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Beyond Bilingualism: Gustaf Wingren and the Public Voice of Diaconia

Abstract:

The political and public dimensions of diaconia are increasingly being acknowledged. This in turn necessitates a discussion of the language agents of diaconia should use when expressing their views in the public sphere. Should they articulate their concerns in a so-called secular language, accessible also to those who do not share the Christian faith? Or should they use the distinctive language of their specific religious tradition? The article proposes that the political ethics of the Swedish theologian Gustaf Wingren (1910–2000) provides a rewarding starting point for addressing this issue. With his dialectical approach to the distinction between law and Gospel, universality and particularity, Wingren contributes to an understanding of the public voice of diaconia, which not only moves beyond the alternatives of distinctiveness and accessibility but which also challenges the concept of bilingualism, a concept that has become central to contemporary public theology. Thus, it is argued, Wingren paves the way for conceptualizing the public voice of diaconia and provide it with the rhetorical flexibility, dialogical reciprocity, and polyphonic diversity needed to constructively engage a postsecular public sphere characterized by religious complexity.

Keywords:

diaconia, Gustaf Wingren, postsecular society, public theology, bilingualism

Introduction

Imagine you are employed in a Christian faith-based organization (FBO) and are given the task of writing a petition urging political authorities to give undocumented immigrants access to public healthcare services. One of the questions you need to figure out is: What kind of arguments and what kind of language to use? Should you, for instance, refer to the right to healthcare for all, as stated in the UN Convention

on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights?¹ Or should you, perhaps, point out that Jesus himself was a refugee, and that the Bible says that whatever we do for one of the least brothers and sisters of Jesus, we do for him (Mt 20:40)?² In other words, should you argue in a so-called secular language, accessible also to those who do not share the Christian faith? Or should you articulate your concerns in the peculiar language of the Christian tradition, using explicitly religious narratives and metaphors, thus maintaining the distinctive character of the public voice of the FBO?³

In the following, I discuss this question with special regard to agents of diaconia, understood as people, communities, or organizations involved in Christian social practice, operating in a postsecular context.⁴ Whereas the concept of diaconia often is identified with individual charity, in the last decades the public and political dimensions of the concept have been brought to the forefront of the discussion. Accordingly, diaconia is currently a concept that, by matters of course, is seen to include “the call to stand up for justice and truth in society, to advocate for the rights of the poor and underprivileged, and to work for peace in the world,” to quote the Norwegian professor of diaconia Stephanie Dietrich.⁵ In a postsecular context, where the demarcations of “public” and “private,” “secular” and “religious” are breaking down and the conventions regulating public discourse consequently

1 This was how *The Church City Mission* in Norway, together with ten partner organizations, in 2015 chose to argue in a petition addressed to The Minister of Health and Care Services, cf. Kirkens bymisjon, “Opprop – rett til helsehjelp for papirløse.”

2 This was how the synod of the Church of Norway chose to argue in a statement concerning the need to show hospitality in asylum and refugee politics, cf. Church of Norway, “Vis gjestfrihet!” It is, of course, as we shall come back to, also possible to combine these ways of arguing.

3 This way of phrasing the question is indebted to Kjetil Fretheim, *Interruption and Imagination. Public Theology in Times of Crises* (Eugene Oregon: Pickwick, 2016), 114.

4 The meaning of the term “postsecular” is contested. In the following, I use it to designate a socio-cultural situation where strong secular sectors continue to exist and thrive, while at the same time the boundaries between the secular and the religious are becoming more porous, so that seemingly contradictory affirmations of social life reality may coexist at different levels; cf. Niels Henrik Gregersen, Bengt Kristensson Uggla, and Trygve Wyller, “Reconfiguring Reformation Theology: The Program of Scandinavian Creation Theology,” in *Reformation Theology for a Post-Secular Age: Løgstrup, Preter, Wingren, and the Future of Scandinavian Creation Theology*, eds. Niels Henrik Gregersen et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 7; 13–14.

5 Stephanie Dietrich, “Mercy and Truth Are Met Together; Righteousness and Peace Have Kissed Each Other” (Psalm 85:10): Biblical and Systematic Theological Perspectives on Diakonia as Advocacy and Fight for Justice,” in *Diakonia as Social Practice. An Introduction*, eds. Stephanie Dietrich et al. (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2014). For a similar emphasis on the political, public, and prophetic dimension of diaconia, see Kjetil Fretheim, “Dimensions of diaconia: the public, political and prophetic,” *Diaconia* 4, 1 (2013).

are dissolving,⁶ the question of how to articulate the public dimension of diaconia needs to be further discussed. This article aims to contribute to this discussion.

How agents of diaconia should voice their public engagement is indeed a question of global and ecumenical concern. The following considerations, however, take their primary point of departure from the Lutheran tradition at work in liberal democracies in the Nordic countries. This is not just a pragmatic choice, reflecting the need to narrow down the aim and scope of the discussion. Both the Lutheran tradition (especially as articulated within Scandinavian creation theology) and the Nordic religious-political context harbor specific challenges and constructive resources concerning the issue of religious voices in the public sphere.⁷ A contemporary discussion of the public voice of diaconia concentrating on the Lutheran tradition operative in the Nordic countries is therefore both needed and justified. That said, the subsequent reflections hopefully also testify to the ecumenical and intercontextual potential of this discussion.

To discuss the question of the public voice of diaconia, I focus on the writings of one of the founding figures of Scandinavian creation theology, the Swedish professor in systematic theology, Gustaf Wingren (1910–2000). Although Wingren developed his theological thinking in a religious and political context at once less pluralistic and less secularized than ours, I still find his political ethics to be relevant for a contemporary discussion of the public voice of diaconia. With his dialectical configuration of the relationship between law and Gospel, universality and particularity, I argue that Wingren paves the way for an understanding of the public voice of diaconia which not only moves beyond the alternatives of distinctiveness and accessibility but which also challenges the concept of bilingualism, which has become central to contemporary public theology.

I first point out some relevant aspects of the ongoing debate on religious voices in the public sphere. Then, I analyze Wingren's take on the issue, by describing the central features of his political ethics. In the last section, I discuss the relevance of Wingren's approach for a contemporary understanding of the public voice of diaconia, in critical dialogue with the bilingual approach. As I have analyzed elsewhere, Wingren's explicit reflections on diaconia remain within a rather individualistic paradigm, representative of the theological discourse of his day.⁸ In this

6 Elaine L. Graham, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Public Theology in a Post-Secular Age* (London: SCM Press, 2013), 65.

7 For a discussion of the contemporary contribution of Scandinavian creation theology, see the collection of articles in Niels Henrik Gregersen et al. (eds.), *Reformation Theology for a Post-Secular Age: Løgstrup, Prenter, Wingren, and the Future of Scandinavian Creation Theology* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017).

