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Biblical and Theological Foundations of Charitable Works¹

To be able to theologially judge, i.e. discuss and categorise, the specifically Christian character of the Ministry of Charity, with regard to the painful challenges of our countries, mention shall be made of some of the fundamental theological aspects or co-ordinates of the Caritas of the Church.

With particular reference to biblical examples of the practice of Jesus, some thesis will be formulated to this end.² They will describe the foundations of our human philanthropy and point to their Christological transcendence.

Ministry of life as mission of the Christian and of the Church on the soteriological practice of charity

1. If the Church is, in the Pauline sense, the prolongation of the Body of Christ in the world (Rm 12:1-8; Co 12:1-31; Col 1:18ff),³ then she is the effective successor of Jesus, and her mission should be understood as no other than that of the mission of Christ Himself. That means that the Church should measure herself against Jesus Christ, especially His practice of charity, in the sense of an „Imitatio Christi“.

¹ „And above all these put on love – many forms of poverty, one single response“ ist the slogan of this Congress, which we are holding as „Witnesses to Charity with the Holy Father“. This is the reason why it is my particular purpose to provide references to the Holy Father's teachings on the Theology of Caritas.

² The biblically transmitted words and deeds of Jesus clearly describe the options for action of the Early Church of the 1st. Century. The present contribution aims to reflect present-day questions and problems in the light of the Gospel of Christ. In addition, a structure-analogical biblical exegesis will be attempted, cf. On structure-analogy: Pompey H., „Beziehungstheologie – Das Zueinander theologischer und psychologischer ‚Wirk‘-lichkeiten und die biblisch-theologische Kontextualisierung von Lebens- und Leidenserfahrung“, in Pompey, H., (ed.), *Caritas – Das menschliche Gesicht des Glaubens: ökumenische und internationale Anstöße einer Diakonietheologie*, Studien zur Theologie und Praxis der Caritas und Sozialen Pastoral, vol. 10, Würzburg 1997, pp. 92-128.

³ „All of us, though there are so many of us, make up one body in Christ“ (Rm 12:5). „Now Christ's body is yourselves, each of you with a part to play in the whole. And those whom God has appointed in the Church are, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers. ... after them, miraculous powers, then gifts of healing, helpful acts, guidance, various kinds of tongues“ (1 Co 12:27-28). „He is the Head of the Body, that is, the Church. He is the Beginning, the first-born from the dead, so that he should be supreme in every way“ (Col 1:18).

2. In the face of suffering, infirmity, sickness, affliction and guilt, God comes into this world through Jesus. To the question about how He understood His mission, Jesus answered: „I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly“ (Jn 10:10). This ministry of life is fundamentally required of us by the affliction and suffering in the word.⁴ To have a fulfilled life – in spite of suffering and need – means to be able to live in love, security and dignity a life that is often marked by sorrow. The Church, her parishes and communities, as well as each individual Christian, should help people – in imitation of Jesus – to find fulfilment in their life, in order thereby to testify to the dawning of the Kingdom of God, i.e. the fulfilment of the life eternal. The Ministry of Charity testifies to the meaning of life in a world of illness, handicap and need. John Paul II, in his address in a Roman parish, affirmed: „The Christian’s vocation is realised through the life of grace in the witness of love and solidarity,“⁵

* The practice of Charity – whether it be the work of spiritual communities or associations, or at the parish or individual level – must therefore face the challenge of whether, thanks to it, a fulfilled life in spite of suffering is possible. That is – to express it in the language of the welfare service – the first quality objective that any charitable service must keep in mind.⁶

3. *The ministry of life is always a Ministry of Charity*

The mission of the Church, as well as that of the individual Christian, primarily has as its content making the love, goodness and benevolence of our God known to all mankind: „*As the chosen of God, the holy people whom he loves, you are to be clothed in heartfelt compassion, in generosity and humility, gentleness and patience*“ (Col 3:12; cf. Titus 3:4). That means enabling all men and women to experience the Caritas of God, so that they may have life through it. The Ministry of Charity springs from the Christian understanding of God: „*God is love*“ – „*Ubi Caritas ibi Deus est*“. God wants to share Himself lovingly with man.⁷ Love is the fundamental motivation of all His action.

⁴ Situations in which life is successful are not a problem for the Ministry of Charity, e.g. to celebrate and to sacramentally cultivate the joyful events of life.

⁵ Cf. John Paul II, Address in a Roman Parish, 3 February 1980.

⁶ Economic considerations must not interfere with this goal.

⁷ His love is the origin of the creation of the world and of man, and at the same time of God becoming man, cf. Pompey, H., „Theologisches Verständnis vom Leben und Leiden, von Solidarität und Helfen – Ein caritativ-diakonisches Credo“, in: idem (ed.), *Caritas – das menschliche Gesicht des Glaubens*, cit., pp: 321-357.

* Out of love God came down to us in the person of Jesus Christ, who became flesh amid the suffering, poverty and injustice of life.⁸ Because His love does not bear seeing us suffer, He wants to stand at our side, to free us of guilt⁹ and suffering. He empties Himself, He assumes human nature (Ph 2:6-8),¹⁰ so that we may once again freely experience His love and, in spite of suffering and need, be able to live a fulfilled life. In the stable of Bethlehem He proclaimed His solidarity with the suffering of human poverty, which He and His parents experienced in the form of material need, homelessness and exile. In His dying and death God shares with us both spiritual and physical suffering, whether it be in His abandonment and solitude or in the violent maltreatment and killing of His body. Material and social poverty, like physical and spiritual suffering, are challenges to His and hence to our Ministry of Charity. God, in His Son, thus turns poverty, bondage, powerlessness, etc., into the privileged place of His redemptive presence.

* Love is God's mystery and the essence of God's wisdom.¹¹ We human beings are quick to ask, what can our loving care and devotion possibly achieve in the case of those suffering from an irreversible disease? Will anything change at all as a result of our help for these – in social terms – hopeless cases? What sense is our help supposed to have? The wisdom of God, whose innermost essence is love, does not evade this question. John Paul II. touched on it in a homily in Toronto as follows: *„For wisdom also means love. In love we have the ripest fruit of wisdom and at the same time also its richest source. In the crucified Christ man became a sharer in the eternal wisdom, to which he comes closer through the heart of the Mother, who stood under the Cross... (cf. Jn 19:25)“*¹²

* Through the Holy Spirit – Father of the poor and the sick – God is consolingly and redeemingly present to us.¹³ The Holy Spirit enables the disciples of Jesus and His Church salvification to help the poor, the sick, the disabled and the outcast by bringing God's love to them. Paul says: „And hope does not disappoint us, because

⁸ The prime impulse for the incarnation of the Son of God is the inexhaustible love of God the Father for man.

⁹ God comes into our broken world, in order to support our disfigured existence with us. Love is so boundless that it unreservedly accepts us, in spite of the damage caused to life (sin), for which we ourselves are responsible, and the various crosses of suffering that flow from nature and circumstance and that man has to bear throughout life.

¹⁰ „Who, being in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped. But he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming as human beings are; and being in every way like a human being, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross“ (Ph 2:6-8).

