

The Distinctiveness of Diaconia and the Post-Secular Condition: Gustaf Wingren Revisited

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The new visibility of religion in the public sphere calls for a rethinking of what characterizes the distinctiveness of diaconia. In the context of nordic Lutheran theology this question has traditionally been treated within the framework of the two kingdoms doctrine. However, in more recent years, prolific theologians such as Ola Sigurdson and Tage Kurtén have questioned the viability of this framework. Given the current post-secular condition, they claim, Nordic Lutheran theology must seek to overcome the separation of religion and politics that the two kingdoms doctrine has given way to. The present article argues that Gustaf Wingren's (1910–2000) account of diaconia represents a rewarding point of departure for such an effort. Drawing on both Irenaeus' concept of *recapitulatio* and the distinction between the two kingdoms of Luther, Wingren develops an understanding of diaconia which makes the particularities of faith productive in the interpretation of diaconal practice, while simultaneously confirming the universal character of God's creative activity. Thus he paves the way for a dialectic approach to the distinctiveness of diaconia, which makes it possible to move beyond the dichotomization of religion and politics typical of protestant modernity, without dismissing still valuable aspects of the two kingdoms idea.

Keywords: Diaconia, The Two Kingdoms Doctrine, The Post-Secular Condition, Gustaf Wingren

Introduction

A central feature of the so-called post-secular condition is that the differentiation between religion and politics characteristic of European modernity is being renegotiated.¹ The result of secularization has not been that religion has simply disappeared from the public arena, as was predicted by the classical secularization thesis. Rather, the widespread talk of the new visibility of religion supports the impression that religion still makes an impact in the public sphere, also in the Nordic countries.² For sure, this assumed new visibility of religion does not imply that the ongoing processes of secularization are seen to be reversed or brought to an end. Recent published research on religion in the public sphere in the Nordic countries concludes, rather, that the present situation is characterized by religious complexity, meaning that seemingly con-

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- 1 Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics* (Chisester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) 14; Jürgen Habermas, "Notes on Post-Secular Society," *New Perspectives Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (2008): 19–20, and José Casanova, "Exploring the Postsecular: Three Meanings of "the Secular" and Their Possible Transcendence," in *Habermas and Religion*, ed. Craig Calhoun et al. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 45.
 - 2 Anders Backström, "Religion in the Nordic Countries: Between Private and Public," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 29, no. 1 (2014): 61–62.

tradiçtory trends of secularization and deprivatization of religion coexist at different levels.³ *The post-secular condition* can in accordance with these findings be described as a socio-cultural situation in which strong secular sectors continue to exist and thrive, while at the same time the boundaries between the secular and the religious become more porous, so that secular mind-sets and religious affirmations of the social life reality may co-exist.⁴

Traces of the post-secular can be found in many fields, including the field of welfare politics. Historically, the Nordic welfare states have been somewhat skeptical towards faith-based contributions to public welfare, in part guided by core elements of the Lutheran tradition.⁵ Especially in Sweden, the prototype of the social democratic welfare regime, faith-based welfare organizations such as diaconal institutions and parishes of the Lutheran majority church have traditionally been left out as potential welfare providers.⁶ During the last three decades this skepticism has been accompanied by a somewhat different attitude. Spawned by the deregulations of the welfare state, the welfare sector has gradually turned to the civil society with its religious elements for assistance,⁷

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- 3 Inger Furseth, "Secularization, Deprivatization or Religious Complexity?" in *Religious Complexity in the Public Sphere. Comparing Nordic Countries*, ed. Inger Furseth (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 292–299.
 - 4 Niels Henrik Gregersen, Bengt Kristensson Ugglå and Trygve Wyller, "Reconfiguring Reformation Theology; The Program of Scandinavian Creation Theology," in *Reformation Theology for a Post-Secular Age: Løgstrup, Prenter, Wingren, and the Future of Scandinavian Creation Theology*, ed. Niels Henrik Gregersen et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 7; 13–14. This definition of "the post-secular" is contested. James Beckford identifies no less than six partly opposing meanings of the term, see James A. Beckford, "Public Religions and the Postsecular: Critical Reflections," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51, no. 1 (2012): 1–19.
 - 5 Since the 1990s, the question of the role of Lutheranism in the development of the so-called universal Nordic welfare states has increasingly gained attention. For a discussion of this research, see Pirjo Markkola, "The Lutheran Nordic Welfare States," in *Beyond Welfare State Models. Transnational Historical Perspectives on Social Policy*, ed. Pauli Kettunen and Klaus Petersen (Northampton: Edward Elgar, 2011), 102–118, and Aud V. Tønnesen, "The Church and the Welfare State in Postwar Norway: Political Conflicts and Conceptual Ambiguities," *Journal of Church and State* 56, no. 1 (2014): 13–35.
 - 6 Annette Leis-Peters, "Diaconal Work and Research about Diakonia in the Face of Welfare Mix and Religious Pluralism in Sweden and Germany," in *Diakonia as Christian Social Practice. An Introduction*, ed. Stephanie Dietrich et al. (Oxford: Regnum, 2014), 140–142. There are, however, important differences between the Nordic countries in this respect. In Norway, for instance, there has been a somewhat more positive attitude to faith-based welfare providers, due to the more pragmatic approach to non-public actors taken by the social-democratic party in the formative years after World War II, Olav Helge Angell, "Kyrkan och välfärden. Svenska uppfatningar i ett norskt perspektiv" in *Välfärdsinsatser på religiös grund. Förväntningar och problem* ed. Anders Bäckström (Skellefteå: Artos, 2014), 161. Still, also here the government's increased stress on the ideal of value-neutrality in professional practice has functioned as an incentive for downplaying the religious profile of the faith-based welfare providers.
 - 7 Leis-Peters, "Diaconal Work", 141. According to Leis-Peters, the move towards opening up for private welfare providers has been more beneficial for the for-profit organisations than the non-profit organisations. Whereas 15% of all welfare services in Sweden in 2011 were provided by for-profit agencies, the share of non-profit organisations was less than 2%.

now even opening up for discussing the possible assets of bringing religiously motivated welfare providers into the welfare economy.⁸ The specific contribution of religious welfare actors has thus become a topic of interest – both for the religious welfare actors themselves, and for governmental policy-making.⁹

These developments within the field of welfare politics call, amongst others, for a renewed theological discussion of how the specific contribution of diaconia, the caring ministry of the church, should be understood.¹⁰ In what way should the particularities of the Christian faith, i.e. the central narratives and practices of the Christian tradition, inform the interpretation of diaconal practice? And what, if anything, is it theologically speaking that distinguishes the practice of diaconia from other contributions to welfare, secular and non-secular alike? In the context of Nordic Lutheran theology, this quest for the possible distinctiveness of diaconia¹¹ has traditionally been brought out with the help of distinctions related to the so called two kingdoms doctrine.¹² A main issue has thus been whether diaconia should be understood as being

8 Anders Bäckström, “Att leva i en postsekulär tid – vad menas med det?” *Svensk Kyrkotidning* 23. no. 2 (2012): 434, and Anders Bäckström, “Välfrädsinsatser på religiös grund – förväntningar och problem. En teoretisk inledning,” in *Välfrädsinsatser på religiös grund. Förväntningar och problem* ed. Anders Bäckström (Skellefteå: Artos, 2014), 12–13. A similar pattern can be found within the context of international development work, Kjell Nordstokke, “Mapping Out Diaconal Assets,” in *Diakonia as Christian Social Practice. An Introduction*, ed. Stephanie Dietrich et al. (Oxford: Regnum, 2014), 214–225.

