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# Towards an Ecumenical Basis of Christian Social Service (*caritas*, *diakonia*) Bridging Catholic and Protestant Perspectives in the World

## *Iskanje ekumenske osnove krščanskega socialnega služenja (*caritas, diakonia*): med katoliško in protestantsko perspektivo v svetu*

**Abstract:** In 2005, the new Pope Benedict surprised more than just a Catholic audience with his first encyclical letter about Christian love. He performed a detailed theological analysis of the term love in the first part. In the second part of the encyclical letter, the Pope applied the term »Christian love« in practice as caritas – active love of one's neighbor. However, more than ten years earlier, Christian love was discussed similarly by German Protestant theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg. For Pannenberg, such love has become a crucial double question: first, does the true love of God consist in participation in his love of the world? Second, is the love of neighbor, in fact, the love of God?

This article discusses possible answers from the perspective of Protestant and Catholic theology and interconnects them with the discourse in Caritas Theory and Diakonik (i.e., the Protestant counterpart of Caritas Theory). Besides the Protestant understanding of Christian service rooted in creation, the Catholic conception of pastoral service as the Church's service to the world, and the concept of the sign of the times, are crucial components of this analysis.

**Keywords:** *caritas*, *diakonia*, diaconia, caritas studies, *diakonik*, christian service, christian social work, love of neighbor

**Izvleček:** *Leta 2005 je novi papež Benedikt XVI. s svojo prvo okrožnico o krščanski ljubezni presenetil tudi širšo, ne le katoliško javnost. V prvem delu je podal podrobno teološko analizo pojma ljubezni, v drugem pa je »krščansko ljubezen« prenesel v prakso kot karitas – dejavno ljubezen do bližnjega. Več kot desetletje prej je o krščanski ljubezni na podoben način razpravljal nemški protestantski teolog Wolfhart Pannenberg. Zanj je takšna ljubezen postala ključno dvojno vprašanje: prvič, ali resnična ljubezen do Boga pomeni udeležbo pri njegovi ljubezni do sveta; in drugič, ali je ljubezen do bližnjega pravzaprav ljubezen do Boga?*

*Članek obravnava možne odgovore z vidika protestantske in katoliške teologije ter jih povezuje z razpravami v teoriji karitas in diakoniki, tj. protestantski ustreznici teorije karitas. Pri analizi so ključni protestantsko razumevanje krščanskega služenja, ukoreninjenega*

*v stvarjenju, katoliško pojmovanje pastoralnega služenja kot služenja Cerkve svetu ter pojem znamenj časa.*

**Ključne besede:** *karitas,* Diakonia, *karitasne študije, diakonik, krščansko služenje, krščansko socialno delo, ljubezen do bližnjega*

Twenty years ago, in 2005, the new Pope Benedict surprised more than just a Catholic audience with his first encyclical letter, *Deus caritas est*, about Christian love (Bianchini 2006; Huber, Labardakis and Lehmann 2006). He performed a detailed theological analysis of the term love in the first part – in the Bible and systematic theology (Meeking 2007; Sherwin 2007; Albrecht 2006; Bartolini 2006; Melina and Anderson 2006; Wainwright 2006). In the second part of the encyclical letter, the Pope applied the term Christian love in praxis as *caritas* – active love of neighbor (DeMore 2022; Gibson, Keeton and Alsman 2021; Baumann, Blank and Jors 2017; Pompey 2014; Mette 2007; Zulehner 2006). Moreover, here he also developed the Caritas-related topics of Catholic social thought (Dal Toso 2014; Plitt Donaldson and Belanger 2012; Trautmann 2012; Fernandéz 2006; Gregg 2006). He followed up decades of discussion about active love – *caritas* as social assistance and Christian social work (Opatrný 2020; Baumann Blank and Jors 2017) in German pastoral theology, in German *Caritaswissenschaft* (i.e., Caritas Theory) (Pompey 2001; Maurer 1998; Haslinger 1996; Pompey 1994; Völkl 1987) which was developed primarily at the University of Freiburg (Baumann 2018).

However, more than ten years earlier, Wolfhart Pannenberg similarly discussed Christian love in his 3rd volume of *Systematische Theologie* (1993, 208–209). Pannenberg also makes a distinction between the biblical terms *eros* and *agape,* like Benedict. In addition, he emphasises, like Benedict again, *agape* as a katabatic, giving love. According to Pannenberg (1993, 212), such love poses a crucial double question: first, does the true love of God consist in participating in His love for the world? Second, is the love of neighbor, in fact, the love of God?