¹¹ God loves man, in spite of his guilt-laden, hopeless situation. Love is the primal cause of God's redemptive action.

¹² Cf. John Paul II., Homily in Toronto, 15. September 1984: ApSt 1984, p. 695ff.

¹³ Cf. The Veni creator spiritus, written by Hrabanus Maurus in the 19th century.

God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Rm 5:5). The Holy Spirit possesses the Church with His divine love for man: „*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness*" (Gal 5:22). Love moves man to being-with-God-for-others in the world. That is why the Church is called to be *Sacramentum Caritatis Patris et Jesu Christi in Spiritu*. God's charitable option for humankind, i.e. the love of the Trinitarian God for man, is thus expressed in the *Diakonia Caritatis Die*.¹⁴ The purpose of charitable work is to enable the Trinitarian *Caritas* to be a living and redemptive presence.

* God's love for mankind is the source, the primal cause and measure of the charitable action both of the Church and of the individual.¹⁵ That is why Paul declares: „*For the love of Christ urges us on*" (2 Co 5:14).¹⁶ If the Church or the individual Christian should give away no matter how much money, even all she or he has, to the poor, but had no love, it would do no good whatsoever (cf. 1 Co 13:3). No matter how good the social paedagogic of therapeutic methods should be, if they were without love, they would only be of limited use to the suffering. That is why the theme of our Congress reads: „*And above all these put on love*". It is not the often impossible removal of need or sickness, but the loving acceptance of the suffering or sick person, that is the fundamental motive of the Ministry of Charity and welfare. For whoever loves as God loves, feels compassion for the sufferings of others. Whoever feels compassion for the sufferings of other, helps as much as he can. Whoever feels compassion for the suffering of others, lets himself be moved by the suffering of others and is impelled to share their suffering. Whoever truly loves, makes no demands, he gives himself. John Paul II: said in the course of an address in Nairobi: „*Help for our fellowmen demands well-founded knowledge of the subject, qualified training, the commitment of the best forces and resources. On the other hand, man needs far more than mere technical perfection. He has a heart and wants to meet a heart also in his helper. That is also one reason why in spite of the requirement of the best professional skills and the best tools, the volunteer worker must retain his place in charitable service. Of course he also needs training. But what is decisive is his*

¹⁴ Cf. Pompey, H., „Theologisches Verständnis von Leben und Leiden, von Solidarität und Helfen“, in idem (ed.), *Caritas – das menschliche Gesicht des Glaubens*, cit., pp. 321-357. In this sense man is the fundamental way of the Church, cf. John Paul II., *Redemptor hominis*. Rome 1979.

¹⁵ The biblical understanding of mercy is not at variance with the theological premises of *Caritas*, cf. Wohlfarth, A., „Barmherzigkeit und sozialpolitik – Barmherzigkeit: Eine neue Sichtweise zu einem vergessenen Aspekt der Diakonie“, in: *Caritas* 97 (1996), pp. 241-243.

*readiness to help, his eye for need, the patience with which he listens; his solicitude without routine, which springs not just from his skill, but above all from himself.*¹⁶

* Paul expressed love as the essence of charitable service in very concrete terms, and formulated the *Magna Charta Caritatis* as follows: *„Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not easily provoked, taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things“* (1 Co 13:4-7). That is the Christian view of a specifically Caritas-imbued practice of aid in the world of sickness and need. As every helper knows, the sick, the disabled, the old, the poor and the abandoned have a deep longing for this love and goodness. Every form of welfare must therefore be charitably qualified also from the expectations of the suffering themselves, i.e. for man's sake.

* The Church, her communities and associations bear responsibility for ensuring, through their efforts in Caritas catechesis, that this social culture of the Ministry of Charity contributes to the well-being of our suffering fellowmen.

Church and community as the place of Caritas

4. The Church, like Christ, must be incarnated as the Caritas of God in the world. *„I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another“* (Jn 13:34). Human relationships and social environments, in which mutual acceptance and love are expressed, need to be created in our parishes and through our communities, which will then become of their own accord places of healing and helping. John Paul II. says in *Christifideles laici*: *„The same charity, realised not only by individuals but also in a joint way by groups and communities, is and will always be necessary. Nothing and no one will be able to substitute for it, not even the municipality of institutions and public initiatives...“*¹⁸

Love, especially for the suffering, belongs to the very essence and nature of the Church. If the Church or a Christian community is uncharitable, it is not

¹⁶ What is at issue is enabling man to experience the „God with us“, the Emanuel, especially in charitable helping and healing. That is the sense (the logic of the incarnation of God) and consequently also the logic of the action of the Church.

¹⁷ Cf. John Paul II., To the laity in ecclesial service in Fulda, 18. November 1980: *Freude*, 68: Address in Nairobi, 7. May 1980, *Freude* 86.

¹⁸ Cf. John Paul II., Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no. 41.

Christological.¹⁹ The charitable option has as its consequence that the loving acceptance and integration of the ministry of the Christian and of the Church. The Church's Ministry of Charity always includes charitable *koinonia/communio/* communion.

* Charity expressed through *koinonia/communio* is, according to the Evangelist John, the primary mark of identity of the Christian community or a Christian association; it is an essential part of the corporate identity of the Church. „*I give you a new commandment: love one another; you must love one another just as I have loved you. It is by your love for one another, that everyone will recognise you as my disciples*“ (Jn 13:35ff.; cf. 1 Jn 3:11; 4:7-13).

Paul describes charitable *koinonia* as follows:“*You are to be clothed in heartfelt compassion, in generosity and humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another; forgive each other if one of you has a complaint against another. The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same. Over all these clothes, put on love, the perfect bond. And may the peace of Christ reign in your hearts, because it is for this that you were called together in one body*“ (Col 3:12-16). Equally striking is the Ministry of Charity, or the ministry of the civilisation of love, as it is described in the Letters of Peter (1 Pt 3:8; 4:15) and John (1 Jn 4.7-21). Paul understands the communion of Charity in a very concrete way: „*Just as each of us has various parts in one body, and the parts do not all have the same function: in the same way, all of us, though there are so many of us, make up one body in Christ... if it is a gift of practical service, let us devote ourselves to serving; if it is to teaching, to teaching, if it is encouraging, to encouraging. When you give, you should give generously from the heart; if you are put in charge, you must be conscientious; if you do works of mercy, let it be because you enjoy doing them. Let love be without any pretence. Avoid what is evil; stick to what is good. In brotherly love let your feelings of deep affection for one another come to expression and regard others as more important than yourself. In the service of the Lord, work, not half-heartedly but with conscientiousness and an eager spirit. Be joyful in hope, persevere in hardship; keep praying regularly; share with any of God's holy people who are in need; look for opportunities to be hospitable*“ (Ro 12:4-21).