9 Philip Wijkström, “Svenska kyrkan i ett omförhandlat samhällskontrakt,” in *Välfrädsinsatser på religiös grund. Förväntningar och problem* ed. Anders Bäckström (Skellefteå: Artos, 2014), 221–257. As Bäckström points out, the government’s interest in the religious elements of civil society is not unique for Sweden, but is present also in Denmark and Norway. Anders Bäckström, “Svenska Kyrkan som tillitsmakare och religiöst problem i välfärden,” in *Välfrädsinsatser på religiös grund. Förväntningar och problem* ed. Bäckström, (Skellefteå: Artos, 2014), 83–84. The same can be said of the majority churches’ interest in finding their specific role in the renegotiated welfare economy. See for instance *Kirke og helse* (2015), 20–21.

10 “Diaconia” or “the caring ministry of the church” is here used to designate not only diaconal parish work on the local level, but also the social practice of diaconal institutions of various kinds. In addition to the traditional performance of caring love for one’s neighbour, “diaconia” also includes – in line with the so called new paradigm of diaconia – creating inclusive communities, caring for creation and struggling for justice, Stephanie Dietrich et al., “Introduction: Diakonia as Christian Social Practice,” in *Diakonia as Social Practice. An Introduction* ed. Stephanie Dietrich et al. (Oxford: Regnum, 2014), 2.

11 Inspired by Jeppe Bach Nikolajsen’s use of Paul Riceour, the expression *the distinctiveness of diaconia* can be understood in two different though closely related ways. See Jeppe Bach Nikolajsen, *The Distinct Identity of the Church. A Constructive Study of the Post-Christendom Theologies of Lesslie Newbigin and John Howard Yoder* (Oregon: Pickwick, 2015), 15. First, it can be qualified as something intrinsic to the being of diaconia (the *ipse-identity* of diaconia). Second, it can be qualified in relation to other forms of care, religious and non-religious alike (the *idem-identity* of diaconia). In the following, I will include both the *ipse-identity* and the *idem-identity* of the caring ministry of the church when I use the expression *the distinctiveness of diaconia*.

12 As Frostin points out, the *Two Kingdoms Doctrine* is a rather young concept, stemming from the period just before World War II. To what extent it is justified to refer to the idea of two kingdoms as a *doctrine* in the traditional sense is thus debatable, Per Frostin, *Luther’s Two Kingdoms Doctrine. A Critical Study* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1994), 1–2.

a part of God's universal creative activity to promote good and oppose evil through the law and the earthly government, or whether it should be seen to belong to the spiritual government, to the witness of the gospel.¹³ In recent years, however, this way of framing the discussion has been challenged. Not only have ecumenical impulses given way to new ways of unfolding Lutheran understandings of the distinctiveness of diaconia – ways that do not make the distinctions related to the two kingdoms doctrine their primary point of departure.¹⁴ The criticism of the two kingdoms doctrine itself has been intensified and given a somewhat new direction. Prolific Nordic Lutheran theologians have, for instance, voiced the concern that the new visibility of religion challenges the ability of the two kingdoms doctrine to guide the Nordic folk churches as they enter into a new religious and societal landscape.¹⁵

The research question of the present article can, on the background of this, be articulated as follows: *How should the distinctiveness of diaconia be theologically interpreted, seen in light of post-secular challenges to the two kingdoms doctrine?* To discuss this question, I will take my point of departure in the writings of the Swedish theologian Gustaf Wingren (1910–2000). The choice of Wingren might not seem to be obvious, given the last decades developments in the theological interpretation of diaconia. However, although what Wingren has to say on the matter needs to be critically assessed in light of the political-ecclesiological turn in the so called new paradigm of diaconia, I still find his contribution to the field to be of great value. In spelling out his understanding of diaconia, Wingren combines elements from the idea of the two kingdoms in Luther with the concept of *recapitulatio* in Irenaeus. Thus, I will argue, he paves the way for an approach to the distinctiveness of diaconia which has the ability of being sensitive to the challenges of the post-secular condition, without dismissing still valuable aspects of the two kingdoms idea.

To substantiate this argument, I will first explore how the post-secular condition challenges the understanding of the two kingdoms doctrine. Then I will present the main features of Wingren's theology of diaconia. Finally, I will dis-

13 See for instance Lars Østnor, *Kirkens tjenester med særlig henblik på diakontjenesten* (Drammen: Luther forlag, 1978), 59–64; Torleif Austad, "Diakoni i lys av skapelse og forløsning," in *Diakoni og kirke*, ed. Andreas Aarflot (Oslo: Luther, 1976), 89–90; Kai Ingolf Johannesen, "Diakonien teologiske og kirkelige forankring," in *En bok om kirkens diakoni* ed. Alf B. Oftestad (Oslo: Luther forlag, 1980), 23–31. See also Stephanie Dietrich, "Systematisk-teologisk grunnlag for diakontjenesten," in *Diakonen – kall og profesjon* ed. Stephanie Dietrich et al. (Trondheim: Tapir Akademiske, 2011), 98–99; Johannes Nissen, *Diakoni og menneskesyn* (Frederiksberg: Aros, 2008), 42–46; Erik Blennberger, "Diakoni, etik och ideologi," in *Diakoni. Tolkning, historik, praktik* ed. Erik Blennberger and Mats J. Hanssen (Kristianstad: Verbum, 2008), 90–91.

14 See for instance *Diakonia in Context. Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment* (The Lutheran World Federation, 2009), 24–27, where the theological identity of diaconia is articulated within an explicit Trinitarian framework.

15 See note 17, below.

cuss how this interpretation is able to address post-secular challenges towards the two kingdoms doctrine described in the first part.