8 Tron Fagermoen, "The Distinctiveness of Diaconia and the Post-Secular Condition: Gustaf Wingren Revisited," *Diaconia* 9, 1 (2018).

article, which focuses on the public and political dimension of diaconia, I expand the perspective and turn my attention to Wingren's political ethics more broadly understood.⁹

The Postsecular Turn and the Option for Bilingualism

A central trait of the current sociopolitical context is that the attempt to keep religion and politics apart is being challenged: Not only is the prediction of the classical secularization thesis, namely, that religion is about to disappear from public life, radically questioned.¹⁰ The religious roots of the differentiation between religion and politics are also increasingly acknowledged, an insight that itself blurs the liberal religion-politics distinction.¹¹ This so-called postsecular turn, however, certainly does not imply that "God is back" in any simplistic sense, or that the processes of secularization are seen as coming to an end. Rather, recent research from the Nordic context shows that sociologists are having a hard time finding unambiguous evidence for the reappearance of traditional religion. What, according to the same sociologists, the postsecular turn does imply, however, is that the current situation is characterized by religious complexity, meaning that seemingly contradictory trends of secularization and deprivatization of religion coexist at different levels.¹² Accordingly, the traditional liberal distinction between religion and politics is (once again) up for debate.¹³

Over the last decades, the renegotiation of the distinction between religion and politics has fostered an intense discussion on the issue of religious reasoning in the public sphere. Within political philosophy, the discussion has been described as a dispute between so-called exclusivists and inclusivists.¹⁴ The former argues that,

9 In Wingren's works *political ethics* is not treated as a clearly delineated topic. The following uses the term to designate those aspects of Wingren's theology which relate to the assessment of political actions and agents, including the question of how Christians and/or the church should take part in political deliberation. For a critical analysis of Wingren's political ethics, see Carl-Henric Grenholm, *Tro, moral och uddlös politik. Om luthersk etik* (Totem: Verbum 2014), 137–174; and Carl-Henric Grenholm, "Law and Gospel in Lutheran Ethics," in *Justification in a Post-Christian Society*, eds. Carl-Henric Grenholm and Göran Gunner (Eugene Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2014), 91–106.

10 Peter L. Berger (ed.), *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 2.

11 Ola Sigurdson, *Det postsekulära tillståndet* (Göteborg: Glänta, 2009), 10–14; Ragnar Misje Bergem, *Politisk teologi* (Oslo: Dreyers forlag, 2019), 107–126.

12 Inger Furseth, "Secularization, Deprivatization or Religious Complexity?", in *Religious Complexity in the Public Sphere. Comparing Nordic Countries*, ed. Inger Furseth (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 292.

13 Sigurdson, *Det postsekulära tillståndet*, 322–334.

14 Andrew F. March, "Rethinking Religious Reasons in Public Justification," *American Political Science Review* 107, 3 (August 2013), 523; Giorgi Areshidze, "Taking Religion Seriously? Habermas on

in religiously pluralistic societies, democratic deliberation should be conducted without any appeal to controversial truth claims.¹⁵ Public contributions of religious actors should accordingly rely on what John Rawls, in his seminal book *Political Liberalism*, calls the neutral and secular principles widely shared in a liberal society.¹⁶ The inclusivists challenges this view, arguing that this kind of self-restraint upon religious representatives is not only unfair and impractical but also impoverishes civic life. Religious actors engaging in the public sphere should therefore indeed use whatever arguments they find appropriate, including religious ones.¹⁷ In what can be seen as an attempt to bridge the divide between these positions, in his theory of how political decisions may be justified in pluralistic societies the influential philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas argues that, in a post-secular society, “comprehensive doctrines” (religious and nonreligious) should certainly be appreciated within the informal sphere of opinion formation, since religions offer articulations of moral sensitivities from which modern societies can profit.¹⁸ The only requirement is that believers and nonbelievers alike engage in a mutual learning process in which these comprehensive doctrines are translated into a language understood by all. This is necessary, since “without a successful translation there is no prospect of the substantive content of religious voices being taken up in the agendas and negotiations within political bodies and in the broader political process.”¹⁹

In political theology and theological ethics, the discussion has followed a similar pattern. Representatives of what might be called the universalistic approach have argued that since Christian ethics is a universal ethics of neighborly love, Christians do not possess any kind of privileged insight into ethical or political matters.²⁰ They should therefore – for good theological reasons – follow the dictum of Rawls and put forward their views using rational and reasonable arguments.²¹ Representatives

Religious Translation and Cooperative Learning in Post-Secular Society,” *American Political Science Review* 111, 4 (September 2017), 724.

15 Richard Rorty, “Religion as Conversation Stopper,” in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 171.

16 John Rawls, *Political Liberalism: Expanded Edition* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2005), 224–225.

17 Nicholas Wolterstorff, “The Role of Religion in Decision and Discussion of Political Issues,” in Robert Audi and Nicholas Wolterstorff (eds.), *Religion in the Public Sphere: The Place of Religious Convictions in Political Debate* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 112; Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 88.

18 Jürgen Habermas, “Notes on a Post-Secular Society,” *New Perspectives Quarterly* 25, 4 (2008), 28.

19 Jürgen Habermas, “Religion in the Public Sphere,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, 1 (2006), 11.

20 Knud E. Løgstrup, *The Ethical Demand*, trans. Theodor I. Jensen, Gary Puckering, and Eric Watson (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 111.

21 Svend Andersen, “Can We Still Do Lutheran Political Theology?” *Studia Theologica* 67, 2 (2013), 122.

of what might be called the particularistic approach, on the other hand, have argued that Christians should *not* give up their distinctive language when taking part in public debate. Translating religious concepts and metaphors into an assumed secular language, they claim, means inevitably losing substantial parts in translation – which should therefore be avoided.²² If we take arguments from both of these positions into account, a commonly held position within the developing paradigm of public theology is to opt for “a third way,” i.e., a bilingual approach.²³ Bishop and Professor of Public Theology, Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, for instance, argues that, in a postsecular society, public theology not only needs to be “eloquent in its own Biblical and theological language,” but that it also needs “to speak a language that can be understood by the public as a whole, using reason and experience to show that Biblical perspectives make good sense.”²⁴ Biblically based ethical orientations are indeed relevant both for the ecclesiastical and the secular realm. However, they need to be translated into the language of secular discourse if they are to be of any use in political deliberation. Bedford-Strohm, echoing Habermas, writes: “As much as the public must be open for the semantic potential of religious language, religious communities in general, and the churches in particular, must translate their contributions to public discourse into a generally accessible language.”²⁵ The option for bilingualism, in other words, means that in a postsecular society, both Biblical-theological and secular reason-based language are welcomed, but that the former needs to be translated into the latter if it is to make an impact in the public sphere.