In the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, the Second Vatican Council stresses: „*The Church, in Christ, is in the nature of sacrament – a sign and an*

¹⁹ It is – one could say – „heretical“. Heresy means in Greek: living only a part of the mission.

instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men“.²⁰ And John Paul II. says in *Redemptoris missio*: „*The Kingdom aims at transforming human relationships; it grows gradually as people slowly learn to love, forgive and serve one another*“.²¹

* Through her Ministry of Charity the Church wants to contribute to the charitable *koinonia/communio* of humankind among each other and with God. Caritas Catechesis must therefore, according to Paul VI., be aimed at a civilisation of love, especially in the spheres of life marked by suffering, sickness and need. John Paul II. writes in *Salvifici doloris*: „*The world of human suffering unceasingly calls for, so to speak, another world: the world of human love; and in a certain sense man owes to suffering that unselfish love which stirs in his heart and actions*“.²² The civilisation of love includes a Christological culture of solidarity and help. Charitable *communio* in the sense of sharing a community life and suffering with the sick and the poor implies an intensification of solidarity with them.²³ Jesus felt Himself called to lead the despised and rejected to the final communion with God. This *communio* can be experienced through integration in a believing, hoping and loving Christian community/association.²⁴ God’s solidarity with the suffering becomes visible through the integration of the poor in the Christian community. So Caritas does not mean merely aid – whether it be of professional or purely human kind – but also a charitable communion of life and suffering.²⁵

* Are our parishes and spiritual communities ready and able, as a *communio* of Charity, to welcome the marginalised, the sick and the poor into their midst? Are our families ready to share the life and suffering of the sick, the old and the poor?²⁶ How can we help parishes and their associations for suffering people to become a

²⁰ Vatican Council II., Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen genium*, no 1.

²¹ Cf. John Paul II., *Redemptoris mission*, no. 15.

²² Cf. John Paul II., *Salvifici doloris*, nos. 29-30.

²³ As is put into practice in family communities and religious communities. The loving dedication of parents to their children and later of the children to their ageing parents is an expression not just of solidarity, but of elementary *koinonia*.

²⁴ It is therefore part of the character of Christian *Caritas* that the „*despised and rejected*“ are not only looked after, cared for and treated, but also supported in their suffering condition through associations, i.e. through volunteers, and integrated into the parish community. Cf. Pompey, H., „*Aktuelle Problemlösungsperspektiven am Beispiel stationären und ambulanten Pflegediensten und Einrichtungen*“, in: idem (ed.), *Caritas im Spannungsfeld von Wirtschaftlichkeit und Menschlichkeit*, Würzburg, 1997, pp. 327-401, esp. Pp. 367-378.

²⁵ This also corresponds to the Jewish/Early Christian and Eastern Church tradition of hospitality. Strangers and the poor were given hospitality in hospices, i.e. houses for guests in need – *hospes*; cf. Pompey, H., „*Christlicher Glaube und helfende Solidarität in der Diakonieggeschichte der Kirche*“, in: Kerber, W. (ed.), *Religion und prosoziales Verhalten*, München 1995, 75-134. But charitable hospitality is only fully possible through volunteers or through a community.

charitable *koinonia*, in other words, a community of Charity in which all can feel at home?²⁷ How can we re-socialise the excluded, who are not integrated into the network of Christian life, by the exercise of Charity in this way?

* Since love is a personal as well as communal reality, it can never be lived nor experienced through an institution, but only through persons who belong to this institution or organisation, i.e. through the members of the Church, parish or of an association. Communities or organisations cannot embrace anyone, cannot clasp the hand of anyone sick, cannot give a kiss to any elderly person, etc. An exclusively organisational/institutional mode of providing the experience of a charitable *koinonia/communio* does not go far enough. Institutions and organisations can merely create the conditions and remove obstacles, and so contribute to a community culture of Charity, in which Charity/love may alter the suffering face of the earth. As John Paul II. declares in *Christi fideles laici*: „Paradoxically such charity is made increasingly necessary the more that institutions become complex in their organization and pretend to manage every area at hand. In the end such projects lose their effectiveness as a result of an impersonal functionalism, an overgrown bureaucracy, unjust private interests and an all-too-easy and generalised disengagement from a sense of duty“.²⁸ Charitable institutions and organisations are instruments just like the Church herself. They will disappear at the end of time. Caritas, love, remains eternal, because it is God’s Charity needs to be cultivated and fostered; awareness of it needs to be raised.²⁹

The realities of the Ministry of Charity

5. Christian faith finds its most decisive expression in love³⁰ for God and for mankind.³¹ „For in Christ it is not being circumcised or being uncircumcised that can

²⁶ Müller, J.-F., Schulze-Ising, B., „Ein spiritueller Weg zur gemeindlichen Caritas – Die Gemeinschaft St. Egidio im Dienst an den Armen“, in: *Caritas* 99 (1998).

²⁷ This, however, is one of the aims pursued both by classic community work, cf. Pompey, H., „Gemeindeaufbau und caritatives Engagement der Basis“, in: *Caritas – Zeitschrift für Caritasarbeit und Caritaswissenschaft*, 76 (1975), pp. 8-17, and also the civil engagement of communitarianism favoured today.

²⁸ Cf. John Paul II, *Christi fideles laici*, no. 41.

²⁹ Scientifically tested concepts for raising awareness about charitable aid and management culture are now available at the national and international level, cf. Pompey, H., *Caritas – Lernort*, op. Cit., 1995.

³⁰ That is why love, i.e. *Caritas*, is the fundamental existential affirmation of the Church.

³¹ Cf. the two leading Christian commandments first and foremost, that we love God; and second, that we love our neighbour as ourselves (cf. Mt 22:37-40).

effect anything-only faith working through love“ (Ga 5:6).³² John Paul II. said in a homily during an Eucharistic Celebration in Anagni: „One must believe, but one must also act, in other words bear witness to and live Christianity through selfless and concrete love for one’s neighbour.³³ „Love is an act of faith, and whoever has little faith, also has little love“.³⁴ Caritas is the human face of our faith.

* The Ministry of Charity:

- a) restores faith in God and in the goodness of man and the value of his life to the no longer meaningful life of suffering people;
- b) is imbued with a hope against hope in hopeless situations (Rm 4:18; 2 Co 1:7; 1:10; Co 1:23), i.e. it enables people to hope in the future of life, in moments of happiness in the coming hours and days, and in the eventual fulfilment of their earthly life in the presence of God; and
- c) brings love into situations of life that are no longer capable of inspiring love or into a loveless life of suffering and accepts suffering persons with human friendliness, even if they are no longer able to accept themselves. The Ministry of Faith, Hope and Charity shares life and suffering with people by being close to them and showing devotion to them. In this way it renews their confidence in life.³⁵ This Ministry of Faith colours in a special way the „how“ of help and does not limit itself to the „what“ of help (whether it be of medical, caring, social or psychological type).³⁶ God asks „how someone places himself at the service of his neighbour; a measure, that is, of the degree of love with which a person devotes himself from the freedom of his heart to his brothers“, as Pope John Paul stressed in a homily given in St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome to mark the Fortieth Anniversary of FAO.³⁷

³² On the connection between faith and love, cf. also 1 Th 3:6ff; 5:8ff; 2 Th 1:3; 1 Ti 2:15; 4:12; 2 Ti 1:13; 3:10 and in particular Titus 3:15, 1 Jn 5; 1-4 and Jm 2:14-24.