The Two Kingdoms Doctrine and the Post-Secular Condition

The two kingdoms doctrine represents a controversial element of the Lutheran tradition, not least due to its lack of inner consistency and its tendency for quietism.¹⁶ In the recent years, a new kind of criticism has been added to the list of objections. Informed by theories of the post-secular, theologians such as Ola Sigurdson and Tage Kurtén have in different, though in my view compatible ways made the case that the effective history of the idea of the two kingdoms does not adequately come to terms with characteristic traits of the late modern context.¹⁷ First – and this is especially the concern of Sigurdson – the two kingdoms doctrine has contributed to a radical privatization and subjectivation of faith, which is problematic given the post-secular renegotiation of the liberal differentiation of religion and politics. In a very general form the two kingdoms doctrine is based on the distinction between the “inner human being” and the “outward human being”, where the former is seen to be a citizen in the spiritual and private realm and the latter in the earthly and political realm. A central aspect in this way of thinking is that both realms are ruled by God. However, whereas the political realm is understood to be God’s rule over *all* people regardless of religious affiliation, the spiritual realm is seen to be the realm of faith, where God brings forgiveness of sins through Christ. Since what God is doing through the spiritual realm is restricted to “the inner human being”, faith is reduced to a private commerce between God and the soul. The embodied dimension of religion is accordingly regarded as belonging to the earthly sphere of the “outward human being”, and is as such

16 Frostin, *The Two Kingdoms Doctrine*, 1–10. As Frostin’s study shows, the terminology used when treating the idea of the two kingdoms varies. Whereas some refer to the distinction between two realms, others refer to the distinction between two kingdoms or two governments / regiments. In the following, I will – with a few exceptions – stick to the terminology used in the literature I am referring to. In the last discussion, where I discuss how Wingren’s interpretation of the distinctiveness of diaconia is relevant in a post-secular setting, I will refer to the earthly and spiritual government when the point is to distinguish between the two ways in which God is active in the world, and to the two kingdoms doctrine when the idea as a whole is being addressed.

17 Tage Kurtén, “Political theology in a Nordic post-secular setting,” *Studia Theologica*, 67, no 2, (2013): 95; Tage Kurtén, “Lutheran Moral Thinking: Its Dilemma in a Late Modern Setting,” in *Crises and Change. Religion, Ethics and Theology under Late Modern Conditions* ed. Jan-Olav Henriksen and Tage Kurtén (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2012), 15; Tage Kurtén, “Luther, Wittgenstein and Political Theology”, in *Lutheran Identity and Political Theology* ed. Carl-Henric Grenholm and Göran Gunner (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2014), 156–159; Ola Sigurdson, “Beyond Secularism? Towards a Post-Secular Political Theology,” *Modern Theology* 26, no. 2 (2010): 188; Ola Sigurdson, *Det postsekulära tillståndet* (Göteborg: Glänta, 2009), 353.

seen to be a merely external tool for the authentic inner faith.¹⁸ As long as the body of the nation state and the ecclesial body converged, this way of distinguishing between “inner” and “outward human being” could still according to Sigurdson appear meaningful. In the present pluralistic context, however, where the hegemony of Christianity is lost, this “excarnation” of faith, to use Charles Taylor’s expression,¹⁹ needs to be reconsidered.²⁰

Second, – and this is mainly the concern of Kurtén – the two kingdoms doctrine has legitimated the development of the secular in sharp contrast to the religious,²¹ and thus the secularistic tendencies within the political field.²² In pre-modernity the two kingdoms doctrine was interpreted within a monolithic Christian society, where a religious view of the social reality was taken more or less for granted. God was seen to be the guarantor of both society and church, and the creative activity of God the creator was presupposed by all citizens. However, as the functional differentiation of society makes its way in modernity, and different societal sectors such as science, economics, and politics frees themselves from the influence of Christian authority, the interpretation of the two kingdoms doctrine changes radically. The spiritual realm comes to be seen as one, relatively small, differentiated sector among others, whereas the political realm is seen to be determined by a secular and potentially secularistic way of thinking. The idea that God the creator works in and through political life loses its meaning, and is replaced by a way of thinking which on theological grounds defends the secular autonomy of both morality and politics.²³ Although this way of thinking, according to Kurtén, still influences Nordic Lutheran theology, he believes that the post-secular condition alters the conditions for holding convictions like these. Not only does the re-entrance of religion in the public sphere challenge the idea of a supposedly universal rational discourse concerning politics and social ethics on non-

18 Sigurdson, “Beyond Secularism?”, 186–188; Ola Sigurdson, “The Return of the Body: Reimagining the Ecclesiology of Church of Sweden,” in *For the Sake of the World. Swedish Ecclesiology in Dialogue with William T. Cavanaugh* ed. Jonas Idestrom (Eugene: Pickwick, 2010), 128–129, and Sigurdson, *Det postsekulära tillståndet*, 353–355. In his short recapitulation of core elements of the two kingdoms idea, Sigurdson draws on Henriksen’s description of the doctrine in Jan-Olav Henriksen, “Pluralism and Identity: The Two-Kingdoms Doctrine Challenged by Secularization and Privatization,” in *The Gift of Grace. The Future of Lutheran Theology* ed. Niels Henrik Gregersen et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 277–290. Kurtén draws on Henriksen as well, although he finds himself to be more critical towards the traditional view of the two kingdoms than Henriksen seems to be. See Kurtén, “Lutheran Moral Thinking”, 14, note 3.

19 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2007), 554, 613–615.

20 This also implies, in Sigurdson’s view, that the “folk church” theology which has characterized the Church of Sweden may not be an option anymore. See Sigurdson, “The Return of the Body”, 130.

21 Kurtén, “Lutheran Moral Thinking”, 22.

22 Kurtén defines secularism as “a secular way of thinking [which] takes the shape of *an ideology* in many fields of our lives”. See Kurtén, “Political theology”, 94–95.

23 Kurtén, “Political theology”, 93, and Kurtén, “Lutheran Moral Thinking”, 15.

religious grounds.²⁴ It also challenges the secular assumptions behind the prevailing religious-secular dichotomy.²⁵ The typical modern Nordic-Lutheran interpretation of the two kingdoms doctrine is accordingly up for revision.²⁶

These critical deliberations on the viability of the two kingdoms doctrine is relevant for the interpretation of diaconia and its possible distinctiveness in at least two ways. First, if Kurtén and Sigurdson are right, any contemporary theology of diaconia which seeks to take the post-secular condition into account needs to move beyond the two kingdoms doctrine's affiliation with modernity's privatization and "excarnation" of faith. The caring ministry of the church is by definition concerned with the task of caring for the whole human being, the body included. Thus, in search of the identity of diaconia, theology needs to sort out how to acknowledge the intrinsic relationship between the particularities of the Christian faith and the embodied – and thus also bodily – dimension of religion.²⁷

Second, a contemporary theology of diaconia needs to find ways of transcending the alleged tendency of the two kingdoms doctrine to underwrite secularistic presuppositions in the social or political sphere. To the extent that the inherently embodied nature of faith is recognized, the question of how diaconia relates to other providers of care cannot be answered within a theoretical framework which operates with an essentialist dichotomy between religion and politics. The post-secular blurring of religious and secular perspectives requires that the relationship between diaconia and other welfare agents be interpreted with the help of conceptual categories which are able to take the religious roots of the former into account, without *a priori* playing it out against other rationalities of care, religious and non-religious alike.

One way to address these challenges is of course to give up on the logic of the two kingdoms doctrine all together and look for conceptual categories bet-

24 Kurtén, "Political theology", 95.

25 Kurtén, "Political theology", 101.

26 As Kurtén poignantly puts it: "In late modernity and from a post-secular point of view Lutheran thinking is challenged as far as it clings to the traditional dichotomies which reflect the modern understanding of the secular and the religious [...] Lutheran ethics must therefore reconsider the "two kingdoms" doctrine, the way the law and the gospel is understood, the way the golden rule is taken in and so forth". Kurtén, "Lutheran Moral Thinking", 33.

