

The Nordic Model

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The Nordic model is something specific and important, both from the perspective of social politics and from the perspective of ecclesiology. This is no surprise, because both the social politics and the ecclesiology come from the same source: the reformation. The reformation moved the responsibility for the poor and the sick from the church to the society (the King). This is seen by many researchers as one important part of the beginning of the Scandinavian welfare state model. And this means that the whole question of diakonia must be discussed both within the context of modernity and of ecclesiology.

Which kind of diaconal strategy must be developed in the context of this Nordic model? My thesis to be defended in this paper is: The diakonia in the Nordic context must come from a church convincingly with the poor, convincing and forcing the welfare state to be as strong on the side of the poor, both nationally and globally. Being with the poor, however, is more than advocacy. Being with the poor, means literally to live their life and opening the churches and Christian institutions for people in need. This is the only convincing Christian social practice. In the following I will argue more in detail for this position.

The Nordic countries Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway have, of course, different traditions both from a historical and political perspective. But when one speaks about the Scandinavian or Nordic welfare state model, something precise is meant. In the Scandinavian welfare state the government, the county or the municipality have in principle full responsibility for all health care and all social work being done. In the Scandinavian model, the principle is that there is no room for private diakonia because the state takes care of all the needs. There are, of course, private based diakonia or other voluntary based institutions. But these are also more or less dominantly financed by state or municipality money.

In the last years one could still see that the number of private caring institutions are increasing. But this does not threaten the construction of the Nordic model, it only modifies it a little. One other reason for the modifying of the Nordic model is the influence coming from the market. There is a tendency in all Nordic countries to give more to the market than before. And this tendency has led scholars to predict a narrowing between the Nordic model and the catholic subsidiarity model in the next generation to come. But not even this tendency has until now meant a principal change in the Nordic model. It might open a little more for voluntary diakonia, but not more than to keep the principle going. The state has the major responsibility for the poor and the sick.

From a political point of view the Scandinavian welfare state was developed as a strong critique on the traditionally strict distinction between the so-called worthy and the so-called non-worthy receivers of social aid and medical care. Traditionally this distinction has been very important in all the Nordic countries. The worthy person was the person with no personal responsibility for his or her social need. The physically sick, the children, elderly and some other groups have always belonged to this category. The worthy were to be helped and supported so that they could keep up to a minimum of life standard. The non worthy was something else. Among the non worthy were the unemployed, often the mentally ill, drug addicts, prostitutes etc. In principle the welfare state was put up to abolish this distinction by claiming that the state and the municipality take responsibility for everyone in need, no matter the reason for being in need. There shall no longer be some worthy or some non-worthy receivers of welfare goods. You receive according to rules and standards, not according to moral status. You also receive, not according to the level of religious belonging, but according to the moral demand heard by everyone.

I think that this position is one fundamental reason for the strong support for the welfare state in the Nordic countries, also among Christians and Church people. It is in accordance with the Christian tradition of the equal dignity of every man, that we have the right to be met as worthy, no matter the reason behind our concrete needs. So one could say that the output for the client gives legitimacy for the welfare state, the private (religious) motivation among the givers is not so important.

From my point of view, this position is also the important one when we discuss the impact of the Nordic model in the context of diakonia. The Nordic model puts the demand of the poor and the sick and the importance of every man's right to be integrated in modern society as the basic rule. This is the basic position of the Nordic model, a position which makes it an important one in the future of a European diakonia. Still, it is not difficult to understand and accept the critique. Even if the Nordic model gives care to all, no matter religious or social status, the problem remains: Is this model good enough? Does it really give the dignity and care to everyone. Is the quality of social work and care living up to the standards one can expect from a Christian perspective? Is it possible to go further with this monolithic model in late modernity, dominated by a much greater multi-cultural influence and reflection?

A recently published dissertation by the Swedish theologian Elisabeth Christiansson shows how diakonia in Sweden for two centuries have been aiming at reforming, both church and society, in order to increase quality and content. Even if the welfare state in all Nordic countries has had the dominant role, and has kept this role often with support from church people, there have been several diaconal initiatives in these countries during the last centuries. But the characteristic of these initiatives have been that they too have contributed to the modernization of the nation. Christianssons dissertation confirms the research done by other in the last decade. The Swedish diakonia, of course, comes from the revival movements stressing the spiritual content as more important than the material welfare, but they contributed still to the modernization by the building of institutions and welfare organizations.

Still I think there are interesting signs for new trends in the relationship between welfare state and church within the context of the Nordic model in the years to come. These trends are connected to late modernity because they show a less monolithic model. But they are also interesting because they tend to give us some significant ecclesiological pictures. The combination of late modernity and ecclesiology will be important for the Nordic model in the years to come.

I use some research which the Norwegian sociologist Olav Helge Angell has done in the Norwegian town of Drammen and into which I have myself participated with a theological interpretation. The first conclusion in the Norwegian study is the confirmation of the general tradition. The local church leaders seem to be content with the situation. But then one more tendency is developing. In this actual city, there is also the activity of the Church City Mission (Kirkens bymisjon), a Norwegian version of the urban mission, the Statdmission, which we find in most European cities.

This local city mission has one social work unit for drug addicts, supported by the municipality. This social work unit has a leader which is also active in official debates in local newspaper and radio. And the work done for the drug addicts is the grassroots work, with hardly any kind of restrictions and less rigid compared to the more professional institutions in the area. So the report by Angel and myself concludes with an interesting new tendency. We have a diaconal work which criticizes both welfare state and the established church. Neither of them are seen to be doing enough for drug addicts. One could therefore have expected the local city mission to take over more welfare work and to expect the church to do the same. But this is not the case.

The local city mission really has no intention to continue with its present work for drug addicts forever. They think that the best solution, also for the city mission, would be that such a work was run by the municipality. But as long as they do not do it, the city mission does. And as long as the

local communities do not speak out for the drug addicts in Drammen, the city mission will do it. It would have been even better if the established church was the spokesman, but as long as it does not take this responsibility, someone else, the city mission does it. What we see here, then, is the importance of diaconal work in late modernity. The importance lies in the diaconal work as a critique both of church and of welfare state. The vocation from the poor is still the most important tendency in the Nordic model. But diakonia urges the society to take up the vocation, and develops in by this a new church where the clients belong, not where the clients can come.

This leads up to some interesting conclusions with an impact for a future thinking of diakonia, ecclesiology and welfare state.

1. It seems like both church, diakonia and municipality still support the tradition that anyone in need is in the position to receive medical care and social assistance from the local municipality.
2. There is a common opinion that the church has a special responsibility for the persons with the lowest status. It is an ecclesiological sign when a community takes this responsibility.
3. When the local community does not take such a responsibility, a diaconal organization, may take it, representing the church, so to say.
4. Taking responsibility for the poorest as a Christian organization today means to open the doors for the poorest and live with them. It is only the practice where the interaction between church people and clients which deserves to be called an ecclesiological sign.
5. The demand for justice and critique of both church and welfare state done by the diaconal organizations should aim at the improvement of the social work, health care and justice in the whole of society according to the standards laid down in the diaconal organization
6. There might be a double strategy for diakonia within the future Nordic model: One is to improve the side of what Lutherans call *primus usus legis*. The second is to develop Christian social practice which already realizes such standards inside the room of diakonia and the church.