³³ The indissoluble link between love and faith can also be recognised in purely secular contexts. Erich Fromm thus affirms: „The practice of the art of love demands the practice of faith“ (Fromm, E., *Gesamtaufgabe*, vol. IX *Sozialistischer Humanismus und humanistische Ethik*, München 1989, p. 511). „The capacity for love depends ... on our capacity to grow and to develop a productive attitude in our relationship to the world and ourselves. This process of self-emergence, of being born, of growing up has faith as its unavoidable premise“ (ibid., p. 515).

³⁴ Cf. John Paul II, Homily during an Eucharistic Celebration in Anagni, 31. August 1986: ApSt 1986, 1587: Prayer for the 40th Anniversary of the Foundation of Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) in St. Peter’s Basilica, 10. November 1985; ApSt 1985, 1634.

³⁵ Cf. Watzlawick, P., *Menschliche Kommunikation – Formen, Störungen, Paradoxien*, 3rd ed, Bern, 1972.

³⁶ In socio-psychological terms it has more to do with the relational aspect of helping and not so much with the content of an interaction or communication. In theological terms it has to do with the kind and mode of faith (*fides qua creditur*) and only secondarily with the content of the faith (*fides quae creditur*). Cf. Pompey, H., „Beziehungstheologie – Das Zueinander theologischer und psychologischer ‚Wirk‘-lichkeiten und die biblisch-theologische Kontextualisierung von Lebens- und Leidenerfahrung“, in: idem (ed.), *Caritas – Das menschliche Gesicht des Glaubens*, cit., pp. 92-128.

³⁷ Cf. John Paul II, Homily during the Eucharistic Celebration in Anagni, 31. August 1986: ApSt 1986, 1587; Sermon on the 40th Anniversary of FAO in St. Peter’s Basilica, 10. November 1985: ApSt 1985, 1634.

Inspired by this religious truth of faith, the Ministry of Charity donates strength (energies of life) and new impulses of life (ideas for living).³⁸ It creates its strength itself from the living relationship to Jesus Christ.³⁹

* In this Ministry of Faith, Hope and Love the charitable helper descends like Jesus Himself into the kingdom of death, into the tomb, where psychic and social life has died, as the Synoptic Gospel report (Mt 8:28; Mka 5:2; Lk 8:27), or into a dark abyss of dark night where guidance is no longer possible, as described in Psalms 23:4 and 88:7, to give light to those who live in darkness and in the shadow dark as death, and guide their feet into the way of peace (Lk 1:77-79), and to help the sick and the needy, in spite of suffering and pain, to rise from the dead to life again.⁴⁰

In our charitable service, we need to ensure, or facilitate, not only an optimal professional aid, but must also ensure that the renewal of this confidence in life, especially in suffering and borderline situations of life, can succeed. A personal relationship to reality that is imbued with this faith can only exist if the members of charitable organisations are correspondingly inspired and possessed by it.⁴¹ So not only the professional, but also the catechetical and spiritual qualification, of our social and charitable efforts needs to be ensured in the Church.⁴² Professional and spiritual qualities have been two central elements in education in Charity throughout the two-thousand-year old history of Christianity. What we don't sow, we cannot reap.⁴³

³⁸ An authentic life that has its source in faith is especially expressed in charitable works.

³⁹ For the inner connection between pneumatology and Christology, especially in charitable action, cf. Mitzscherlich, M., *Caritas als Wesensdimension und Grundfunktion der Kirche*, Erfurter Theologische Zeitschriften, vol. 24, Leipzig 1997.

⁴⁰ Cf. Pompey, H., „*Spiritualität und Praxis der Diakonie des Helfens*“, in idem (ed.), *Caritas – Das menschliche Gesicht des Glaubens*“, cit., pp. 358-395.

⁴¹ The essential characteristic cannot be sacrificed to any economic pressure. Hence the decisive question posed to the Ministry of Charity is: Where can this reality be ensured in terms of contracts of employment? Can it be ordered? This theological content poses the greatest demands to the quality management of personnel in the charitable services and to those for management and client culture.

⁴² Whether it be through a practice-based, qualified introduction to the specific „management philosophy“ of Caritas (e.g. by admission into the six-month period of probation through participation in the relevant courses), through offers of spiritual renewal, etc., cf. on the courses experimented for this purpose, Pompey, H., *Caritatives Engagement – Lernort des Glaubens und der Gemeinschaft*, cit., 1994.

⁴³ Volunteer and professional staff are chosen from human beings and are at the service of human beings. If we co-operate with people of other religions and often nowadays with those who have dropped out of Christianity in caring for the sick and the suffering and ask them to assist us in our efforts, then the above considerations go for them too; they too must have the right spiritual as well as professional qualifications. That is all the more reason why the leaders and supervisors of such initiatives need to see to it that personnel be given the chance of getting to know or to cultivate, on an ongoing basis, that management philosophy. Just as further professional education is provided, so too must further spiritual education, if the charitable and diaconal character of an establishment is to be preserved and continue to be felt. Cf. Pompey, H., „*Spiritualität und Praxis der Diakonie des Helfens und Heilen*“, in: idem (ed.), *Caritas – Das menschliche Gesicht des Glaubens*, cit., pp. 358-395.

6. Mercy is a special way of expressing faith and love. The Ministry of Charity finds its concrete expression in the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy. Jesus Himself with His Gospel of Mercy inspired the ministry of life of the Church and of Christians.⁴⁴ Its actual meaning for the present time can be specified as follows:⁴⁵

* The Corporal Works of Mercy:

1. *visite*: Visiting the sick includes, according to the Church's ancient social tradition, help, care and therapy. It also includes the financing and organisation of hospitals, residential homes, welfare centers, etc.
2. *poto*: Giving drink to the thirsty and
3. *cibo*: Giving food to the hungry describe partial tasks of these institutions and services. More specifically, they consist of helping a seriously ill patient to drink, feeding a child or a disabled person; the cooking of meals by home helps is also included.⁴⁶ At the present time, in view of the drought in Africa (Ethiopia and the Sahel) and other regions, this Work of Mercy demands a wider commitment, such as for instance the boring of wells and the building of irrigation plants through Church-run development projects. Famine, above all in the Southern Hemisphere, demands a concrete realisation of the Ministry of Charity at the present time, including not only direct food aid but self-help projects to enable these people to develop an efficient form of agriculture, etc.
4. *redimo*: Redeeming prisoners can, in situations of drug-addiction and alcoholism, means extricating them from their condition and liberating them from the fetters of dependence. Helping to look after people in penal institutions is also included in this Work of Mercy. It may also be expressed in present-day efforts to redeem captured Christians from slavery in Sudan.⁴⁷
5. *tego*: Clothing the naked comprises e.g. the patient, respectful washing and clothing of invalids, as also the self-sacrificing services of helping an elderly and infirm person to dress in the morning and undress in the evening. This Work of Mercy is further realised at the world level through Caritas Internationalis in Rome, Catholic Relief Services (USA), the Caritas Internationalis department of German Caritas, Misereor (Germany), CAFOD (Great Britain), Memisa

⁴⁴ The Corporal Works of Mercy, as described by Jesus in His Last Judgement address (Mt 25:34-40), are on the whole better known than the Spiritual Works of Mercy.