27 By focusing in this way on the bodily dimension of faith, I am admittedly pulling the initial ecclesiological concerns of Sigurdson in an anthropological direction. I find this move to be justified, however, by the fact that Sigurdson himself recognizes the close proximity between anthropological and ecclesiological concerns. He writes, for instance: "It is my firm contention that the often-heard complaint against a Christian or even a more general religious contempt for the body, i.e. the individual body, has to do with the modern lack of self-understanding concerning the social body". Sigurdson, "Beyond Secularism?", 188. It should be noted, however, that my point is in a certain sense the opposite of Sigurdson's: The lack of acknowledgement of the embodied or ecclesial aspects of faith is as I see it closely related to the lack of acknowledgment of the bodily dimension of faith. For a criticism of the ecclesiological focus in the recent theological interest in the body see Elisabeth Gerle, *Sinnlighetens Närvaro. Luther Mellan Kroppskult och Kroppsförakt* (Totem: Verbum, 2015), 61–62.

ter suited to such a task. This would be a solution in line with what Sigurdson, Kurtén, and more ecumenically oriented contributions to the interpretation of diaconia seem to suggest.²⁸ Since, however, I find the Nordic Lutheran tradition's way of distinguishing between the two kingdoms to still harbor untapped resources pertaining both to the field of diaconia and to the broader field of religion and politics, I will explore another route, namely to see whether and how Wingren's theology of diaconia is able to address the post-secular challenges presented above in a way that comprises the still valuable aspects of the Nordic Lutheran discourse on the two kingdoms idea.

Wingren on Diaconia and the Two Kingdoms Idea

Gustaf Wingren, professor in systematic theology at the University of Lund (1951–1977), was one of the leading figures in twentieth century Swedish theology, with profound influence also in the other Nordic countries. Although the knowledge of Wingren's theology has been decreasing over the last couple of decades, there are currently signs of a renewed interest in his theological universe. In a newly published book on Scandinavian creation theology, for instance he is – together with Regin Prenter and Knud E. Løgstrup – put forth as a theologian who “offers a model for reconfiguring Reformation theology for a post-secular age”.²⁹ In another recent study in Lutheran ethics he is, however, treated with a lot more ambivalence, as he is accused of promoting a political ethic empty in its normative content.³⁰

Wingren's way of distinguishing between the earthly and the spiritual government, or between law and gospel, to follow Wingren's preferred terminology,³¹ is characterized by a) the conviction that it is only by following the se-

28 Sigurdson points in the direction of the concept of the church as a pilgrim church, whereas Kurtén points towards the concept of “radical democracy” as it is promoted by Stanley Hauerwas, Roman Coles and Jeffrey W. Robbins. See Sigurdson, “Beyond Secularism?”, 188, and Kurtén, “Political Theology”, 102. See also note 14.

29 Gregersen, Kristensson Ugglå and Wyller, “Reconfiguring Reformation Theology”, 7.

30 See also 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* ed. Carl-Henric Grenholm and Göran Gunner (Eugene Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2014), 102.

31 Terminologically speaking, the two kingdoms doctrine does not occupy a very prominent place in the theology of Wingren. However, since he explicitly states that he uses the distinction between law and gospel synonymously with the distinction between earthly and spiritual government, and since the law/gospel distinction without doubt represents an essential aspect of his theological thinking, I will argue that the logic of the two kingdoms idea plays a vital role in Wingren's constructive theology. See Gustaf Wingren, *The Living Word. A Theological Study of Preaching and the Church*. Trans. by Victor C. Pogue, (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1960). 140; Gustaf Wingren, *Creation and Law*. Trans. by Ross Makenzie (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1958), 162, and Gustaf Wingren, *The Gospel and The Church*, Trans. by Ross Makenzie (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1964), 174–175. See also Nygren, Tomas, *Lag och evangelium*

quence in which God acts in and with the world that the different aspects of the Christian faith may be properly understood, and by b) an attempt at combining the law/gospel distinction of Luther with the concept of *recapitulatio* in Irenaeus.³² These concerns result in a dialectic approach to the relation between the universal and the particular, earthly and spiritual government, meaning that the particularity of the gospel and the universality of the law are seen to be reciprocally defined with respect to each other.³³ Few topics in the theology of Wingren demonstrate this dialectical approach more clearly than the question of the distinct identity of diaconia. Thus, even if the explicit treatment of the caring ministry of the church is confined to a sub-chapter in *Gospel and Church* (1960/1964), and to an article published as late as in 1991,³⁴ I will still claim that the question of what characterizes the distinctiveness of diaconia is an issue which goes right to the heart of Wingren's theological project.

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), 55. Whereas the earthly government in Luther, according to Wingren, was confined to the secular authority, to the ruler of society, Wingren claims that the earthly government and the political use of the law today should be understood in broader categories, as being embodied wherever God's ongoing work in a fallen world is present. See Wingren, *Creation and Law*, 153. Wingren's interpretation of the two kingdoms doctrine is, as Roger Jensen makes clear, heavily influenced by the Swedish theologian Gustaf Törnvall's work on the topic. What characterizes Törnvall's interpretation is his heavy emphasis on the first article of faith as the foundation for understanding the relation between the two regiments. See Roger Jensen, *Modernisering av lutherdommen...? Gustaf Wingren's nye skapelsesteologiske tilretteleggelse av den lutherske kallslere, i et komparativt perspektiv* (Oslo: Det praktisk-teologiske seminar, 2003), 46–47.

- 32 Bengt Kristensson Ugglå argues that a shift took place in the theological development of Wingren, from being dominated by the legal metaphors of the Lutheran tradition (in combination with metaphors of the battle), to increasingly making use of biological metaphors from the early church – a shift which was inspired by the theology of Grundvig and motivated by what Wingren took to be a transition towards a post-Constantinian era. See Bengt Kristensson Ugglå, *Becoming Human Again. The Theological Life of Gustaf Wingren*. Trans. by Daniel M. Olson (Eugene: Cascade, 2016) 290 – 296. Although I think Kristensson Ugglå is basically right – also in his observation that the theology of the later Wingren went through a recontextualisation in which the focus shifted from the academic sphere to the contemporary social context – I will more strongly underline the *continuity* in Wingren's attempt at holding together the concept of *recapitulatio* in Irenaeus and the law/gospel distinction in Luther. Just as both Luther and Irenaeus contribute substantially to the theology of the early Wingren (see for instance *Gospel and Church* and *Creation and Law*), the attempt at holding together their respectively biological and legal metaphors is evident also in the later Wingren. See for instance Gustaf Wingren, *Gamla vägar framåt: Kyrkans uppgift i Sverige* (Älvsjö: Verbum, 1986), 134–141. Thus, I will argue that the tensions created when different theological metaphors are in play simultaneously is something that characterizes the theology of Wingren as a whole.
- 33 This dialectical approach to the relation between the particularity of the gospel and the universal aspects of creation is something that Wingren shares with the other founding figures of Scandinavian creation theology. See Gregersen, Kristensson Ugglå and Wyller, “Reconfiguring Reformation Theology”, 12.
- 34 Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 154–172; Gustaf Wingren, “Diakonins teologi: goda gärningar eller gudagärningar?” in *Lunds stiftsbok 1991 / 1992* (Kyrkans ungdom i Lunds stift, Lund: 1991), 39–47. Apart from this, shorter comments on the issue of diaconia can be found scattered around in his many books and articles.