These questions are crucial questions of the social engagement of Christian churches in the world, and particularly in society. The attitude between the love of God and the love of neighbor seems critical for the role of the churches and social activity (Lob-Hüdepohl and Schäfer 2022;

Thorsen 2020; Gärde 2017) of particular Christians in the society. The search for answers is essential, not only in Pannenberg's but also generally in Protestant and Catholic theology, for the debate about the collaboration of non-Christians in churches' helping organizations (Cloke and Beaumont 2012) and public or private social services providers. Moreover, it is similarly essential for the cooperation of Christians in secular and other assisting organizations that are oriented to different worldviews (Allen 2017). Thus, depending on the positive or negative answers, collaboration on social and helping activities among Christians from different confessions and churches and non-Christians is possible or should be ruled out.

Therefore, this study discusses the conceptions of love by Benedict XVI and Wolfhart Pannenberg, considering the possible inspiration of *Deus caritas est* in Pannenberg's thinking. Such a discussion aims to search for answers to the above-quoted questions from Pannenberg's *Systematische Theologie*, *Band 3*. Due to the applied level of its second part, the encyclical letter Deus caritas est by Benedict XVI will be discussed first. The pastoral point of view in the second part of the encyclical letter allows us to understand the problem of a Christian's love or a Christian's comprehension of love from a daily perspective. Then Pannenberg's point of view is discussed, which, as a theological perspective, is primarily systematic. Third, the interim conclusion is essential to identify the differences or similarities between the two understandings and conceptions. However, it is possible to say first that the Trinitarian basis for a Christian's love and a Christians understanding of love will be important. Therefore, the fourth section is dedicated to the possible pastoral application.

Regardless of the confessional particularity, this text should reveal the Trinitarian basis for a Christian's social service as essential from both the ecumenical and pastoral points of view. Therefore, such a perception of this problem also seems important because of Christianity's credibility today.

## 1 Love systematically and pastorally by Benedict XVI

In the very crucial Article 31 of *Deus caritas est* (Mette 2007), Benedict XVI argues that: »The increase in diversified organizations engaged in meeting various human needs is ultimately due to the fact that the command of love of neighbor is inscribed by the Creator in man's very nature.« This article is the core of the second, practical part of his first encyclical letter concerning the essential elements of Christian and ecclesial caritas.[1]

Nevertheless, in the first part of the encyclical letter, which is more speculative regarding the love which God mysteriously and gratuitously offers to man (*Deus caritas est* [Benedict XVI 2005], 1), Benedict XVI explains the Church's charitable activity as a manifestation of Trinitarian love: the love consists in the intention of the Father that his Son becomes a man and a redeemed man at the cross, and gives his Spirit, which

> in fact, is that interior power which harmonizes their hearts with Christ's heart and moves them to love their brethren as Christ loved them, when he bent down to wash the feet of the disciples (cf. *Jn* 13:1-13) and above all when he gave his life for us (cf. *Jn* 13:1, 15:13). The Spirit is also the energy which transforms the heart of the ecclesial community, so that it becomes a witness before the world to the love of the Father, who wishes to make humanity a single family in his Son. (*Deus caritas est* [Benedict XVI 2005], 19)

Therefore, this Trinitarian understanding of love leads to a better understanding of two crucial expressions in love: the ancient Greek words *eros* and *agape*. *Eros* is a term of secular and »ascending«, possessive love (*amor concupiscentiae*); however, *agape* of love is grounded in and shaped by faith and therefore is »descending«, oblative (*amor benevolentiae*). The two notions often contrast as »ascending« love and »descending« love. However, Benedict rejects such a dualism (*Deus caritas est* [Benedict XVI 2005], 7).

1 The English translation of *Deus caritas est* uses the term »charity« for Christian caritas. To avoid error and confusion regarding Christian caritas and philanthropic activities as well as helping NGOs, which are both in common discourse in English called *charity*, I will use the term *caritas* in this text.