⁴⁵ The seven Corporal Works of Mercy still incontestably determine the charitable apostolate of the Church today and find their response in evangelisation as in the various charitable services and Church-run aid organisations: Misereor, Adveniat, Renovabis, Missio etc.

⁴⁶ Also the „meals on wheels“ service and the soup kitchens provided at the entrance to convents.

⁴⁷ E.g. KNO-Info no. 24/25, 81, 1367.

(Netherlands), CCFD (France), Eastenopfer (Switzerland), etc. All these Relief Agencies support and promote the self-reliance of the developing countries. In concrete terms this Work of Mercy is also expressed at the present time in the aid given to refugees, especially in Albania, Mecedonia and Kosovo.

6. *colligo*: Giving hospitality to strangers: this Work of Mercy also takes the form nowadays of the acceptance of the victims of political persecution, asylum seekers and emigrants, among others. Church organisations and individual families also perform this Work of Mercy in their friendly contacts with guest workers and students from abroad, etc., as also through their apostolate among the homeless. Welcoming strangers may also take the form of helping to finance a place in a clinic or after-care clinic for those without means, or without health insurance.
7. *condo*: Burying the dead: this is the last service we can render to a person during his mortal life. Ever more people die in Central Europe without family or friends.⁴⁸ The new world-wide hospice movement assumes the commitment of caring for the dying and the grieving.⁴⁹

* The Spiritual Works of Mercy⁵⁰ are especially expressed in Christian forms of social help, psychotherapy, assistance to the sick, caring for and visiting the old and the sick.⁵¹ The individual Spiritual Works of Mercy may help to alleviate spiritual and mental sufferings⁵².

⁴⁸ To participate in the burial service of someone who has died is a sign of respect for his or her person and life. It is the last act of corporal mercy.

⁴⁹ Cf. Pompey, H., *Serbende nicht alleine lassen – Erfahrungen christlicher Sterbebegleitung*, Mainz 1996.

⁵⁰ Cf. German Bishops' Conference (ed.), *Katholischer Erwachsenen Katechismus*, vol. II, *Leben aus dem Glauben*, Freiburg 1995. The seven works of spiritual mercy, with regard to man's relation to himself, are especially founded on the Beautitudes preached by Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:3-12). The necessary Works of Mercy with regard to man's relation to his neighbour, are specified in Paul's great Hymn to Love (1 Co 12:31-13:3). The Spiritual Works of Mercy are also touched on, directly or indirectly, in Jesus' Discourse on the Church (Mt 18:15; 18:19; 18:21).

⁵¹ Every form of illness is today less a material than a psychic-spiritual or inter-personal problem.

⁵² In some sense the Spiritual Works of Mercy have something to do with the so-called seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, that are already transmitted in the Old Testament (Is 11:1ff.) and are described as the Spirit of the Messiah. The spirit of Yahweh rests on Jesus. This reality of God is His Spirit. The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are: 1. The gift of understanding, by which the truths of the faith in their true sense and their inner order enable us better to grasp the sense of our life. 2. The gift of knowledge, aimed at a true knowledge of faith and of life. 3. That gift of wisdom, by which we are heaped rightly to evaluate the world in the light of faith and love. 4. The gift of counsel, by which God Himself leads the seeker to a sound practical judgement, and shows him what needs to be done and what needs to be avoided on his journey through life. It supports the virtue of wisdom. 5. The gift of piety, which enables us to worship God as the Father and frees us from bondage and faint-heartedness. 6. The gift of fear, which endows us with reverence for God, for every human being and for life itself. 7. The gift of fortitude, which endows us with the strength and trust that has its foundation in God. Cf. LThK, vol. 4.

1. *consule*: Giving good counsel, enabling others to share in one's own experience of life or counselling those in doubt.⁵³
2. *carpe*: Reprimanding someone who has erred; that also means⁵⁴ pointing out to someone who is seriously disturbed in his relation to God, to himself and to his fellowmen, these impoverishments of life if he/she has repressed them. In the case of those suffering from a breakdown in interpersonal relations or drug addiction, among others, this is often the first task that needs to be addressed by family members, by a parishpriest, a colleague at work, a friend, etc.
3. *doce*:⁵⁵ Knowledge or information about life, where it is lacking, needs to be provided and guidance given about where help can be found. Teaching the inexperienced or uninformed also means giving witness to one's own Christian life and faith, as this is variously performed in charitable associations and groups.⁵⁶
4. *sola*:⁵⁷ Comforting the grieving can mean enabling the irreversibly or terminally ill patient to realise that in spite of everything he/she is loved and esteemed. Someone suffering needs to experience comfort and warmth. People also need to be consoled in their experience of separation, whether it be separation from their fellowmen, from their home country, from the enjoyment of good health, from material living conditions, etc.
5. *remitte*:⁵⁸ This means the readiness to forgive injustices and offences, for the sake of helping to heal divisions or restore inter-personal or inter-ethnic relations where these have broken down, as for example in Bosnia and in Kosovo, in Rwanda or in Congo/Zaire. It may also entail trying to understand the troubles and tribulations of an invalid, an ageing person, an individual or a people whose dignity has been violated.
6. *fer*: This Work of Mercy means patiently bearing with those who have become a burden; accepting backsliders, just as they are and helping to support their life in spite of everything. Only what has been accepted, can be freed.

⁵³ In the English word *counselling*, as in pastoral counselling, we find the essence of this Spiritual Work of Mercy. The counsellor is called in Greek „paraklet“: the name given to the Holy Spirit. We ask the Spirit to give us the „Donum concilii“: the gift of counsel.

⁵⁴ The North German dialect expression „sich jemanden kapern“ means buttonholing someone, and explaining something to him in a clear and honest fashion.

⁵⁵ The Latin term comes from the verb *doceo*, to teach or instruct.

⁵⁶ In this kind of teaching, the character of mercy as a gift must never be lost sight of. That means that freedom must be accepted whether this information is accepted or not. Self-knowledge cannot be forced on anyone.

⁵⁷ The Latin term comes from the verb *solare*, to warm; cf. *solarium*.

⁵⁸ The Latin term comes from the verb *remittere*, to remit, to leave off, to leave something behind one.

7. *ora*: Praying for the living and the dead also means including the real needs of an ill person in one's prayers, i.e. in one's own relations with God, in order to ask for strength on that person's behalf.⁵⁹

8. When mercy is shown to persons in suffering or in need, it is at the same time shown to Jesus. He is present in the persons in pain: „For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in“ (Mt 25:35). John Paul II. says in *Salvifici doloris*: „He himself is present in this suffering person, since his salvific suffering has been opened once and for all to every human suffering“.⁶⁰

* Corresponding to the three fundamental tasks of the Church: preaching, service of the World, and service to one's neighbour, there are three ways of encountering Jesus, i.e. three ways in which Jesus is actually present in men and women today. In preaching Jesus is present in the World of the Bible; in the liturgy He is present in the Eucharist; and in the Ministry of Charity He appears to us in the form of suffering human beings.⁶¹ The three forms of encounter with Jesus are inextricably linked. That is why they need to be cultivated together. This threefold service to God is the foundation of the charitable *koinonia* of a community⁶² or of a Christian association. This redemptive presence of Christ characterises Christian Charity and provides the foundation of its liberating help.⁶³ Nowhere can the Christian encounter God more concretely and experience Him in more humanly real form, than in the suffering human being. No more concrete encounter with God is possible, say, in meditation. This form of encounter with God in the suffering human being is a typical characteristic of Christianity that distinguishes it from all other religions.