The Spiritualizing Tendencies of Luther

In line with the principles of the Swedish Luther Renaissance, Wingren develops his constructive theology in close dialogue with the theology of Martin Luther. In the case of diaconia, however, Wingren reveals a certain ambivalence towards the reformer. Surely, Luther is here as elsewhere hailed for his ability to “on almost every point” find the center of what the New Testament has to say on the given topic.³⁵ At the same time he is also criticized for making it hard to acknowledge “the particular diaconate which in modern times has sprung up in churches throughout the world”.³⁶

According to Wingren, the problem with the theology of Luther is related to the sharp distinction the reformer makes between “conscience” and “body”, or, to be more concise, to the way he relates this anthropological distinction to the fundamental distinction between gospel and law, spiritual and earthly government. In Luther the gospel is confined to do its work within the conscience – within the “inner human being” – whereas the work of the law is exclusively related to the body, to the “outward human being”.³⁷ Accordingly, “the Gospel cannot be given concrete expression in what is done for men’s physical needs within this Lutheran framework. What is done for men in the world is done by the “law” or by secular government”.³⁸ Whereas the gospel expels guilt from the conscience, it does not bring healing to the body. The gospel and the body are held strictly apart.³⁹

The problem in this way of relating the distinction between conscience and body to the distinction between law and gospel / earthly and spiritual government is, according to Wingren, paradigmatically demonstrated in Luther’s inability to come to terms with the passages in the New testament where Jesus is described as *healer*. When Luther preaches over such texts, Wingren claims, the paralysis, the blindness, or the deafness is systematically spiritualized and interpreted as being expressions of guilt, whereas the healing acts of Jesus are interpreted as being expressions of forgiveness.⁴⁰ The opposition between guilt and forgiveness has thus taken control over the interpretation, at the expense of the opposition between life and death, sickness and health.

35 Wingren, “Diakonins teologi”, 41.

36 Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 166.

37 Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 156. Wingren is here referring to Luther’s *Larger Commentary on Galatians*.

38 Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 166, note 29.

39 Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 166.

40 Gustaf Wingren “Reformationens och lutherdomens ethos,” in *Etik och kristen tro* ed. Gustaf Wingren (Lund: Gleerups, 1971), 137.

The consequence is that the intimate relationship between the gospel and the body that these texts evidently give witness to is overlooked or suppressed.⁴¹

Diaconia: The Physical Aspect of the Gospel

In sketching out his alternative to the spiritualizing tendencies of Luther, Wingren takes his point of departure in how the work of Jesus in the New Testament is described as having two aspects: To preach the gospel and to heal the sick / care for the hungry. Just as this double aspect of word and action sums up the twofold ministry of Jesus, it also sums up the twofold obligation of the church. The church is thus called both to proclaim the gospel through words (mission) and to demonstrate the gospel through actions (diaconia).⁴² *Diaconia* is as such an activity which originates in the gospel and the spiritual government and which aims at demonstrating God's love for the whole human being, the ill and the needs of the body included.⁴³

Although diaconia originates in the gospel, Wingren emphasises that it cannot be properly understood unless it is related to the first article of faith, or, to stay within the terminology of the idea of the two kingdoms, to God's universal creative activity through the earthly government.⁴⁴ On the one hand this implies that the proper context of diaconia is everyday life as it is shared by all. Diaconia is as such closely related to the concept of *vocation*, the daily responsibility every baptized Christian has for his or her neighbour, whoever they might be.⁴⁵ On the other hand, it implies that the content or object of diaconia is to offer restoration to the original creation. As Wingren puts it: "The Gospel is essentially something that restores [...] If we put the first article aside and begin with the second, we lose sight of a vital aspect of the Gospel".⁴⁶ Thus, even though diaconia points forward to the coming kingdom of God, it also points "back" to how things were before the fall of Adam. God's redemp-

41 Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 166, and Wingren, "Diakonins teologi", 42. Wingren can therefore claim that "Despite vigorous attempts Luther never succeeds in breaking through the walls which he himself had systematically erected", Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 166.

42 Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 154, 160.

43 Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 166–167. Wingren is consequently critical of the attempts to make the deacon a part of a threefold ministerium. See Wingren, "Diakonins teologi", 44. Indeed, he finds the attempts at integrating the caring ministry of the church into a threefold ministry to be an expression of "anti-ecumenism", and urges Lutheran churches to not give in to the demands of the traditional churches to conform to their hierarchical understanding of ministry.

44 As Stephanie Dietrich puts it in a comment on Wingren's theology of diaconia: "A major concern for Wingren was that diaconia binds together the dimension of creation and the dimension of salvation" (my translation). Dietrich, "Systematisk-teologiske grunnlag for diakontjenesten", 100.

45 Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 161.

46 Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 167.

tive activity through the gospel is as such a response to a need which exists in creation even before the gospel is preached.⁴⁷

This way of relating redemption to creation and the works of the gospel to the needs of the body is made possible by the above-mentioned combination of the law/gospel distinction of Luther and Irenaeus' concept of *recapitulation*. A central aspect of this idea is that salvation is understood as the restoration of creation, meaning that God's redemptive activity is seen to be in fundamental continuity with God's ongoing creative activity.⁴⁸ Whereas the driving force in the theology of Luther, according to Wingren, is the antitheses of guilt and forgiveness, the doctrine of recapitulation in the early church deals more radically with life and death as the fundamental antithesis of human existence. Hence, the reality of salvation goes beyond bringing absolution to the inner human being, and encompasses the whole created human being. By expanding the guilt/forgiveness antitheses of Luther by drawing on the life/death antithesis of Irenaeus, Wingren is in other words able to include also the healing of the body in the works of the gospel.⁴⁹ The gospel and the spiritual government is thus not, as in Luther, confined to do its work in the conscience, to forgive sins, and to foster moral exhortation. The gift of Christ include also "the physical aspect of the work of the Gospel", and is as such also directed to the body.⁵⁰

Whether or not Wingren actually succeeds in integrating the concept of *recapitulation* and the distinction between law and gospel / earthly and spiritual government in a consistent way, goes beyond the scope of this article to discuss.⁵¹ What can be said, however, is that by anchoring the interpretation of diaconia in a blend of Irenaeus and Luther, Wingren makes it possible to

47 Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 170.