Thus, concludes Benedict, the love of God is in this sense alongside *eros* and *agape* for man: »God's *eros* for man is also totally *agape*.« (*Deus caritas est* [Benedict XVI 2005], 10) However, man cannot live merely as an oblative. Whoever wishes to give love must also receive love, and therefore, according to Benedict XVI, one must constantly drink anew from the original source, which is Jesus Christ, from whose pierced heart flows the love of God (cf. Jn 19:34) (*Deus caritas est* [Benedict XVI 2005], 7). Nonetheless, the reverse is, also according to him, true, as emphasised in 1 John 4:20: »Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.« Furthermore, Benedict concludes: »One is so closely connected to the other that to say that we love God becomes a lie if we are closed to our neighbor or hate him altogether. Saint John's words should rather be interpreted to mean that love of neighbor is a path that leads to the encounter with God, and that closing our eyes to our neighbor also blinds us to God« (*Deus caritas est* [Benedict XVI 2005], 16) because: »Only if I serve my neighbor can my eyes be opened to what God does for me and how much he loves me.« (*Deus caritas est* [Benedict XVI 2005], 18)

Indeed, ecclesial caritas, from this perspective, primarily represents not diverse philanthropic, humanitarian, and social activities, but rather the divine movement of love from God to humanity and, therefore, among people and for God. In this logic, diverse welfare activities foreshadow the divine movement of love, tangibly represented by ecclesial caritas. However, neighborly love is, in the same logic, nothing special for Christians and the Church. The inscription of the commandment of love in man's very nature opens the conscience of every person for holding God and following his law, which consists in love for God and love for neighbor (*Gaudium et spes* [Second Vatican Council 1965], 16).

## 2 The tangled ball of yarn of Trinitarian divine *agape* by Pannenberg

A similar position to Benedict was also held by Pannenberg when, around ten years earlier, he considered love and emphasized that in all sayings of the New Testament »the reference is not to our love for God but

to God's love for us and ours for neighbors, even including our enemies.« (Pannenberg 2009, 184) Pannenberg speaks about not only monotheistic but also Trinitarian divine *agape* too. The »Trinity shows itself to be an expression and form of the divine love that constitutes the divine life« (192).

For the love of man, it means he is not only a receiver of the divine love of God. When the apostle Paul says in Rom. 5:5, »And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us,« the relation of love between a man and God must be mutual (Pannenberg 2009, 192–193). However, it remains open regarding what it means by »man«. The English translation of *Systematische Theologie, Band 3,* paraphrases Rom. 5:5. The apostle uses the pronoun »us« for man, i.e., he means »we«. From the context, it is clear that he speaks about Christians. Nonetheless, the German original of Pannenberg's *Systematic Theology* uses the word »men«:

> Wenn es nun solche Gegenseitigkeit im Verhältnis zwischen Gott und Mensch gar nicht gäbe, der Mensch also im Glauben nur als Empfänger der göttlichen Liebe vor Gott stünde, wie könnte dann gesagt werden, dass die Liebe Gottes ausgegossen ist in die Herzen der Menschen (Röm 5,5)? (Pannenberg 1993, 218)

However, then it is necessary to ask: Will the apostle Paul say the divine love of God »has been poured out« *only* in the hearts of Christians, and will Pannenberg say the divine love of God »has been poured out« in the heart of *every* man?

This question is essential because of Pannenberg's understanding of neighborly love. It also consists in the Trinitarian comprehension of divine *agape*. Pannenberg refers to the command of love in Johannine literature and in the Apostle Paul's writings. These love orders regarding neighbor are not a purely moralistic *cri de coeur* (appeal). They are calls, challenges, and invitations to »abiding« in the love of Jesus (John 15:10), to be in unity with him, to dwell in his sphere of being. By love, believers are drawn into participation in God's movement of love for the world (Pannenberg 2009, 183–84). Thus, through the love of God for the world, i.e., through the love of God which has been poured out in the hearts of man, man is involved

in the yarn of Trinitarian divine *agape* to participate in them and through such participation empowered for the neighbor's love. The opinion for understanding the neighbor's love is apparent. A man's faith is the answer to the love of God for the world, which is, for Pannenberg, identical with grace (Pannenberg 1993, 86–87); love of neighbor is, therefore, the consequence and fruit of such faith (218). »In the message of Jesus the command to love God does indeed come first, before the command to love our neighbor (Mark 12:29-30). With Jesus there can be no question of absorbing love of God into love of neighbor.« (Pannenberg 2009, 189) Is it the consequence that not everybody can love God because he or she was not involved in the tangled ball of yarn of Trinitarian divine agape and, therefore, is also not capable of love of neighbor? Thus, is the answer to the second of Pannenberg's (1993, 212) questions – is love of neighbor, in fact, merely love of God – a negative? And the first question (consisting of God's true love participating in his love of the world) could be answered positively.