Although the bilingual approach represents a theologically reflected and philosophically informed attempt at dealing with the question of religious reasoning in a postsecular public sphere, I still argue that it is insufficient. With its insistence on the need for translation *from* a Biblical-theological language *to* a generally accessible secular language, the option for bilingualism is in danger of reproducing the religious-secular dichotomy it rightly set out to challenge. Thus, it runs the risk of unduly narrowing the rhetorical space of religious actors engaging in political deliberation in a postsecular society.

Before I discuss the implications of these claims in more detail, let me first introduce Wingren’s alternative approach to the issue of how religious actors should

22 Stanley Hauerwas, “On Keeping Theological Ethics Theological,” in *The Hauerwas Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 52–53.

23 Graham, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, 99–100; Fretheim, *Interruption and Imagination*, 125–127; Dirk J. Smit, “Does it Matter? On Whether it is Method in the Madness,” in *A Companion to Public Theology*, eds. Sebastian Kim and Katie Day (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2017), 75.

24 Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, “Nurturing Reason: The Public Role of Religion in the Liberal State,” in *Liberation Theology for a Democratic Society* (Zürich: LIT Verlag, 2018), 41.

25 *Ibid.*

voice their political-ethical concerns in the public sphere. Although as mentioned Wingren developed his theology in a religious and political context that cannot be described as postsecular and is therefore less worried than a theologian such as Bedford-Strohm that society is in danger of losing the political resources of the Christian faith, his political theology still reflects an approach that, I argue, is relevant to the current situation. The following rather lengthy description of key features in Wingren thus serves to prepare the ground for the final discussion of how Wingren's political ethics may be relevant for a public voice of diaconia which takes the challenges of the current postsecular context into account.

Wingren's Political Ethic of Law and Gospel

The Rejection of Barth's Christocentrism

When Wingren articulates his political ethics, he engages in a polemical confrontation with some of the leading theologians of the day, notably with Karl Barth.²⁶ A key element in Wingren's criticism of Barth is directed toward the Swiss theologian's reordering of the Lutheran law-Gospel sequence,²⁷ a reordering Wingren takes to be the result of Barth's negative dependency on the fixation on epistemology in liberal theology.²⁸ Since Barth opposes the idea that human beings have adequate knowledge of God and God's will independent of the revelation in Christ, and since he believes that seeing the law as preceding the Gospel inevitably entails such an idea, in Wingren's view, he is required to reverse the law-Gospel scheme.²⁹ The result is a Christocentric theology that promotes the idea of an exclusively Christian ethos and, conversely, denies the existence of natural law.³⁰

According to Wingren, Barth's Christocentric reversal of the Lutheran law-Gospel sequence has wide-ranging implications for the content and task of political ethics. When the Gospel is given priority over the law, it is at the same time interpreted as a certain political order, a definite social program.³¹ The Gospel is thus "filled with

26 For a thorough analysis of Wingren's reception of Barth, see Ola Sigurdson, *Karl Barth som den Andre* (Stockholm: Brutus Östlings Bokförlag, 1996), 85–134. It goes beyond the scope of this article to evaluate whether Wingren gets Barth right or not. What Sigurdson's analysis suggests is that Wingren, like other Swedish theologians of the last century, trivializes Barth and construes him as *the other* of Swedish theology.

27 Gustaf Wingren, *Theology in Conflict*, trans. Eric H. Wahlstrom (Philadelphia, Pa: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), 110.

28 *ibid.*, 25.

29 *ibid.*, 126.

30 Gustaf Wingren, *The Flight from Creation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1971), 65 – 66.

31 Wingren, *Theology in Conflict*, 126.

law,” that is, filled with ethical content, whereas natural life is “drained of law,” that is, drained of God’s creative presence. As a result, “[t]he world becomes profane, and the scriptures become legalistic.”³²

To illustrate what this implies, Wingren points to how Barth in *Christengemeinde und Bürgergemeinde* (Christian Community and Civil Community) depicts church and state as two concentric circles with the revelation in Christ as their common center. Both the church (the inner circle) and the state (the outer circle) are called to be reminders of the center, of Christ. However, since only the church is truly aware of the basis on which the state also rests, the church has the *real* knowledge of what is good and right. Therefore, the church is given the role of passing along this knowledge on to the state – not the other way around.³³ Wingren acknowledges that this way of understanding the relationship between state and church gave Barth an effective means to criticize the ideology of the German National Socialism of his day. He maintains, however, that this does not in itself justify the reordering of the law-Gospel sequence. On the contrary, if Barth and his allies had made the first article of faith their starting point and referred to the antinationalistic potential in Old Testament statements of God being the Creator of everything and everyone, according to Wingren they would have been even better equipped to criticize the Nazi regime.³⁴

What makes Barth’s Christological reordering of the law-Gospel sequence so problematic in Wingren’s view is that it leaves the church to argue in a way that is “empty and pointless in the eyes of citizens who are atheists or followers of Islam,” i.e., in a language that does not make sense outside the domain of the church.³⁵ Since the revelation in Christ for Barth is the only true source of political-ethical knowledge, and since he believes that the church has privileged access to this source, it becomes difficult for the church to communicate its ethical convictions to those who do not share the Christian faith. Wingren admits, that after the Second World War, Barth develops a political ethics that increasingly draws on common-sense insights and reason-based arguments. However, since these references to common sense are not backed up with a theology that acknowledges the constructive role of reason, Wingren finds them to be more the result of theological inconsistency than expressions of change in theological orientation.³⁶ Thus, for Wingren, the

32 *ibid.*, 71–72.

33 Gustaf Wingren, “The Word of God in the Theology of Barth,” *The London Quarterly and Holborn Review* (1949), 343.

34 Gustaf Wingren, *Creation and Gospel: The New Situation in European Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1979), 64.

35 Wingren, *Flight from Creation*, 46.

36 Gustaf Wingren, “Reformationens och lutherdomens ethos,” in *Etik och kristen tro*, ed. Gustaf Wingren (Lund: Gleerups förlag, 1971), 131–132. In Sigurdson’s view, this is Wingren at his most

problem of how the church should communicate its political-ethical convictions to the wider public also remains unresolved in the later Barth.³⁷

A Political Ethics of Law and Gospel

Wingren's alternative to Barth is characterized by his insistence on making the first rather than the second article of faith the point of departure. Only if theology and theological ethics start with a proper description of *creation* and *law*, Wingren claims, is it possible to adequately interpret other aspects of the Christian faith.³⁸ Wingren's theology should not, however, be reduced to creation theology understood exclusively. For Wingren, it is the interplay between law and Gospel, creation and redemption, earthly and spiritual government, that structures the task and content of theological ethics. Wingren's political ethics Wingren can thus be described as an ethics of law and Gospel in which the universalistic and particularistic dimensions of the Christian faith are kept in dialectical tension.³⁹

Wingren's insistence on making creation and law the starting point of ethics means that every human being can acquire moral insight independent of and before God's revelation in Christ. The law (in its first use) or the earthly government – concepts Wingren uses almost synonymously – is universal: It is given in creation, it is perceptible through reason, and it is at work wherever needs of the neighbor

problematic. By first criticizing Barth for reversing the law-Gospel sequence and then criticizing him for not following up on his own critique, Wingren seems to claim that Barth gets it wrong either way; cf. Sigurdson, *Karl Barth som den andre*, 108.