48 "The distinctive mark of mission and diaconate is that both are vehicles restoration of the original creation and to this extent they serve Christ and creation at the same time". Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 168. See also Gustaf Wingren, *Människan och kristen. En bok om Ireneus* (Skellefteå: Artos, 1997), 56–59. By drawing on Irenaeus in this way, Wingren is clearly inspired by the Danish theologian N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783–1872), who he believes represents "a unique example of a type of Lutheranism which really thinks in terms of contrast between life and death, directly influenced, no doubt, by the writings of Ireneus (sic)". Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 166, note 31. For an account of how Grundtvig's way of integrating Irenaeus into a Lutheran framework becomes increasingly important to Wingren, see Kristensson Uggla, *Becoming Human Again*, 291–295.

49 Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 166.

50 Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 170.

51 Ronald Thieman argues that Wingren does not fully succeed in consistently integrating the *recapitulatio* motif of Irenaeus and the distinction between law and gospel in Luther, Ronald Thieman, "Toward a Theology of Creation: A Response to Gustaf Wingren," in *Creation and Method. Critical Essays on Christocentric Theology*, ed. Henry Van Der Goot (Washington: University Press of America, 1981), 125–129. Although Thieman in my view rightly points out some of the difficulties of combining the theological metaphors of Irenaeus and Luther, I find his analysis to be too determined by an essentialist account of how the law/gospel distinction "really" works. Thus, he ends up seeing the complex texture in Wingren's theological project first and foremost as a problem that needs to be resolved rather than, as I do, an opportunity for constructive reflection.

transcend what he takes to be the problematic dichotomies of Luther on the anthropological level. Accordingly, he destabilizes the clear cut separation of conscience and body, inner and outward human being, which has prevailed in large parts of the Lutheran interpretation of the two kingdoms idea.⁵² In what way this destabilizing move might be utilized in the present context is a question I will return to in the next section. First we need to look more closely into how Wingren relates diaconia to non-Christian providers of care.

Diaconia, Creation and Law

In opposition to both the liberal theology of Schleiermacher and the anti-liberal theology of Barth, who in Wingren's view are equally preoccupied with questions concerning the possibility of knowing God and God's will, Wingren insists on making the sequence of God's actions in and with the world the structuring principle of his theology.⁵³ To properly interpret how diaconia relates to other providers of care, it is accordingly necessary to see it in relation to his understanding of the first article of faith and the earthly government.⁵⁴

A central aspect of Wingren's understanding of the first article of faith is that God, prior to and independent of the gospel, uses the law and the earthly government to produce good works to meet the needs of the neighbor. As opposed to the gospel – which is intrinsically related to the message of the particular life, death, and resurrection of Jesus – the activity of the law and the earthly government is universal in character. It is operative in anyone or anything that produces good works to the benefit of the fellow human being.⁵⁵ With the important qualification that the law should be understood as a means God uses to continuously create anew in a fallen world (*creatio continua*),⁵⁶ Wingren can therefore refer to the law as a “natural law”, claiming that it is exclusively derived from the universally present “unrecognized demands” of the neighbor.⁵⁷ That the content of the law is derived from the demands of the fellow human being means, however, that it is not possible to determine *a priori* how the law is to be substantiated. Just as the needs of the neighbor will vary from

52 In his detailed and comprehensive study on the ethics of Wingren, Carl-Henric Grenholm seems to overlook this aspect. Wingren does not only, as Grenholm rightly observes criticize Luther and later Lutheranism for not relating the gospel to the body, Grenholm, *Tro, Moral och Uddlös Politik*, 159. He also offers an alternative to Luther, as I have demonstrated, by claiming that diaconia is to be understood as the physical aspect of the gospel. Thus, what Grenholm refers to as “the sharp distinction between law and gospel” in Wingren, is, I will argue, somewhat destabilized, Grenholm, “Law and Gospel”, 100. This has in my opinion more far reaching consequences for the interpretation of Wingren than Grenholm acknowledges.

53 Gustaf Wingren, *Theology in Conflict. Barth, Bultmann, Nygren*. Trans. by Eric H. Walström (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1958), 23–25; Wingren, *Creation and Law*, 11–12.

54 Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 167.

55 Wingren, *Creation and Law*, 162.

56 Wingren, *Creation and Law*, 30.

57 Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 215–216; Wingren, *Creation and Law*, 58–59.

one situation to another, so must the care for the neighbor continuously take on new forms.⁵⁸ The universal character of the law and the earthly government does in other words not imply that it can be fixated in pre-contextual norms and rules that are made current irrespective of time and place. Care for the neighbor is, on the contrary, always conditioned by the concrete context in which it is enacted.

When diaconia is seen in relation to such an understanding of the law and the earthly government, the result is an interpretation which underlines what I will call its *non-oppositional distinctiveness*. First, the distinctiveness of diaconia is non-oppositional in the sense that diaconal practitioners in no way are seen to be exercising monopoly in performing God's care for the body. Prior to and independent of the particular gospel, God the creator compels human beings and institutions of all sorts to care for the body. Practitioners of diaconia should therefore not see their relationships to other care-providers as one of competition.⁵⁹

Second, the distinctiveness of diaconia is non-oppositional in the sense that Christians are not seen to possess any kind of privileged insight into how to perform care for the body.⁶⁰ God's universal presence and activity through the earthly government means that human beings, regardless of faith or church context, are able to adequately respond to the law of neighborly love. This does, of course, not mean that this always happens. Wingren's point is, rather, that Christians and non-Christians alike in principle have access to the knowledge they need to act in accordance with the law of neighborly love. The exclusive position to which the Gospel lays claim in the realm of faith thus has no counterpart with regard to works.⁶¹

This non-oppositional character of the distinctiveness of diaconia does not, however, deprive diaconia of its distinct identity. First, when the integration of the concept of *recapitulation* and the law/gospel distinction has made it possible to see the church's care for the body as originating in the spiritual government, diaconia is at the same time seen to be an activity performed within an explicit eschatological horizon, comprising promises for the future which are not in the same way reflected in the framework of the law and the earthly government. As Wingren puts it: "The act of healing is itself a *word*; it proclaims that the Kingdom of God has come".⁶² Although redemption is not understood as anything *else* than the restoration of creation, it is still the case that "redemption brings more than creation when it restores creation".⁶³ And in this "more" the non-oppositional distinctiveness of diaconia is to be located.

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

59 Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 157–158.

60 Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 215.

61 Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 171.

62 Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 154.

63 Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 181.

Second, the distinctiveness of diaconia is captured in Wingren's talk of diaconia as representing "a new activity" compared to what God is already doing through the earthly government, through creation and law.⁶⁴ In the preaching of the gospel, Christ is not only proclaimed as gift. He is also set forth as an example to follow. Those who receive the gospel are thus not only forgiven, but are also filled with a new willingness to "suffer for the good of the neighbor, and to do so with joy".⁶⁵ In this sense the gospel "sharpen", "heightens", and "accentuates" the natural law.⁶⁶ Outwardly, the "old" works for the neighbor embodied in the law are not distinguishable from the "new" works, which has its source in the gospel.⁶⁷ Since the caring ministry of the church is interpreted as being the outplaying of the epic, narrative character of the unique and particular gospel, however, diaconia is still understood within an interpretative framework which gives it a distinct identity.⁶⁸ In this sense there is both "connection" and "distinction" between the natural law and the commandments of Jesus.⁶⁹

The Distinctiveness of Diaconia in the Post-Secular

Having described how Wingren's way of employing the two kingdoms idea makes it possible to maintain a dialectic approach to the question of diaconia's distinct identity, I will turn to the question of how this interpretation is able to meet the post-secular challenges to the Lutheran tradition described in the first part of the article.