Regarding the love of one's neighbor, it seems to be too much of a Catholic reading of Pannenberg, indeed. We cannot read his texts with Catholic foresight about the differences between (baptized) Christians and other people (*Lumen gentium* [Second Vatican Council 1964], 14-16). It appears the word »man« by Pannenberg is not in contrast to the word »Christian« because man is only in contrast to God. This is obvious from his conclusions regarding predestination. According to Pannenberg, predestination means *dynamic inclusivity*, the movement for inclusion of all. The Church and every Christian are called not to overstep others and exceed them. In the meantime, they have to include the whole of humankind in the relationship of the tangled yarn of Trinitarian divine *agape* (Pannenberg 1993, 564). A similar judgment is found in the second volume of Pannenberg's Systematic Theology when he speaks about reconciliation with the world. He emphasizes the true understanding of the humanity of the earthly Jesus. He was not the »man for others« or the »true neighbor« per se because he was the man for God, and only in this sense also the »man for others« and the »true neighbor« (Pannenberg 1991, 470). In volume three of Systematic Theology, therefore, regarding humanity, Pannenberg can say that only in the Kingdom of God will mankind be liberated from every oppression and selfishness (1993, 565). The community with God is the true determination of man and, therefore, eschatological,

not just moral (1991, 255–256). However, God's intention regarding his creation is the community with him here and now (1993, 565). Such a community cannot simply be postponed in eternal life.

Thus, according to Pannenberg, man can follow natural law as part of God's commandments only within the logic of the Trinitarian divine *agape*. The Holy Spirit has poured out the love for God, and therefore, it is possible for man to follow the commandments. Regarding Pelagius' mistake concerning goodwill, Pannenberg emphasises with Augustine, goodwill is identical with *caritas* – God's love given as grace (Pannenberg 1993, 86–87). Thus, to have goodwill and therefore follow natural law means following man's eschatological determination through his moral determination (Pannenberg 1991, 258). Concerning love of neighbor by a non-Christian, it is necessary to conclude that having community with God is also the determination of a non-baptized man. Therefore, such a man can follow his eschatological determination through his moral determination, follow the natural law through his involvement in the tangled yarn of Trinitarian divine *agape*, and finally, follow the commandment of neighborly love, however, not by himself but through *caritas* – God's love given as grace.

Pannenberg apparently identifies with Rahner's point of view. In note 258 of *Systematical Theology 3,* he quotes his *Theological Investigations* (*Schriften zur Theologie* VI, 264ff and 247). According to Rahner, he determines that explicit love of neighbor is primarily an act of love of God because explicit love of God consists in the trusting and loving, »opening up to the totality of reality that takes place in the love of neighbor«. God is at work in all the relations of humanity, however secular. Nevertheless, Pannenberg has doubts regarding the meaning of such a ruminating: »The question remains, however, why this reference has to become thematic in and for itself.« (Pannenberg 2009, 187) It seems we can interpret it as a primarily Catholic problem consisting in the contrast between baptized and non-baptized man, which was one of the critical issues of Rahner's thinking and the core of his so-called *anonymous Christian*.

## 3 Ellipse of love of neighbor – interim conclusions

Stressing the differences between Christians and non-Christians regarding neighborly love, as seen in Benedict and Rahner, seems to be a typical Catholic perspective, whereas Pannenberg sidesteps this issue by emphasizing caritas as a gift of grace. However, the result of his thinking concerning love of one's neighbor is, in fact, very similar to the conclusions of Benedict: Love of one's neighbor is a path that leads to the encounter with God because it is based on God's love for His *creation in general and humankind in particular.*

The first result from the comparison above is the »suspicion« regarding the hypothetical inspiration of *Deus caritas est* in Pannenberg's thinking. When Benedict in *Deus caritas est* 7 says that *eros* is a term of secular and »ascending«, possessive love (*amor concupiscentiae*), however, *agape* of love is grounded in and shaped by faith and therefore »descending«, oblative (*amor benevolentiae*), he introduced it: »There are other, similar classifications.« (*Deus caritas est* [Benedict XVI 2005], 7) This place seems to reference Pannenberg. However, also the general contradistinction between *eros* and *agape* was first written by Pannenberg. Moreover, these »suspicions« regarding the inspiration of Benedict in Pannenberg improve the strong emphasis on establishing the love of neighbor in the Trinitarian divine *agape* by both authors primarily.