37 For an interpretation of Barth that makes some of the same observations as Wingren but that evaluates Barth's use of common-sense arguments to be an example of bilingualism rather than the outcome of inconsistency, see Eva Haraste, "Karl Barth, a Public Theologian? The One Word and Theological Bilinguality," *International Journal of Public Theology*, 3 (2009).

38 Gustaf Wingren, *Creation and Law*, trans. by Ross Makenzie (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1958), v–vi; Gustaf Wingren, *Credo. The Christian View of Faith and Life*, trans. by Edgar M. Carlson (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1981), 12–13.

39 As pointed out by Kristensson Uggla, the theological thinking of Wingren went through a radical change at the beginning of the 1970s, in the sense that the social rather than the academic context now became the primary horizon of reflection; cf. Bengt Kristensson Uggla, *Becoming Human Again. The Theological Life of Gustaf Wingren*, trans. by Daniel M. Olson (Eugene: Cascade, 2016), 28. However, although Wingren's political ethics certainly became more explicit in his later writings, I agree with Carl-Henrich Grenholm when he argues that there is also a strong continuity between the early and the later Wingren, Grenholm, *Tro, moral och uddlös politik*, 166. I at least take this to be the case when it comes to the more fundamental aspects of theological ethics, such as the understanding of the relationship between the two governments, law and Gospel, creation and redemption, and so forth. The following analysis of Wingren's political ethics is therefore based on key texts from both early and later Wingren.

are present.⁴⁰ By qualifying that the law should not be understood as an eternal law, Wingren can therefore refer to the law as “natural law,” claiming that it is exclusively derived from the universally present demands of the neighbor.⁴¹ The validity of the laws contained in the Bible, for instance, the Ten Commandments, is therefore given in their status as being extraordinarily good expressions of the natural law rather than in their status as being a part of the Bible.⁴²

The universal character of the law does not imply, however, that the various instruments of the law *always* live up to the standards of neighborly love. Because of the existence of evil and sin, there is a constant temptation for anyone exercising power to abuse the law for selfish ends. Prevailing social structures and political authorities should therefore continuously be critically examined to ensure that they serve the needs of the neighbor.⁴³ Moreover, this means that, even if the law is perceptible without being articulated, it should still be preached.⁴⁴ As Wingren puts it: “Unfortunately, governments execute their task poorly. The church therefore needs to preach the law and precisely the law in its ‘civil use,’ *usus civilis legis*.”⁴⁵ On this basis, Wingren argues that the tradition of prophetic preaching should be kept alive, whether based upon common sense arguments (as in the Lutheran tradition) or on the Old Testament prophets (as in the Reformed tradition).⁴⁶

If, as mentioned, the revelation in Christ is not seen as a precondition for acquiring ethical insight, what is then the function of the Gospel in Wingren’s political ethics? Wingren emphasizes that the work of the Gospel, understood as “the story of Christ, the continued repetition of the account of what happened to Him, and what He did and said,”⁴⁷ brings absolution and restores.⁴⁸ No political program is

40 Wingren, “Lutherdomens ethos,” 115–117; Wingren, *Credo*, 61–63.

41 Wingren, *Credo*, 64–65.

42 Wingren, “Lutherdomens ethos,” 118.

43 Wingren, *Creation and Law*, 153–156.

44 Wingren’s position on the need to preach the law is disputed within Wingren research. Thomas Nygren concludes that in Wingren the law is to be presupposed rather than preached (Thomas Nygren, *Lag och evangelium som tal om Gud. En analys av synen på lag och evangelium hos några nutida lutherske teologer: Pannenberg, Wingren och Scaer* (Malmö: Artos & Norma, 2007, 63), whereas Bo Håkansson argues that for Wingren the law should be preached even though it is presupposed (Bo Håkansson, *Vardagens kyrka. Gustaf Wingrens kyrkosyn och folkkyrkans framtid* (Lund: Arcus förlag, 2001, 206). The following analysis makes clear that I find Håkansson’s interpretation to be the most convincing.

45 My translation: «Regeringarna i staterna sköter tyvärr sin uppgift dåligt. Då måste kyrkan predika lagen och just lagen i dess ‘borgerliga bruk,’ *usus civilis legis*.” Gustaf Wingren, “Vad är lag och vad är evangelium i dag,” *Tro och liv* 47 (1988): 6.

46 Wingren, “Lutherdomens ethos,” 119.

47 Wingren, *Creation and Law*, 182.

48 Gustaf Wingren, *The Gospel and The Church*, Trans. by Ross Makenzie (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1964), 77–78.

launched; no new law is offered. What is offered is liberation from “the curse of the law.”⁴⁹ Surely, in the preaching of the Gospel, Christ is put forth not only as a gift but also as an example to follow – an example in which the natural law is “accentuated” and “heightened.” This does not imply, however, that the example of Christ adds something “hitherto unknown” to the universal ethos of neighborly love. Rather, the Gospel confirms the already present ethical demand of the neighbor.⁵⁰

That said, I still argue that there are reasons for holding that the Gospel also plays a role in Wingren’s political ethics, although this is disputed in the Wingren research. Whereas, for instance, in his lengthy and thorough analysis of Wingren’s ethics, Carl-Henric Grenholm concludes that in Wingren’s view political ethics “should not be related to the Gospel and Christology,”⁵¹ I claim that the matter is a little more complicated.⁵² It is certainly true that Wingren urges Christians to refrain from using the Gospel to motivate secular politics⁵³ and warns them about basing their political reasoning on Christology, since that would decrease the scope of their argument.⁵⁴ It is equally true, however, that Wingren claims that this does not imply “that the Gospel of Christ has no political consequences.”⁵⁵ The theological basis for making such a claim is twofold. On the one hand, Wingren maintains that although Christ in principle does not add anything new to the ethical knowledge given in the demands of the neighbor: “Christ [...] helps people to be natural and to see what common sense requires of them.”⁵⁶ The image of Christ thus functions as a “catalyst” to see “what is natural” and to compel people to change the conditions of their fellow human beings.⁵⁷ On the other hand, Wingren holds that although the Gospel is a message of absolution – of justification by grace alone through Christ – it is not, as Luther claims, confined to do its work within the conscience. It is also related to the needs of the body, as Wingren’s use of Ireneus’ understanding of salvation in

49 Wingren, *Creation and Law*, 167.

50 Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 215–216.

