circumstances of life'.⁵⁵

This love informs many other 'everyday' gifts: ministry, teaching, admonition, healing, service, leadership, etc.⁵⁶ It would seem that Paul also considers suffering to be a charism.⁵⁷ Vatican II several times emphasizes the value of all gifts, great or small:

These charismatic gifts, whether they be the most outstanding or the more simple and widely diffused, are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation, for they are exceedingly suitable and useful for the needs of the Church.⁵⁸

For the exercise of this apostolate, the holy Spirit, who sanctifies the people of God through the ministry and the sacraments, gives to the faithful special gifts 'allotting to everyone according as he will'. Thus the individual, 'according to the gift that each has received, can administer it to one another' and become 'good stewards of the manifold grace of God', and build up thereby the whole body in charity. From the reception of these charisms or gifts, including those which are less dramatic, there arise for each believer the right and duty to use them in the Church and in the world for the good of mankind and for the upbuilding of the Church.⁵⁹

Though Paul says that the gifts of the one Spirit must work together in unity, nowhere does he convey the idea that all gifts are reducible to one. The diversity of needs must be met by a plurality of gifts, each expressing *diakonia* in its own way. This emphasis on the needs of the Church must not be allowed to displace the central fact that the Church exists for the sake of the kingdom, and that

⁵² *Gaudium et Spes*, 32.

⁵⁵ *Gaudium et Spes*, 38.

⁵⁷ 2 Cor 4, 7-12.

⁵³ *Ad Gentes*, 28.

⁵⁶ 1 Cor 12, 28; Rom 12, 6ff.

⁵⁸ *Lumen Gentium* 12.

⁵⁴ Cf 1 Pet 4, 10; 1 Cor 12, 7.

⁵⁹ *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 3.

just as dialogue is part of the Church's mission of *diakonia*, so the exercise of charisms is authentic only insofar as it helps the servant-Church prolong the *diakonia* of her Lord, who was sent to save all men.

All that Vatican II says about charisms and *diakonia* are especially applicable to consecrated religious. Apostolic religious sisterhoods exercise individually and corporately many charisms or gifts. They are a sign of the servant-Church, not because whatever kinds of service they are engaged in of themselves establish the kingdom, but because their ministrations witness to the kingdom. The service is not rendered so that the recipients will accept the kingdom, but because the *diakonia*

is an overflowing of the love of God for mankind and therefore a sign of his present activity. Such acts of service, which are integral to mission, are the grateful response of Christians to what God has done; they are not a kind of 'bait' offered to interested inquirers. Their justification is to be found in the fact that they are an imitation of the ministry of Christ in and for the world.⁶⁰

The council documents, too, lend support to the ideal that whatever power is connected with the strength and efficiency of the sisterhoods, must be used only in terms of service, lest their numbers, influence, and the esteem in which religious sisterhoods are held, be used in such a way as to make *diakonia* impossible.

By reason of their call, in addition to the individual charisms that religious share because they are among the people of God, their common gift is the gift of celibate community. The charism of celibacy provides a kind of freedom at the service of charity. Through this charism, some members of the Church can 'more fully devote themselves in him and through him to the service of God and men'.⁶¹ Chastity 'on behalf of the kingdom liberates the human heart in a unique way, and causes it to burn with greater love for God and all mankind. It is . . . a most suitable way for religious to spend themselves readily in God's service and in works of the apostolate'.⁶² By it, 'they (priests and, by analogy, religious) gain extremely appropriate help for exercising that perfect and unremitting love by which they can become all things to all men through their priestly ministration'.⁶³

So often in the past, motivation for celibacy was given on grounds

⁶⁰ J. G. Davies, 'The Meaning of Mission', in *Cross Currents*, XVI (1966), p 419.

⁶¹ *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 16.

⁶² *Perfectae Caritatis*, 12.

⁶³ *Optatam Totius*, 10.

that spiritual parenthood was higher than the natural; yet its value lies rather in its participation in the charismatic nature of the Church itself, which embraces the eschatological as well as the incarnational dimension of salvation. And even though this charism of celibacy is given to comparatively few, it should not for that reason be deemed extraordinary. In the framework of the charismatic Church, whose very essence is its relation to the kingdom, consecrated celibacy is completely normal, because its chief witness is to the existence of the kingdom. On the other hand, insofar as it liberates one for *diakonia*, it is also a sign of the earthly manifestation of the Church as mission.

Of course, all charisms, and not only celibacy, are for the sake of building up the body, and therefore closely connected to *diakonia*. A charism is given to a specific individual for the sake of the community, and for a specific service to the community. In Paul's letters, gift, call and charism are as interrelated as Church, *diakonia* and mission. Gifts and service are interrelated;⁶⁴ and both charisms and call are very definitely related to service.⁶⁵

From the council documents we cite one example where call, service and charism are closely connected. The decree on Christian education calls the ministry of teachers a 'true apostolate which our times make extremely serviceable and necessary, and which simultaneously renders an authentic service to society'.⁶⁶ This specific example is chosen because so many apostolic sisterhoods are engaged in the work of education; and because education is of special importance in fostering a true understanding of *diakonia*. It not only disposes one for dialogue, but also has unique advantages in promoting co-operation among all Christians, that feature which both 'expresses the bond which unites them and sets in relief the features of Christ the Servant'.⁶⁷ In addition, and by way of summation, the gift of teaching reveals in a striking way what is true of all charisms: they are authentic expressions of *diakonia*.

⁶⁴ Cf I Cor 12, 4-6.

⁶⁶ *Gravissimum Educationis*, 8.

⁶⁵ Cf Rom 11, 29; I Cor 7, 7.17.

⁶⁷ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 12.