Nevertheless, encyclical letters »suffer« from a lack of references and quotations. Therefore, the common inspiration of Pannenberg and Benedict in the third source, as seen in Augustine, for example, is also possible. Nonetheless, this »suspicion« is fundamental regarding the topic of love of neighbor by non-Christians because the interconnection of both views of the matter points to possible ecumenical understanding and the common conception of this problem. Thus, it seems necessary to read it as an encouragement to search for an ecumenical basis of Christian social service (*caritas*, *diakonia*) in the world and realize Christian *caritas* and *diakonia* ecumenically.

Secondly, the result that neighborly love lies between the Trinitarian divine *agape* and the natural law, which is God's command inscribed in human nature, explains the love of neighbor as two foci determining an ellipse.

However, natural law's command to love one's neighbor needs to be read in light of Trinitarian divine *agape* as well. Nonetheless, this command differs from involvement in the tangled yarn of Trinitarian divine *agape*, which allows one to participate in it and, through such participation, empowers one with neighborly love. Thus, the command of neighborly love in natural law and God's Trinitarian love for the world involve men through their mutual interaction. The natural love of neighbor, therefore, anticipates the Trinitarian divine *agape*. It is from God, prepared in the nature of men like a bridgehead for participation in the Trinitarian divine *agape* – God's love for the world, which activates the response of men to the command of neighbor's love.

Therefore, it is necessary to prove Pannenberg right, as from the point of view of dogmatic or systematic theology, this inference is of less importance. However, it is of greater practical, applied, and pastoral importance. It correlates with the claim of Cardinal Cajetani (1639, 219) *omnis homo est proximus*, which is his interpretation of the core statement of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Moreover, according to Luther, who emphasizes that God needs nothing from man, thus God wills that He is venerated through service to one's neighbors (Luther, § 14), this conclusion appears to be important practically as well. However, instead of in the Trinitarian divine *agape*, Luther based the conception of love for one's neighbor on a Christological basis, thus emphasizing the parable's allegorical interpretation (Luther n.d., §§ 35–36). Benedict XVI and Pannenberg address this problem similarly through Trinitarian divine agape and the command of natural law, which opens avenues for the proper praxis of social and helping activities among non-Christians and Christians from various confessions.

## 4 Pastoral application

The Swiss Protestant theologians Heinz Rüegger and Christoph Sigrist, who are interested in Christian caritas and diakonia, pointed out through the inspiration of the German Protestant theologian Gerd Theißen the problem of combining the pure Christological rationale of neighborly love with the constitutive understanding of love for one's neighbor within the churches. Because of *imitatio Christi,* such a rationale leads to the

internal rules of diaconal and caritas organization founded by churches, which excludes all non-Christians. In the case of Catholics, these rules in some particular churches also exclude Christians who are in so-called irregular situations in their family life (*Amoris Laetitia* [Francis 2016], 296–300) from the service of Caritas. In fact, these rules are still being circumvented or directly not followed (Rüegger and Sigrist 2014, 72). On the contrary, the above-described comparison of the understanding and conception of love of neighbor by Pannenberg and Benedict XVI, stretching between the Trinitarian God's love for his creation and natural law's command of love, not only avoids this problem: in fact, it is a more exact and proper understanding and conception of the love of neighbor, Christological problem included. This understanding and conception cover and meet not merely Christian faith in whatever confession and therefore the Christological rationale of the love of neighbor, but also the faith of the Old Testament and the *semina verbi* (O'Collins 2006) in other religions as well as in the secular culture of helping professions.

Therefore, the practical application means, *firstly*, to accept and recognize in whatever secular or religious-based charity and social activities the tracks and manifestation of neighborly love, which was recognized in conscience as an order of natural law, and which calls us to act in compliance with the natural law through the love of the Trinity for the world. Therefore, Pope Benedict valued the cooperation between the state and various Christian charities, the services of diverse charitable and philanthropic organizations in addressing social and political problems, as well as voluntary engagement (*Deus caritas est* [Benedict XVI 2005], 30b).