51 Grenholm, “Law and Gospel,” 101.

52 This implies that I agree with Nygren when he argues for an ethically informed use of the Gospel in Wingren, cf. Nygren, *Lag och evangelium*, 65–66. See also Håkansson, *Vardagens kyrka*, 206–208. Grenholm is certainly right when he, against Nygren, emphasizes that in principle the Gospel according to Wingren does not bring anything substantially *new* to the content of Christian ethics, cf. Grenholm, *Tro, Moral och Uddlös Politik*, 155–156. However, as I argue below, the sifting among existing demands and the social effects of the Gospel still implies that the Gospel plays a productive role in the political ethics of Wingren.

53 Wingren, “Lutherdomens ethos,” 133.

54 Wingren, *The Flight from Creation*, 46.

55 *Ibid.*, 52.

56 *Ibid.*, 53.

57 *Ibid.*

terms of healing demonstrates.⁵⁸ As such, the Gospel represents a transforming and liberating message with consequences for social life.⁵⁹ Concerning political ethics, this means, first, that Wingren maintains that the preaching of the Gospel is a critical principle in dealing with the multitude of demands surrounding every human being.⁶⁰ Thus, both law and Gospel, both common sense and the Gospel's image of Christ, form the foundation for a critical "no" to the ethical-political assessments of society.⁶¹ Second, Wingren also argues that the preaching of the Gospel has what he calls "social effects" (although he emphasizes that the Gospel should not be *reduced* to its social effects). One example of such a social effect is when the preaching of the Gospel breaks down social barriers and creates communities uniting people of diverse gender and ethnicity.⁶² Another example is when the preaching of the Gospel opposes the works-righteousness implicit in the ideology of growth, an ideology that leads to both the destruction of the natural environment as well as the exploitation of the world's poor.⁶³ Based on these observations, it is, in my view, appropriate to conclude that the Gospel of Christ plays a constructive role in Wingren's political ethics. Of course, Wingren's understanding of the role of the Gospel in political ethics both could and should be clarified and developed further. The tendency to prioritize the individual as the addressee of the Gospel should be challenged.⁶⁴ The same could be said about the assumption that using concepts taken from Christology would be incomprehensible within secular discourse.⁶⁵ Still, I claim that the analysis above points in the direction of a political ethics in which the universal and the particular, law and Gospel, are kept in a kind of productive dialectic tension.

To conclude then, Wingren's ethics of law and Gospel epitomizes a dialectical response to the question of what kind of language Christians and/or the church should use when communicating their ethical-political convictions to the wider public. On the one hand, it follows from Wingren's emphasis on the universal character of the law that when Christians take part in political debate, they should argue on the basis of common sense and natural reason.⁶⁶ Reasonable words with

58 Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 166–167.

59 Wingren, *Växling och kontinuitet*, 158–160.

60 Wingren, *The Flight from Creation*, 73.

61 Wingren, "Vad är lag och evangelium," 7.

62 Gustaf Wingren, *Växling och konitnuitet* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1972), 161.

63 Wingren, "Vad är lag och evangelium," 4–7. For an illuminating analysis of Wingren's criticism of the ideology of growth, see Kristensson Uggla, *Becoming human again*, 266–276, and Håkanson, *Vardagens kyrka*, 219–232.

64 See for instance Wingren, *Fligh from Creation*, 81.

65 Wingren, "Lutherdomens ethos," 133.

66 Wingren, "Lutherdomens ethos," 133.

a worldly sound are, according to Wingren, preferable if one seeks cooperation with people of no or other faiths.⁶⁷ At the same time, Wingren also argues that the Gospel, the preaching of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, has a role to play in political ethics: The Gospel makes it possible to differentiate between the demands of the neighbor, and it has social consequences when it is preached. Accordingly, based on Wingren's theology, it is possible to develop a political ethics in which both common sense and the image of Christ, both law and Gospel, both the universalistic and particularistic dimensions of the Christian faith, are utilized in the articulation of the public witness of Christians and/or the church.⁶⁸

The Dialogue with Løgstrup's Rejection of a Specific Christian Ethics

To further clarify the profile of Wingren's political ethics, it may be instructive to turn to his dialogue with the Danish theologian and philosopher Knud E. Løgstrup. In Løgstrup, Wingren identifies a thinker who confirms and expands his own understanding of the idea of creation through a phenomenological analysis of the human condition. By drawing on Løgstrup, Wingren is able to give a more adequate account of the Biblical notion of creation than the historical sources alone would allow him to do.⁶⁹ At the same time, Wingren also takes Løgstrup to represent a way of thinking that does not take the ethically recreative character of the Gospel properly into account.⁷⁰ An investigation into the assessment of Løgstrup may therefore deepen the understanding of Wingren's approach to the issue of how Christians and/or the church should voice their political-ethical concerns in public.

A key idea Wingren picks up from Løgstrup is that inherent in life given in Creation, there is a radical demand present wherever human beings interact. Every human encounter involves an unexpressed demand to take care of the other. To receive life is to be involved in this reciprocity of demands.⁷¹ Knowing the Bible or being a Christian is not a prerequisite for being informed by this radical demand. The radical demand arises, rather, wherever human beings interact. In this sense, Wingren claims, Løgstrup is justified in rejecting the idea of a specifically Christian ethics.⁷²

67 Gustaf Wingren, "Profetisk språk i bibeln och i dag," *Nålsögat* 7, 1–2 (1986), 18. Wingren can, as we have seen, occasionally also argue for the use of the Old Testament prophets in the criticism of flaws in contemporary society; see Wingren, "Lutherdomens ethos," 119.

68 Wingren, "Vad är lag och evangelium?" 7.

69 Wingren, *Credo*, 27.

70 Wingren, *The Flight from Creation*, 71–73.

71 Wingren, *Creation and Law*, 31.

72 Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 119.

What Wingren seems to find especially attractive in Løgstrup is that the demand of the neighbor should not be equated with existing norms of society. As Wingren puts it: “The need of our neighbor may require that we do something for him that has never been done before.”⁷³ The radical demand represents in other words a renewing force concerning the existing norms that surround us. Løgstrup thus offers an alternative to the discredited *Ordnungstheologie* – the theology of orders – which prevailed in Germany before the Second World War. In the theology of orders, life was understood to be established in an act of Creation once and for all and was seen to be preserved through certain static orders. In the philosophy of Løgstrup, however, the idea of creation is dynamically conceived, in the sense that the radical demand always challenges the existing norms of society to the benefit of the neighbor.⁷⁴ In Wingren’s view, this implies that the first article of faith becomes a critical rather than a conserving tool for social analysis.