* That Jesus Christ Himself with His strength and wisdom is present in the suffering human being, and that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit not only accompany charitable action but are at work in the suffering human being (Jn 5:17), can help those involved in nursing and social work. John Paul II. says in *Salvifici*

⁵⁹ People suffering from an irreversible disease: people being artificially fed, people suffering from diabetes, amputation of a limb, alcoholism, etc.

⁶⁰ Cf. John Paul II, *Salvifici doloris*, nos. 29-30.

⁶¹ Also in service to our neighbour Christ is not just symbolically but really present: i.e. not merely in the sense of a *significatu*, but in substance as in the Eucharist. (The concrete man corresponds to the outward forms of bread and wine. Christ is in His essence present in our neighbour.) The presence of Jesus in the suffering is more easily understood in the functional ontological than in the substantial ontological sense (cf. the relevant philosophical background in: Rombach, H., *Substanz – System – Struktur*, 2. vols., 2nd edn., Freiburg/München, 1981).

⁶² Pompey, H., „Theologisches Verständnis vom Leben und Leiden, von Solidarität und Helfen – Ein caritativ-diakonisches Credo“, in idem (ed.), *Caritas – Das menschliche Gesicht des Glaubens*, cit., pp. 321-351ff.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

doloris: „He himself is present in this suffering person, since his salvific suffering has been opened once and for all to every human suffering“.⁶⁴ Quoting John Chrysostom, John Paul II. further declares in *Evangelium vitae*: „Do you wish to honour the body of Christ? Do not neglect it when you find it naked. Do not do it homage here in the church with silk fabrics only to neglect it outside when it suffers cold and nakedness“.⁶⁵ Ever since Jesus Christ, God no longer hovers over the suffering world: He is present in the midst of the suffering world.⁶⁶ It is therefore understandable that Christians and Christian associations should constantly be striving to serve their suffering fellowmen.⁶⁷ The unconditional, helping service to our fellowmen is a specific form of Christian service to God.⁶⁸ But the suffering person should not thereby be reduced to a mere object of encounter with God or devotion to God. Christians engaged in charitable help must never exploit the suffering, the sick and the disadvantaged for religious or devotional purposes. If we were simply to serve Jesus in our suffering neighbour, e.g. for the sake of the Last Judgement, the love for Jesus thus manifested would be nothing but a narrow self-love: it would neither be love of our neighbour, nor love of God.

* It is also important to be spiritually conscious that Jesus is at work not only in the sick/suffering person, but at the same time in His Helper. In the Ministry of Caritas the individual Christian does not only encounter and accompany his suffering neighbour: at the same time the individual helper becomes a helping Christ for the suffering person, i.e. the helper acts „in persona Christi“ and through His service Christ is salvifically made present to the suffering. The two-fold sacramental presence of Christ in the suffering and in the helper represents a spiritual power that is granted to those who believe in it and who propagate or cultivate it. Thus Christ is

⁶⁴ Cf. John Paul II, *Salvifici doloris*, nos. 29-30.

⁶⁵ Cf. John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, no. 87.

⁶⁶ Cf. the description and discussion of fundamental perspectives in the theology of hope and the Cross in the diaconic theology of Jürgen Moltmann, in: Abel, P., *Miteinander leben und Hoffnung teilen – Diakonische Pastoral mit Gruppendanken – Studien zu einer Methode der diakonischen Arbeit am Beispiel der Begleitung Pflegender bei Burn-out*, Würzburg 1994. The Protestant theologian Moltmann shows in a theologically convincing way how God is compassionately present in the psychic and physical sufferings of Jesus and all those who suffer.

⁶⁷ In His Last Judgement discourse Jesus says: „I tell you, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me“ (Mt 25-40). In Jesus Christ, God unconditionally expressed solidarity with all suffering human beings in so radical a fashion that He is present in each one of them and shares their suffering. In the individual suffering person, in the sick, the poor, the disadvantaged, the helper encounters Jesus Himself as the crucified and risen Lord (1 Co 15:20)

⁶⁸ The seven Corporal Works of Mercy continue to determine today the charitable engagement of the Church and find their response both in proclamation and in the Church's various charitable services and charity appeals: *Misereor, Adveniat, Renovabis, Mission*, etc. To encounter God in the suffering human being is not only alien

really at work on both sides.⁶⁹ The encounter with God in charitable service has something to do with striking the right balance between self-love, love for one's neighbour and love for God. All three dimensions are salvifically present in the helping relationship. John Paul II. said in a homily in Stockholm: „There are two commandments of love – and yet only one love. One and the same love embraces God and our neighbour ... The true love for our fellowmen, for our neighbour is – simply because it is true love – at the same time love for God.“⁷⁰ Whoever has recognised this link between love for God and love for our neighbour is „not far from the Kingdom of God“, as is promised to us in Mk 10:28-34.

8. *„For the poor you always have with you; but you do always have me“* (Mt 26:11; Jn 12:8).

Mental or psychological suffering between human beings, material need and bodily illness are spiritual and practical challenge to faith and love. The conquest of suffering, need and illness remains an utopian goal for man. Christian faith and Christian Love will not make suffering, need and illness disappear from the world any more than professionally optimal care and assistance, for that is an eschatological event.

What results are therefore actually achieved by the Ministry of Charity? Faith, hope and love do not directly remove suffering, need and sickness. Although they may motivate concrete help, they serve primarily to change the experience of and response to suffering, need and illness. The concrete alleviation or overcoming of suffering and need are of course bound up with them, but the fundamental service is the charitable transformation of suffering, illness and failure. That has something to do with what Paul calls the Ministry of Reconciliation (2 Co 5:18).

* Effective professional assistance to alleviate pain, illness and need is also provided by other non-Christian personnel and associations. The real challenge of faith and love in the here and now is how to transform suffering into a new strength of life, in the same way that the love of God transforms suffering, as expressed in the Books of Psalms: „Yahweh sustains him on his bed of sickness; and transforms altogether the bed where he lies sick. For my part I said, ‚Yahweh, take pity on me!

to, but even found offensive or repulsive by, many religions and ideologies. From the ancient Greek to the far-eastern religions of our time, such an idea is rejected.

⁶⁹ Pompey, H., „Theologisches Verständnis vom Leben und Leiden, von Solidarität und Helfen“, cit., p. 351.

⁷⁰ Cf. John Paul II, Homily in Stockholm, 8. June 1989; ApSt 1989, 450.