Diaconia beyond the Excarnation of Faith

One of the challenges confronting a contemporary Lutheran theology of diaconia is the need to move beyond the tendency of the two kingdoms doctrine to underwrite the "excarnation" of faith typical of protestant modernity. Diaconia, in line with this logic, is left to be interpreted solely in terms of how God is acting through the earthly government with institutions and people ir-

64 Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 171–172.

65 Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 181.

66 Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 179–181.

67 Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 171.

68 Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 180–182.

69 Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 180. Whether or not Wingren is sufficiently clear regarding the possible conflict between diaconia and non-Christian forms of care needs to be further discussed. Whereas for instance Carl-Henric Grenholm argues that the political ethic of Wingren lacks the necessary resources for criticizing political authorities or prevailing social structures (Grenholm, "Law and Gospel", 102), Bengt Kristensson-Uggla claims that especially the theology of later Wingren is best understood as a politically radical socially critical theology (Kristensson Uggla, *Becoming Human Again*, 259, 266). I intend to discuss this issue more closely in an article on the voice of diaconia in the public sphere (in progress).

respective of faith. Religious convictions and practices are accordingly at best given a motivational role in the performance of diaconia, and the particular sources of faith are made unproductive in the interpretation of diaconal practice. In a post-secular situation, this is problematic. What is now needed are interpretations of diaconia which do not see the caring practice of the church as something external to the particularities of the Christian faith.

What does Wingren's account of diaconia have to offer in this regard? When Wingren, on the basis of his blend of Irenaeus and Luther, claims that diaconia originates in the spiritual government, he contributes to what I will call a possible "re-carnation" of faith, to make a twist on Taylor's original term. In opposition to what he takes to be the spiritualizing tendencies in Luther, Wingren suggests that the works of the gospel is not confined to do its work in the conscience. It is, rather, related to the whole human being, the body included. The separation between mind and body which has prevailed in modernity is thus disturbed, and faith in the gospel is made relevant to the bodily dimension of human life reality. For sure, that Wingren relates the gospel and the spiritual government to the bodily dimension of human life reality does not necessarily mean that he relates it to the *social* embodiment of religion. Wingren's understanding of diaconia remains, rather, within an individualistic paradigm in which it is first and foremost understood to be performed *by* individuals, *for* individuals. It might therefore be questioned to what extent Wingren's interpretation of diaconia actually is able to contribute to the acknowledgment of the social embodiment of faith, which, as we have seen, is called for by for instance Sigurdson.⁷⁰ However, when Wingren relates the work of the gospel to the individual body, he is in principle also relating it to the "world of the bodies", the sphere where human bodies interfere. Thus, he is not only challenging the anthropological dichotomies of the Lutheran tradition. He also disturbs the traditional Lutheran way of distinguishing between the spiritual and the earthly government in a way that could be developed into a more explicit socio-political informed account of diaconia.

As a consequence of this "re-carnation" of faith, the distinctive sources of the Christian faith are made available for the interpretation of diaconia. Since diaconia originates in the spiritual government, diaconal practitioners of various kinds are given the opportunity to draw on the particularities of faith when reflecting on the meaning and direction of their work. The New testament narratives of the life and work of Jesus, for instance – including the passages depicting Jesus as healer – thus suggest themselves as significant interpretative resources for making sense of the diaconal ministry. In an increasingly pluralistic context, Wingren's "re-carnation" of faith can thus be utilized to make the

70 This means, moreover, that a contemporary Lutheran theology of diaconia – in line with the so-called new paradigm of diaconia – needs to say more about both the political and the ecclesial dimension of diaconia than Wingren does. See Dietrich et al, "Introduction", 1–3.

distinctive identity of diaconia visible and concrete. Given Wingren's stress on the universal implications of the first article of faith and the earthly government, this does not mean, however, that Wingren's outlook can be taken to support an understanding of diaconia which principally prioritizes the particularities of faith over against other sources of care. Just as Wingren acknowledges the dialectic tension between the universal and the particular, between law and gospel / earthly and spiritual government, the rationality of diaconia should not *a priori* be played out against other rationalities of care, be they secular or religious. The practice of diaconia could, rather, within Wingren's theological framework be interpreted as a non-separable mix of religious and non-religious rationalities, in which no single perspective prior to or independent of the necessary context-specific considerations is given a preferential status.

The potential in this way of holding together the dialectical tension between the universal and the particular can be illustrated by relating it to the way diaconal institutions negotiate their religious identity in the face of secularization. In a study on faith-based institutions of drug treatment, the Norwegian researcher in Christian social practice, Olav Helge Angell, has identified two fundamentally different ways of reacting to the modern differentiation of religion and secular professionalism. In the *caritative model*, the relationship between professionalism and religion is seen to be harmonious. The intrinsic value of professional quality is appreciated with reference to the idea of creation, and therapeutic and religious functions are strictly separated. The secular rationality of professionalism dominates, and religion is kept out of the treatment. In the *soteriological model*, the relationship between religion and professionalism is seen to be more antagonistic. Here religious and therapeutic functions are seen to be one and the same, and "religious healing" is seen to be a relevant strategy. The model is thus characterized by a critical attitude towards the secular rationality of professionalism, and sees this to be in conflict with basic religious standards.⁷¹ What characterizes Wingren's interpretation of diaconia is that it has the potential of moving beyond both of these models. In contrast to the *caritative model*, the particularities of the Christian faith are in Wingren potentially given a substantial role in the realization of diaconal practice. This makes it possible to transcend the tendency within the *caritative model* to downplay the significance of religion in for instance drug treatment, just as it makes it possible to question the necessity of strictly separating religious and therapeutic functions. In contrast to the *soteriological model*, faith is not by definition seen to be in conflict with professionalism. Rather, religious perspectives and secular professionalism can be encouraged to work together, in search of the most beneficial way of responding to the

71 Olav Helge Angell, *Misjon eller terapi i rusmiddelomsorga? Tradisjon og modernitet i religiøse behandlingsinstitusjoner* (Oslo: Diakonhjemmets høyskolesenter, 1994), 38–41.

human needs in question. Wingren's interpretation of diaconia thus has the potential of making it possible to interlink the distinctive religious resources of faith *and* established standards of professionalism, in a way that resonates with the post-secular renegotiation of the separation of the religious and the secular.⁷²

Diaconia and the Care of the Other: Beyond Secularism

Another challenge facing a contemporary Lutheran theology of diaconia is how to transcend what Kurtén takes to be the way in which the two kingdoms doctrine contributes to the separation of religion and politics, and the subsequent *secularism* in the political sphere. In a situation where the welfare sector turns to an increasingly pluralistic civil society for assistance, this way of theologically seeing the treatment of religion and politics as mutually exclusive categories is losing its interpretative force. What is now needed is a theological interpretation of how diaconia relates to other providers of care which contributes to what Kurtén refers to as a "post-secular solution",⁷³ a solution which is able to move beyond the modern dichotomization of religion and politics. The question, then, is in what way Wingren's interpretation of diaconia and how it relates to other providers of care might contribute to such a solution?