Despite this enthusiastic endorsement of his Danish ally, Wingren remains critical of certain aspects of Løgstrup’s thinking. The main problem in Løgstrup, as Wingren sees it, is the tendency to treat the dialectics of law and Gospel as a distinction of peripheral importance. For Løgstrup, the Gospel is relevant only as an eschatological reality, as something that points toward life to come, toward another kingdom. What is then left out, according to Wingren, are the effects the Gospel has on life here and now – “before death.”⁷⁵ Løgstrup is right, Wingren claims, to avoid the mistake of turning faith into an ideology peculiar to Christians. Yet, he argues that what Løgstrup fails to acknowledge is that even though the believer does not acquire a new ideology through the Gospel, he/she still acquires faith. And this faith implies a new means of forming a “true judgment,” a judgment that critically discriminates between the many demands of the neighbor.⁷⁶

In an attempt to convince Løgstrup that recreation of social norms not only follows from the ethical demand but that it also *can* – and sometimes *does* – come from the Gospel, Wingren highlights two historical examples. First, he points out how in the early church the healing ministry of Jesus and faith in bodily resurrection led to unprecedented care for the body. Second, he points out how the message of justification by faith alone in the late Middle Ages resulted in the demand to have the Gospel preached in one’s own mother tongue, a demand that ultimately led to the rise of the nation-state. In both cases, Wingren claims, the recreation of social norms flows out of the Gospel rather than out of the ethical demand. When

73 Wingren, *Creation and Law*, 94, note 25.

74 *Ibid.*, 30.

75 Wingren, *Creation and Gospel*, 137.

76 Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 119–120.

Løgstrup overlooks this, he overlooks the ethically recreative force of the Gospel and reduces the church to playing a purely cultic role on the verge of death.⁷⁷

What the dialogue with Løgstrup demonstrates is that Wingren understands his position to be an alternative not only to the Christocentric ethics of Barth, but also to an exclusive focus on the first article of faith in Løgstrup. For Wingren, theological ethics should avoid the temptation of seeing creation and the Gospel – “the universal” and “the Christian” – either as contrasting entities (as in Barth) or identical entities (as in Løgstrup). Rather, both the law and the Gospel, both “the universal” and “the Christian” (in dialectical interplay) should be included in a theological interpretation of the human condition.⁷⁸ Concerning the question of what language Wingren suggests Christians or the church should use in public, this confirms the conclusion we reached above: On the one hand, the universal character of the ethical demand implies that Christians and/or the church should use a language based on reason and common sense when engaging the public sphere. On the other hand, the recreative force of the Gospel points in the direction of a political ethics in which also the story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus in some way is made productive in the public message of Christians and/or the church.

Wingren and the Public Voice of Diaconia in a Postsecular Context

How, then, is Wingren’s political ethics of law and Gospel relevant to a contemporary understanding of the public voice of diaconia? As I pointed out in the first part of the article, one of the characteristics of the current postsecular context is that seemingly contradictory trends of secularization and deprivatization of religion coexist at different levels. This state of religious complexity brings the question of language and voice to the fore: Should agents of diaconia such as FBOs, local parishes, or individual performers of Christian social practice address the public sphere through their distinctive religious language? Or should they rather seek to speak in a way that is understandable outside the religious community? The option for bilingualism propagated by, among others, the earlier mentioned Bedford-Strohm – who in the following will serve as the main representative of the bilingual approach – exemplifies one way of responding to this challenge. By insisting on the need for public theology to be grounded in the Biblical and confessional tradition of the Christian faith and at the same time to translate its contributions to the

77 Gustaf Wingren, “Skapelse och evangelium. Ett problem i modern dansk teologi,” *Svensk teologisk kvartalsskrift*, 53 (1977), 6–7.

78 Wingren, “Skapelse och evangelium,” 7–10.

public discourse into a generally accessible language, Bedford-Strohm believes he has found a way of dealing with the linguistic challenges of the contemporary postsecular public sphere.⁷⁹ Evaluated from Wingren's perspective, however, there are vital flaws in this way of responding to the postsecular condition, although there are also points of agreement between the two approaches. In the following, I discuss what these points of agreement and disagreement are and argue why I take Wingren's political ethics to be the better guide for agents of diaconia engaging in contemporary political deliberation.

Confirming and Challenging Bilingualism

To start with, there are at least two ways in which Wingren's political ethics confirms Bedford-Strohm's way of responding to the challenges of postsecularity. First, in a way that resembles Habermas' reflections on how religious voices in postsecular societies may contribute to the formation of opinion in the public sphere, both Wingren and Bedford-Strohm emphasize that it is imperative that theologians, the church, and for that matter agents of diaconia "speak the language of reason," as Bedford-Strohm puts it, when taking part in political deliberation.⁸⁰ For the FBO in the example referred to in the Introduction, in other words, it is fully in place to refer to shared values such as human rights when advocating for access to public healthcare for undocumented immigrants. From Wingren's perspective, this requirement for accessibility is not hard to fulfill: It corresponds to the idea that the law of neighborly love is in principle accessible to all, regardless of faith affiliation or church context. That said, Wingren is, admittedly, more reluctant than Bedford-Strohm to declare that a specific situation requires a churchly or diaconal public response – a hesitation that follows from his emphasis on the universal character of the law. There should be no doubt, however, that Wingren too holds that there are situations in which a churchly or diaconal public response is needed, and that public statements of this kind should be articulated in an accessible language.⁸¹

79 Bedford-Strohm, "Nurturing Reason," 35; 40–41.

80 Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, "Reformation. Freeing the Church for Authentic Public Witness," in *Liberation Theology for a Democratic Society* (Zürich: LIT Verlag, 2018), 106.

81 In Bedford-Strohm's theology, the political role of the church, agents of diaconia included, is testified to both in his principled reflections on the topic and in his work on specific ethical-political issues. See, for instance, Bedford-Strohm, "The Anthropocene as a Challenge for Public Theology" in *Liberation Theology for a Democratic Society* (Zürich: LIT Verlag, 2018) and Bedford-Strohm, "Sacred Body? Stem Cell Research and Human Cloning," in *Liberation Theology for a Democratic Society* (Zürich: LIT Verlag, 2018). For Wingren, the political role of the church is first and foremost treated in conjunction with fundamental considerations on how God acts in and with the world, although there are also examples of reflections on concrete ethical-political issues such as the ecological