Cure me for I have sinned against you“ (Ps 41:4-5).⁷¹ Suffering and affliction are the real provocations of faith and love.⁷² God did not remove suffering, but took it upon Himself, with the coming of Jesus. His Ministry of Charity primarily consisted of penetrating suffering, affliction and disease with faith and light,⁷³ so that people might have life in spite of guilt and suffering. The love of God, Caritas, is stronger than suffering.⁷⁴ The Christian aid worker does not despair, because he knows that the overcoming of all need begins through love in the here and now and achieves its fulfilment in the Kingdom of God.

* The person to whom faith, hope and love are restored, and who is once again fulfilled by them, sees his suffering and failure in a different way, for the experience of real Caritas makes life once again liveable in spite of suffering, illness and need; it enables people to love it, believe it and hope in it once again.⁷⁵ The experience of charitably given help and care in illness and material need releases energy and imagination for new action; it transforms the life of the suffering (i.e. metanoia).

* This intention of helping and caring for others can never be relinquished by the Ministry of Charity of the Church, if she does not want to destroy the fruit of the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. Is it possible for personnel, who have no access to strength of faith, to fulfill this intention?⁷⁶ What form should be taken by an

⁷¹ Cf., also in Psalms: „Listen, Yahweh, take pity on me, Yahweh, be my help! You have turned my mourning into dancing, you have stripped off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy“ (Ps 30:11-12). „Send out your breath and life begins; you renew the face of the earth“ (Ps 104-30). In his farewell discourse on love Jesus says: „In all truth I tell you, you will be weeping and wailing while the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrows will turn to joy“ (Jn 16:20). With regard to the socially immoral life, Paul writes: „And these things made up your way of life when you were living among such people, but now you also must give up all these things: human anger, hot temper, malice, abusive language and dirty talk; and do not lie to each other. You have stripped off your old behaviour with your old self, and you have put on a new self which will progress towards true knowledge the more it is renewed in the image of its Creator; and in that image there is no room for distinction between Greek and Jew, between the circumcised and uncircumcised, or between Barbarian and Scythian, slave and free. There is only Christ: He is everything and He is in everything. As the chosen of God, then, the holy people whom he loves, you are to be clothed in heartfelt compassion, in generosity and humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with one another; forgive each other if one of you has a complaint against another. The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same. Over all these clothes, put on love, the perfect bond. And may the peace of Christ reign in your hearts, because it is for this that you were called together in one body. Always be thankful“ (Col 3:7-15). The here and now of the transformation of suffering is bound up with the eschatological salvation to come, as emphasised by Paul: „And this veil will not be taken away till they turn to the Lord. Now this Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with our unveiled faces like mirrors reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the image that we reflect in brighter and brighter glory; this is the working of the Lord who is in the Spirit“ (2 Co 3:16-18); cf. 1 Co 15:51.

⁷² Just as they were the provocation of God’s love.

⁷³ Cf. Pompey, H., „Theologischer Verständnis von Leben und Leiden, von Solidarität und Helfen.“

⁷⁴ What this entails is the charitable participation of man in the fulfilment of the creation, as Boulad affirms, cf. Boulad, H., „Caritas als Dienst der Evangelisation“, in: Pompey, H. (ed.), Caritas – Das menschliche Gesicht des Glaubens, cit., pp. 223-235.

⁷⁵ This also includes the Ministry of Justice.

⁷⁶ In tackling this question we need to differentiate between two things: whether people’s access to faith is obstructed, or whether they themselves categorically reject the transcendental religio, i.e. a bond with God that

appropriate form of Caritas catechesis aimed at providing an introduction and guidance to personnel employed in the charitable services?

Specific features of a Ministry of Charity

9. The Ministry of Charity seeks to help man in an integral way, in other words it wants to inspire or revitalise thinking, feeling, acting and environment in suffering and illness. In theological terms, this is the *Fides-qua-creditur* effect, which releases vitality. The Ministry of Charity is thus mentally/psychologically alleviating, and at the same time strengthening. But it also provides a form of help that is spiritually restorative, that restores a sense of meaning of life, and promotes an integral renewal of life.⁷⁷ This brings us to the „*fides-que-creditur*“ aspect of Charity.⁷⁸ Strength and wisdom are the basic elements of a successful life in spite of suffering and affliction.

According to *Evangelii nuntiandi*,⁷⁹ Caritas and Catechesis belong together.⁸⁰ What is entailed here is the transformation, the metanoia of the person. This also comprises the Christian „conversion“ of the social environment in which people live, as envisaged by the Church’s social apostolate,⁸¹ by liberation theology, by community work⁸² or the commitment of civil society, and as enacted by any politically relevant ministry aimed at achieving a more just society. At the end of a

transcends themselves. Questionnaires of the German Caritas Association (DCV) and surveys of the Institute of Caritas Science show that the overwhelming majority of Caritas personnel identify with the specific character of the Church’s welfare and health-care services.

⁷⁷ Cognitive psychology makes it clear that there is a reciprocity between cognitions and emotions. Psychosomatics show that the tension between emotions and somatic phenomena can make a person ill and have other stressful or damaging effects on a person’s health, while behaviour psychology teaches that motivations and attitudes have a decisive effect on human behaviour, cf. Pompey, H., „Theologisch-psychologische Grundbedingungen der seelsorglichen Beratung“, in Lade, E. (ed.), *Christliches ABC heute und morgen. Handbuch für Lebensfragen und kirchliche Erwachsenenbildung*. Bad Homburg, 1978 ff. (supplement nr. 6, 1986), pp. 179-209. In this way faith represents also a cognitive reality (*fides quae creditur*). In theological terms caring and helping express the unspoken aspects of faith, which we call „*fides qua creditur*“ and which is the supporting element of the proclamation of the contents of the faith, „*fides quae creditur*“.

⁷⁸ Cf. Pompey, H., *Beziehungstheologie – Das Zueinander theologischer und psychologischer „Wirk“-lichkeiten und die biblisch-theologische Kontextualisierung von Lebens- und Leidensfragen*, cit., 1997.

⁷⁹ Paul VI, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii nuntiandi: Evangelisation in the Modern World*, 1975. Cf. Secretariat of the German Bishops’ Conference (ed.), *Verlautbarungen des apostolischen Stuhls*, 2, Bonn 1975; Pompey, H., „Leid und Not-Herausforderungen für Christliche Soziallehre und Christliche Sozialarbeit“, in: Glatzel, N./Pompey, H., (eds), *Barmherzigkeit oder Gerechtigkeit?*, Freiburg 1991, pp. 9-38, pp. 23-25.

⁸⁰ That means that the cognitive interpretation, recognition, and understanding of a given charitable experience form a unity.

⁸¹ Cf. Pompey, H., „Die soziale Pastoral der Dritten Welt als Herausforderung für das diakonisch-caritative Engagement einer Gemeinde“, in: Biemer, G., (ed.), *Gemeinsam Kirche sein. Festschrift der Theologischen Fakultät der Universität Freiburg i. Br. Für Erzbischof Dr. O. Saier*, Freiburg 1992, pp. 410-443.

⁸² Cf. Pompey, H., „Gemeindeaufbau und caritatives Engagement der Basis“, cit., pp. 8-17.