Nevertheless, is it possible to interpret that this regards the recognition of non-Christian organizations and helpers among non-Christians? Benedict references here the post-synodal exhortation of John Paul II *Christifideles laici* 41, which quotes the decree about the apostolate of the laity *Apostolicam actuositatem* 8, where the Second Vatican Council valued »pity for the needy and the sick and works of charity and mutual aid intended to relieve human needs of every kind« which are »held in highest honor by the Church«. There is also a reference to the older document, the encyclical letter *Mater et Magistra* on Christianity and social progress by John XXIII, from 1961. Pope John emphasized here that, besides care for souls, the Church concerns »itself too with the exigencies of man's daily life,

with his livelihood and education, and his general, temporal welfare and prosperity« (*Mater et magistra* [John XXIII], 3). The decree *Apostolicam actuositatem,* with references to public speeches of Pius XII and John XXII, adds in article 8:

> Therefore, the laity should hold in high esteem and, according to their ability, aid the works of charity and projects for social assistance, whether public or private, including international programs whereby effective help is given to needy individuals and peoples. In so doing, they should cooperate with all men of good will.

Through these sources, it is possible to account for the statement of Benedict XVI in *Deus caritas est* 31, which opened this questioning about the ecumenical basis of Christian social service:

> The increase in diversified organizations engaged in meeting various human needs is ultimately due to the fact that the command of love of neighbor is inscribed by the Creator in man's very nature.

Therefore, we can read the words of Pope Benedict XVI as a careful note for the opening of Christian caritas to non-Christians. In other words, the Trinitarian divine agape facilitates man's response to the order of neighborly love from natural law; thus, the Church should allow such a response by opening its proper caritas and diaconal activities to non-Christians. It is also possible to accept and recognize the tracks and manifestations of neighborly love in whatever secular or religious-based charity and social activities, and to support and collaborate with them from the side of the Church and Christians.

In the logic of the tangled yarn of Trinitarian divine *agape* (see section 2), this problem does not determine Pannenberg's understanding of ecclesiology. In similar terms, the concept of predestination encompasses dynamic inclusivity, i.e., the task of churches and Christians to involve all humankind in the relationship of the tangled yarn of Trinitarian divine *agape* (Pannenberg 1993, 564). Moreover, Pannenberg's identification with Augustine regards the understanding of goodwill as caritas – God's love given as grace (1993, 86–87), which

ultimately reinforces the above-described conclusions regarding cooperation among Christians and churches with other charities and social activities.

However, *secondly*, both Benedict and Pannenberg emphasize the rooting of man, also loving and helping man, in Christ. »Consequently, more than anything, they must be persons moved by Christ's love, persons whose hearts Christ has conquered with his love, awakening within them love of neighbor,« wrote Benedict about helpers working in Catholic Caritas (*Deus caritas est* [Benedict XVI 2005], 33). For (Pannenberg 1993, 86–87), the love of neighbor is a constituent of man's faith, which is the answer to the love of God for the world, i.e., grace. Thus, the Christological rationale of caritas and diakonia cannot simply be swallowed up by the Trinitarian. Instead, the proper reading of Christological rationale is necessary.

Although Benedict emphasizes the rooting of helpers in Christ, he also reminds us of the mutual interconnection between the love of God and neighbor's love: »Only if I serve my neighbor can my eyes be opened to what God does for me and how much he loves me.« (*Deus caritas est* [Benedict XVI 2005], 18) This is, therefore, the reason why the praxis of agape, caritas is »essential to the Church as the ministry of the sacraments and preaching of the Gospel« (*Deus caritas est* [Benedict XVI 2005], 22) and the love of neighbor, which is in this sense grounded in the love of God, »is first and foremost a responsibility for each member of the faithful [...] the local community to the particular Church and the Church universal in its entirety. As a community, the Church must practice love« (*Deus caritas est* [Benedict XVI 2005], 20). Therefore, the Christological rationale for caritas above all means that Christians and their churches should love their neighbors because they learn God's love for the world.

However, to learn them is nothing particularly Christian. The cognition of its Creator is the role, duty, and determination of the whole of humankind, of each man. Therefore, Rüegger and Sigrist (2014, 72) point out that helping – providing *agape* as Christians' caritas and diakonia – is constitutive for Christianity, yet not exclusive. Furthermore, this conclusion is similar to that of Pope John XXIII in *Mater et Magistra* 3 and the Second Vatican Council in *Apostolicam actuositatem* 8. Therefore, *Deus caritas est* 33 emphasizes caritas workers need professional training in helping

professions and the »formation of heart«. If love of neighbor is the path to encountering God, then the »formation of heart« refers to pastoral ministry among caritas workers and all helping professions. It encompasses a special kind of corporate identity, management, leadership, supervision, lifelong learning, and pastoral counselling. It means the task of *dynamic inclusivity* (Pannenberg 1993, 564) for the Church and churches, to support all of them who set out on the journey of neighborly love, leading to the encounter with God in the logic of the Trinitarian divine *agape* – God's love for the world and the corresponding order of neighbor's love in the natural law.