Second, both Wingren and Bedford-Strohm hold that not only the first article of faith, but also the second, which deals with the meaning and significance of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, is relevant for the political dialogue taking place in the public sphere. In Wingren's theology, this is expressed through his idea that the Gospel contributes to the necessary sifting of the demands of the neighbor, and through his claim that the preaching of the Gospel has "social effects." For Bedford-Strohm, the public relevance of the second article of faith is expressed in his endorsement of the Christological ethics of Bonhoeffer and Barth, and through his observation that also in Luther the Gospel is relevant for temporal government, although it cannot be the direct basis for political rule.⁸² Surely, Wingren differentiates more clearly than Bedford-Strohm between the Lutheran tradition, on the one hand, and the theology of especially Barth, on the other hand, and rejects, as we have seen, the Christological political ethics of the latter. Bedford-Strohm, however, sees the two positions as overlapping (with Bonhoeffer taking an intermediary position), since in his view both hold that the Gospel cannot be applied directly to politics, and since both reckon that a language based on reason and common sense is to be preferred in the political realm.⁸³ Despite these differing assessments of the relationship between Luther and Barth, Wingren and Bedford-Strohm agree in claiming that the second article of faith also plays a role in political ethics (although Wingren is far more reluctant than Bedford-Strohm to make Christology productive in the public sphere). For the FBO in our example, this means that if we look somewhat beyond Wingren's reluctance toward using arguments that will not be accepted by all, it will be possible to refer also to the Gospel stories when arguing for access to healthcare for undocumented immigrants – as long as this is done without playing the Gospel stories out against the universal law of neighborly love. Thus, both Wingren and Bedford-Strohm have resources for making what Habermas refers to as moral sensitivities postsecular societies have much to gain from productive in the opinion-formation of the public sphere.⁸⁴

Despite these overlapping concerns, the exposition above also shows that Wingren's political ethics goes against vital points in Bedford-Strohm's bilingual response to the challenges of the postsecular context. The main problem with the bilingual approach, seen from Wingren's perspective, is the binary differentiation it makes between (1) a theological language rooted in Biblical texts and metaphors

crises and the problem of social exclusion. See, for instance, Wingren, *Creation and Gospel*, 58–60; Wingren, *Växling och kontinuitet*, 160–162.

82 Bedford-Strohm, "Public Theology and Political Ethics," in *Liberation Theology for a Democratic Society* (Zürich: LIT Verlag, 2018), 10.

83 Bedford-Strohm, "Public Theology and Political Ethics," 14–15.

84 Habermas, "Notes on a Post-Secular Society," 28.

and (2) an accessible language of secular discourse.⁸⁵ Whereas Bedford-Strohm operates with a Biblical and theological “first language,” on the one hand, and a secular “second language,” on the other hand,⁸⁶ Wingren’s political ethics resist making such a distinction. In Wingren’s theological grammar, a reason-based language that draws on experiences flowing out of the human condition as it is shared by all is just as much to be regarded as the “first language” of diaconia as a language permeated by Biblical narratives and explicit theological concepts. Thus, if a Christian FBO like the one in our example uses a language devoid of Biblical references and metaphors when urging public authorities to provide access to public healthcare for undocumented immigrants, this is not necessarily to be understood as an instance of “self-secularization”⁸⁷; it might just as well be interpreted as the result of the FBO taking the universal character of the law seriously. This endorsement of non-Biblical or nontheological language in public discourse is closely linked to Wingren’s theological affirmation of the secular.⁸⁸ For Wingren, who stresses God’s continuing and creative presence in *all* aspects of human life reality regardless of faith or church affiliation, secularization, understood as the process in which the bonds between church and state are loosened, is to be regarded as a legitimize and natural outcome of the Christian faith.⁸⁹ A so-called secular language without explicit religious connotations is accordingly to be conceived as a part of the mother tongue of diaconia, not as a foreign language for agents of diaconia. This radically questions the binary sacred/secular differentiation inherent in Bedford-Strohm’s bilingual response to the postsecular context.

This resistance against the binary differentiation between a Biblical-theological “first language” and a “second language” based on reason and common sense, moreover, means that the requirement for translation, dominant for instance, in Habermas’ reflections on religious contributions in postsecular societies, becomes problematic. Whereas the bilingual approach follows the proposition of Habermas and argues that religious actors in a postsecular society must be willing to translate their ethical-political convictions into what Bedford-Strohm calls “the language of secular discourse,”⁹⁰ Wingren’s theology goes against the premises on which such a request is built. In Wingren’s political ethics, universality and particularity,

85 Bedford-Strohm, “Poverty and Public Theology: Advocacy of the Church in Pluralistic Society,” in *Liberation Theology for a Democratic Society* (Zürich: LIT Verlag, 2018), 158.

86 Bedford-Strohm, “Freeing the Church,” 106.

87 Bedford-Strohm, “Nurturing Reason,” 40.

88 Bengt Kristensson Uggla, “Lutheran Theology as Affirmation of the Secular: Revisiting Gustaf Wingren in Dialogue with American Theology,” in *American Perspectives meet Scandinavian Creation Theology* Elisabeth Gerle and Michael Schelde, eds. (Aarhus: The Grundtvig Study Center, 2018), 43.

89 Wingren, “Lutherdomens ethos,” 135–136.

90 Bedford-Strohm, “Poverty and Public Theology,” 158.

law and Gospel, are rather held in a dialectical tension where they are seen to be reciprocally defined. Accordingly, the particularistic aspects of the Christian faith, the Gospel and its “social effects,” neither can nor should be translated into a secular and presumably more understandable language, just as little as the universal aspects of faith, captured in the concepts *creation* and *law*, should be understood as secular translations of the particularistic dimension of the Christian faith, i.e., the Gospel. To once again return to our example from the Introduction: When an FBO argues for access to public healthcare for undocumented immigrants by referring to the UN Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, this is not the result of the Gospel being translated into an accessible language; rather, it is, as made clear above, the result of a theological reflection that takes the universal character of the law into account. To be sure, Wingren shares the view of the bilingual approach that Christians taking part in political deliberation should strive to argue in a way that is comprehensible also to people of no or other faiths. The concept of translation, however, does not adequately describe what is going on when agents of diaconia struggle to make themselves understood in a postsecular public sphere.

Beyond Bilingualism

Based on these considerations, I will now reflect on how Wingren’s political ethic paves the way for a conceptualization of the public voice of diaconia that moves beyond the option for bilingualism and thus represents an alternative response to the challenges of the postsecular context. These considerations admittedly go further than Wingren’s explicit reflections do and reflect my own reworking of Wingren’s political ethics. This is especially the case in the first section, where I speak in favor of a public voice of diaconia characterized by rhetorical flexibility. That said, I still argue that what follows is both informed and inspired by the political-ethical framework Wingren establishes.