Eucharistic Celebration, the Deacon says: „*Ite missa est*“, i.e. „*Now go and do likewise*“ – bear witness to the experience of God’s love, open up a space for love, and donate words of love. Love is the fruit of faith. Kindle the fire of His love and point out paths of justice; light up people and incite them to love. Love will then find expression in the Ministry of Mercy and of Justice.

* Do we find enough time in our Ministry of Mercy, following the practice of Jesus, to help and care for people in such a way as to enable them to discover the Gospel in their predicament of life and so permit a *révision de vie*?

* Do we further take sufficient care in our ministry to perceive the function of justice in society? In other words, do we commit ourselves to changing a country’s society and structure to ensure they serve the well-being of the suffering? For this it is often necessary to clearly direct society to people’s situations of suffering and point out concrete opportunities and ways of helping in the areas in which they each live.⁸³

Addresses of Ministry of Charity

10. Jesus’s Gospel of life is addressed to all men, although Jesus Himself only healed by way of example. He especially addressed Himself, in His healing, to the poorest of the poor. Jesus healed and helped only one person at the pool of Bethesda, and precisely the one who was poorest and had no one else to help him (Jn 5:1-18). For Jesus felt Himself particularly called to care for the poor and the suffering, in order to proclaim to them the gospel of liberation. Those who could help themselves in practical and financial terms, or could avail themselves of other offers of aid, were also the addressees of the helping of healing Mission of Jesus, but not primarily. This was also the practice of the Early Church. „The poor come first“⁸⁴ still today remains the rule of the social work of the Church.

* Yet, although the poor are given priority, Jesus does not exclude others better situated in social and financial terms who are ill or disturbed. For instance He helped Peter’s mother-in-law (Lk 4:38-39), the daughter of the head of the synagogue Jairus (Lk 8:40-56), the centurion’s slave (Lk 7:1-10) and the son of a royal official (Jn 4:43-54). He devoted time to counselling the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn 4:4-42), Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews (Jn 3:1-21), the rich young man (Mt 19:16-22), the affluent tax collectors (Mk 2:15-17; Lk 5:27-31) and the scribes (Mt 12:38-45; 15:1-

⁸³ In the way that this happens e.g. through *Secours Catholique* in France.

9). None of these belonged to the materially most disadvantaged sections of society at the time, and yet in spite of that Jesus helped them and counselled them.

* Since in previous centuries the middle and upper classes⁸⁵ - on the basis of natural family solidarity - took care themselves of their sick and suffering in their own houses, the Church did not have to provide health-care, or social and counselling services for everyone. The history of the practice of Charity in the Church demonstrates this. Right down to the late Middle Ages, hospices were only for foreigners and the poor.

* If a parish, a community, a charitable association reaches the limits of its aid in terms of financial resources and personnel, it and its Caritas are not under any obligation to provide a blanket provision of welfare and health-care services to everyone,⁸⁶ e.g. to the more affluent classes of the population. Community and private providers of such services can equally provide them. But if no one cares for the poor, then it is they who are without doubt the first and foremost addressees of Church aid.

11. The healing of the ten lepers (Lk 17:11-19) makes clear a social criterion of charitable aid. Jesus heals all ten, even the non-believing Samaritans. He does not enquire into their religious affiliation, although this was not unimportant to Him, as His meeting with the woman at Jacob's well (Jn 4:4-42) makes clear. His Caritas is open to all, it knows no boundaries. He wanted to enable everyone to experience the Kingdom of God. That is why He could not limit His healing and His preaching, although He was conscious of having been primarily sent to the house of Israel, i.e. to His own religious community (Mt 10:5-8; 15:24; Lk 2:34; Rev 2:36). Jesus heals and helps without preconditions. But many only wanted rapid healing and help, although Jesus would have gladly given them more. Jesus Himself was disappointed by this. Only one of the ten Lepers came back, expressed an interest in associating himself with Him, was converted, underwent change of heart (metanoia) and became a member of his spiritual community. He was, what is more, a foreigner and non-believer. Yet he knew how to prize his experience of God's mercy and believed, i.e. was healed in an integral way and thus earned life in the long term.

Christian institutions and services that are limited to believers alone, and that deliberately exclude others, are inconceivable. Paul tells us: „Let us never slacken in

⁸⁴ The slogan of the German Lenten Charity appeal of Misereor in 1998, to mark its 40th jubilee.

⁸⁵ Up until a century ago.

⁸⁶ No such limitation can be derived from the practice of Jesus or that of the Early Church.

doing good; for if we do not give up, we shall have our harvest in due time. So then, as long as we have the opportunity, let all our action be for the good of everybody, and especially of those who belong to the household of the faith“ (Ga 6:9-10). The Caritas of the Church must always be open to everyone. Although the charitable love for its own members distinguished the original Christian community (Ga 6:10; Jn 13:34-35),⁸⁷ this did not mean that the others were excluded (Ga 6:10).⁸⁸ „We help if we can, all those who are in need“, or „the deacon is a provider of welfare for all those who are in the city“; as the theologian and philosopher Justin (+ 165) put it.⁸⁹

Charitable *communio* or *koinonia* became the distinguishing feature of the early Christians. Mutual help and solidarity were so impressive within the Church that non-believers were able to see for themselves, according to Tertullian (140-220): „See how they love each other“⁹⁰. The early Christian communities testified to the strength of their faith through the mutual love they expressed in *communio*. The option for the members of their own community cannot be lightly dismissed, as it arises from the charitable *koinonia* itself.⁹¹ This option should not be left out of consideration in the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy.⁹²

The slogan of our Congress is: „*And above all these put on love – Many forms of poverty, one single response*“. In this sense I wanted to point out some biblical and theological aspects of the charitable mission of our Church, especially as a contribution to the second main perspective of the Congress: Witnesses to Charity with the Holy Father. The New Testament teaching and also the Social Doctrine of the Church, especially that of our present Pope John Paul II. enables us to recognise the particular charitable spirit of the Church, which is at once realistic and close to life. Both represent a source of guidance for the humane quality of the charitable ministries of mercy and social justice in our time.

⁸⁷ This has an analogy with Jesus' option: Jesus also felt Himself primarily sent to His own people and only secondarily to all peoples.

⁸⁸ The Works of Charity performed towards non-believers, apart from the concrete practical help that grows from the faith itself, also have the aim of bearing witness to the faith through deeds (in the same way as the healing practice of Jesus), so that all men may be able through the social apostolate of the Christian community, to share in God's love.

⁸⁹ Cf. Pompey, H., *Christlicher Glaube und helfende Solidarität in der Diakonieggeschichte der Kirche*.

⁹⁰ Tertullian, *Apologeticum*. *Verteidigung des Christentums*, ed. C. Becker, München 1952, p. 182ff.

⁹¹ See *supra*, thesis no. 3.

⁹² From those responsible for charitable services and from volunteer staff one often hears the fearful question: Will I myself eventually find a place in a charitable establishment such as a residential home for the elderly or nursing home? The State provides health insurance, but the Church or Caritas as a welfare association does not guarantee them any form of place in its own homes. Is that compatible with a charitable association?