To begin with, it should be noted that Wingren's way of framing the relationship between diaconia and other providers of care bears a certain resemblance to the kind of Lutheran theology that Kurtén finds to be more a part of the problem than of the solution. With his emphasis on the first article of faith, and his focus on the universally operating law of neighborly love, Wingren comes close to a position which holds that there exists a universal secular common ground in matters of ethics and politics.⁷⁴ Indeed, Wingren fully endorses the process of secularization, understood as the process in which the ties between church and state are dissolved, and sees it to be a natural development of the theology of Luther.⁷⁵ He can therefore be seen to represent a line of thought within Nordic-Lutheran theology which Kurtén believes to be less suited for the post-secular context, since it both reflects and contributes to the modern separation of religion and politics, and thus also to the lurking secularism within the political sphere.

In my reading, however, there are three aspects in Wingren's account of how diaconia relates to other providers of care which disturb such an interpretation. The first aspect is connected to the way Wingren finds diaconia to be

72 Olav Fanuelsen develops a similar point in Olav Fanuelsen, "Kirkens omsorgstjeneste," in *Diakoni. En kritisk lesebok* ed. Kai Ingolf Johannessen et al. (Trondheim: Tapir, 2009), 155.

73 Kurtén, "Political theology", 90.

74 Kurtén, "Lutheran Moral Thinking", 16–24.

75 Wingren, "Lutherdomens ethos", 135–136.

originating in the gospel and the spiritual government. When Wingren claims that the caring ministry of the church is to be interpreted in light of the spiritual government, the particular gospel is made productive in the “world of the bodies”, i.e. in the political sphere, and the clear cut distinction between the spiritual and earthly government is challenged. This aspect of Wingren’s understanding of how diaconia relates to other providers of care is evident in Wingren’s dialogue with the Danish philosopher and theologian Knud E. Løgstrup. Against Løgstrup, Wingren maintains that social change *might* also come from the particular gospel. For instance, he points to how the message of the healing ministry of Jesus in the early Church led to an unprecedented care for the body and the emergence of hospital care. Thus, even though Wingren, in agreement with Løgstrup, fully acknowledges the universal element of the Christian faith, he maintains that the gospel also has social effects.⁷⁶ In this sense he opposes a theological legitimization of a strict secularistic understanding of the social field.

Second, although Wingren fully endorses the process of secularization, this endorsement is consistently anchored within a theocentric framework where it is seen to be an expression of God’s presence and activity within a commonly shared life reality. The binary distinction between the secular and the religious, which otherwise often prevails in the discourse on secularization, thus tends to dissolve. Both diaconia and care performed by the secular Other are, in the theology of Wingren, ultimately seen to be expressions of the triune God’s care for the body. As such, both are included in a religious or theological interpretation of God’s presence in social life reality. The secular is in other words not seen to be in *opposition* to the religious, but is rather recognized as an integral part of a specific religious (Nordic-Lutheran) account of how God acts in and with the world.⁷⁷ For sure, Kurtén is right when he points out that in a post-secular condition, God’s creative activity in the secular sphere is a theological conviction that cannot be expected to be shared by everyone, just as little as a secular point of view can be taken for granted. Accordingly, Wingren’s endorsement of secularization should be seen as an example of what might be called a particularistic universalism,⁷⁸ where God’s universal creative activity is acknowledged, although from an explicit particular point of view (the Nordic Lutheran tradition). What Kurtén does not seem to take sufficiently into account, however, is the potential of this particularistic universalism to

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

77 Trygve Wyller, “The Discovery of the Secular-Religious Other in Scandinavian Creation Theology,” in *Reformation Theology for a Post-Secular Age: Løgstrup, Prenter, Wingren and the Future of Scandinavian Creation Theology*, ed. Niels Henrik Gregersen et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 253.

78 For this expression, see Ola Sigurdson, *Karl Barth som den Andre* (Stockholm: Brutus Östlings, 1996), 295.

challenge the possible secularism within the political sphere. To the extent that a theocentric endorsement of secularization like Wingren's is played into the political discourse, this will in itself challenge the secularistic presuppositions that otherwise tend to control the political field, although in a different way than Kurtén seems to envision. In this sense, Wingren's dialectical way of configuring the distinction between law and gospel / earthly and spiritual government, has the potential of reaching beyond the religious/secular dichotomy that Kurtén rightly questions.

The third aspect which disturbs an interpretation of the Nordic-Lutheran tradition such as Kurtén's pertains to the fact that although Wingren endorses secularization, he does not see God's universal activity through the earthly government to be *bound* to the secular. The aim of God's ongoing creative activity through the law in its political use is, as we have seen, to promote good and oppose evil, and thus to meet the needs of the body. To achieve this, however, God uses anyone or anything that produces works to the benefit of the neighbor, "even atheists and followers of other religions".⁷⁹ Accordingly, even though secularization is considered to be an effective means in keeping the law flexible and the care for the weak adequate in continuously new circumstances, God's ongoing creation can also include the care of the religious Other. Surely, Wingren does not develop this point in any length, which should not come as a surprise given the relative absence of religious pluralism within his own context.⁸⁰ As his endorsement of secularization appears to be somewhat pragmatic, he still opens up for a dialectic understanding of how diaconia relates to other providers of care, including the religious Other.

The Distinctiveness of Diaconia: Concluding Remarks

The aim of this article has been to discuss the question of the possible distinctiveness of diaconia in light of challenges to Lutheran theology set out by the post-secular condition. I have argued that Wingren's dialectical approach to the distinction between earthly and spiritual government – shaped by his idiosyncratic blend of impulses from Luther and Irenaeus – makes the particularities of faith productive in the interpretation of diaconia, without playing these out against other rationalities of care, secular or non-secular. On the ba-

79 Gustaf Wingren, *Credo. The Christian View of Faith and Life* Trans. by Edgar M. Carlson (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1981), 12.

80 Theology of religions is, as Jacob Wirén remarks, one of the very few *lacunae* in the theology of Wingren. Wirén still argues that there are some characteristic features in the theology of Wingren which is highly interesting for a theological account of religious otherness today. See Jakob Wirén, "Wingren and the Theology of Religions: Inter-religious Hermeneutics," in *Reformation Theology for a Post-Secular Age: Løgstrup, Prenter, Wingren and the Future of Scandinavian Creation Theology*, ed. Niels Henrik Gregersen et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 216.

sis of this, I have made the case that Wingren's theology of diaconia have the potential of disturbing both the modern "excarnation" of faith as well as the secularistic tendencies within the political field. Thus, it paves the way for an understanding of diaconia's non-oppositional distinctiveness which has the ability to address specific challenges in the post-secular condition – especially with regard to the Nordic context – without giving up on central aspects of the two kingdoms idea.

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