This is finally clear from the elemental text of the Gospel about the love of one's neighbor, as seen in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). This pericope brings nothing special about Christians' caritas and diakonia, nor about the Christian's motivation to act pro-socially. Also, the Old Testament and ancient social ethos knew the obligation to help a man in distress (Söding 2015). Moreover, in the parable, the lawman, not Jesus, quoted the double commandment of love of God and neighbor's love from Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18. The story of the Good Samaritan enables us to recognize, understand, and admit the right motivation for help by all people, i.e., not only by Jews and Christians (Theißen 2008, 95–96). Pannenberg considers the parable likewise in his 3rd volume of *Systematic Theology*. According to him, the parable shows that love is free from unalterable law and, contrarily, able to find solutions for unusual and extraordinary situations and new ways for action relevant to the situation (Pannenberg 1993, 91).

## Conclusion

Neither of the applications mentioned above are new in the Caritas Theory of Catholic theology as well as in the Diakonik of Protestant theology. However, they are primarily discussed from a practical point of view, rather than from the core understanding of love in Christianity, i.e., the love of one's neighbor and the love of God for the world. The Trinitarian conception of both God's love for His creation and its resulting neighborly love opens new perspectives on how to address this problem in theology, churches, and their pastoral practice.

Thus, the tracks and manifestations of neighbourly love in the world, theology, the Catholic Church, and the Protestant churches should read like signs of the times (Sander 2005). It means to »decipher authentic signs of God's presence and purpose in the happenings« (*Gaudium et spes* [Second Vatican Council 1965], 4 and 11), because the Church (laity as well as pastors and theologians) has a task (Lat. *munus*), »to hear, distinguish and interpret the many voices of our age, and to judge them in the light of the divine word, so that revealed truth can always be more deeply penetrated, better understood and set forth to greater advantage« (*Gaudium et spes* [Second Vatican Council 1965], 44). It is, therefore, the task to decipher the tangled yarn of Trinitarian divine *agape* in our world.

Thus, the common ecumenical basis of Christian social service is possible just through the Trinitarian comprehension of neighborly love. Moreover, through such a comprehension, the participation of the non-Christian in the caritas and diakonia of Christian churches is also possible. More precisely, through a Trinitarian understanding of love, collaboration among Christians and non-Christians in social service is possible. Therefore, it is necessary to call this problem a gap in the ecumenical movement. The omission of a daily basis for serving the poor and needy can be regarded as a fatal mistake of Christianity in the 21st century. The omission of it concerning non-Christians is a fatal fault in the pastoral task of Christianity in today's world.

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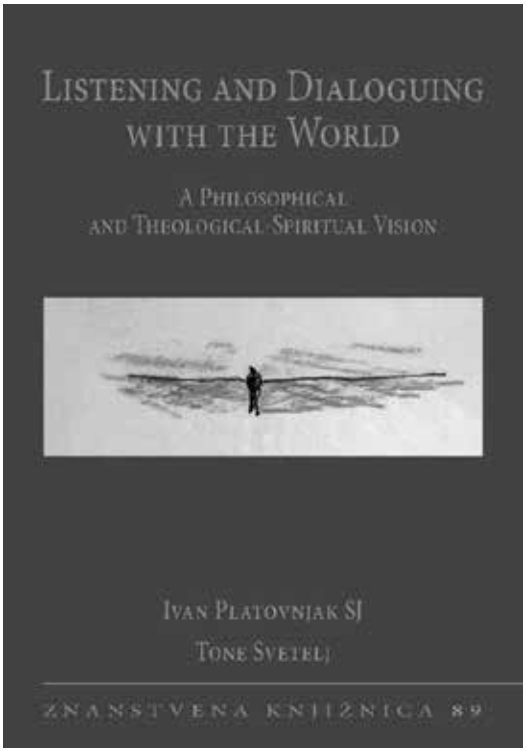
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