Wingren’s first possible contribution is to pave the way for a postsecular public voice of diaconia characterized by what I call *rhetorical flexibility*. To the extent that both law and Gospel, the universalistic and particularistic aspects of faith, play a constructive role in the articulation of political ethics, it may be possible to let context-specific rhetorical considerations shape the public language of diaconia. In other words, rhetorical reflections on the credibility of the institution or the person making the statement, considerations of what kind of arguments or language are most convincing, and deliberations on how to awaken the preferred sentiments in the addressees may play a key role in formulating the message. In one rhetorical situation, a Christian FBO urging political authorities to give undocumented immigrants access to public healthcare services may choose to argue on the basis of shared values such as human rights. In another situation, the same FBO may find it more effective to draw on the idiosyncratic narratives of the Christian tradition,

for instance, that of Jesus himself being a refugee. Thus, the semantic potential in the moral convictions of the Christian faith are preserved, just as the need to speak in a way that is accessible outside the church context is maintained. However, this kind of rhetorical flexibility demands that agents of diaconia develop the ability to make sound rhetorical judgments concerning what kind of language to use when taking part in the public discourse. As indicated, Wingren does not have much to say on how to form such a rhetorical judgment. What Wingren's political ethics does offer, however, is a clear vision of what the goal of the public voice of diaconia should be: to ensure that the universal law of neighborly love is observed.

Wingren's second contribution is to pave the way for a public voice of diaconia characterized by *dialogical reciprocity*. Whereas Bedford-Strohm's bilingual approach may be criticized for being too focused on how the Biblical and theological language of agents of diaconia can *contribute* to the postsecular public discourse, Wingren's political ethics instigates a more reciprocal attitude.⁹¹ His acknowledgment of the universal character of the law implies that, when agents of diaconia such as an FBO advocating for access to public healthcare for undocumented immigrants enter the public discourse, they do so knowing that they have as much to learn from other voices taking part in the discussion as they have to teach them.⁹² Accordingly, the necessary mutual learning process between religious and nonreligious actors in a postsecular society called for by, for instance, Habermas is theologically legitimized. Moreover, this attitude of dialogical reciprocity brings to the fore the question of how agents of diaconia may include the experiences of those people they like to think they are speaking on behalf of in their public language, namely, people at risk, the marginalized, and the oppressed. Wingren does not have much to say on this matter. However, given his emphasis on reciprocity in the interpretation of the ethical demand,⁹³ his responsiveness to the poor and the oppressed,⁹⁴ and the general focus on the *other* in his ecclesiology and anthropology,⁹⁵ it is not hard to see how Wingren's political ethics may be developed to include the experiences

91 Bedford-Strohm underlines that public theology needs to be interdisciplinary and to "engage in a vivid dialogue with other scholarly disciplines"; Bedford-Strohm, "Nurturing Reason," 42. However, this interdisciplinary dialogue appears to be focused more on public theology being informed by other scholarly disciplines on scientific knowledge on economy, ecology, and so forth, than on being informed on ethical-political values and insights. Thus, it seems to be tacitly presupposed that knowledge of what is good and right belongs to theology and the church.

92 Wingren, *Växling och kontinuitet*, 65.

93 Wingren, *Creation and Law*, 30.

94 Wingren, *Växling och kontinuitet*, 133–134.

95 For an analysis of this aspect of Wingren's ecclesiology and anthropology, see Kristensson Uggla, *Becoming Human Again*, 360–364.

of the oppressed and marginalized.⁹⁶ Consequently, in addition to deciding on what kind of language to use when advocating for giving undocumented immigrants access to public healthcare, the FBO in our example also needs to figure out how the voices of those affected, i.e., the voices of the undocumented immigrants themselves, may be included in the petition they are about to write.

Wingren's third contribution is to open up for a public voice of diaconia characterized by *polyphonic diversity*, a much-needed virtue in a postsecular context marked by political pluralism both within individual and among different religious and nonreligious/secular traditions. In the framework of Wingren's political ethics agents of diaconia are not supposed to speak univocally – with one voice and in one way. On the contrary, just as the law of neighborly love cannot be fixated independent of time and place, and just as the discriminative power of the Gospel cannot be detached from the specific neighbor relationship it operates within, agents of diaconia should not be expected to agree on what to say in public or on how to say it.⁹⁷ Again, it may be illuminating to turn to our imagined example. There may, of course, be agents of diaconia who do not share the views of the FBO arguing for giving undocumented immigrants access to public healthcare, just as there may be agents of diaconia who disagree with the way the case is argued. Within a theological framework that legitimizes diversity of opinion, this kind of disagreement is not in itself a threat to the integrity of the public voice of diaconia. That said, that Wingren's political ethics legitimizes diversity does not mean that it legitimizes diversity *without limits*.⁹⁸ On the contrary, although the law of neighborly love can be articulated in many ways, it cannot be articulated in just any way. Accordingly, an ongoing critical dialogue is necessary on how to articulate the law of neighborly love in a postsecular public sphere marked by religious-political pluralism.

Concluding Remarks

So, what kind of language should agents of diaconia use in a postsecular public sphere characterized by religious complexity, i.e., by seemingly contradictory trends of secularization and deprivatization of religion coexisting at different levels? Should they, in accordance with the idea of the universal character of Christian ethics, voice

96 Bedford-Strohm identifies a similar option for the poor in Luther, cf. Bedford-Strohm, "Poverty and Public Theology," 160–161.

97 A parallel to this model of polyphonic diversity may be found in Bedford-Strohm's concept of "pneumatological pluralism," cf. Bedford-Strohm, "Community and Diversity," 88.

98 This means that I disagree with Grenholm's assessment of Wingren's political ethics as being "empty in its normative content," Grenholm, "Law and Gospel in Lutheran Ethics," 102. See also Grenholm, *Tro, moral och uddlös politik*, 172–174.

their concerns in an accessible and so-called secular language? Should they use the distinctive language of the religious/theological tradition they are situated within? Or should they, as proposed by the bilingual approach, translate their originally religious conceived concerns into the secular language of the political discourse? As we have seen, Wingren's political ethics resists the binary tendency in all of these solutions. On the one hand, Wingren's political ethics implies that agents of diaconia, drawing on the universal law of neighborly love, may indeed use a language of reason and common sense when engaging the public sphere – although when doing so they should make clear that this kind of language is an inherent aspect of Christian speech and not the result of translation. On the other hand, Wingren's political ethics is also open for making what *is* specifically Christian, i.e., the Gospel, the message of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, productive in the articulation of the public voice of diaconia (although this aspect in Wingren's thought needs to be clarified and developed further). Accordingly, Wingren paves the way for conceptualizing a public voice of diaconia which dialectically makes both the universalistic and the particularistic aspects of faith productive in the formation of opinion in the public sphere; a voice which transcends the alternatives of accessibility and distinctiveness and moves beyond the option for bilingualism; a voice characterized by the rhetorical flexibility, dialogical reciprocity, and polyphonic diversity needed to constructively engage a postsecular public sphere characterized by religious complexity.

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