

# Diaconia Beyond Borders

## Welfare State, Church, and Migrants with Limited Welfare Rights

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### Abstract

The presence of migrants in precarious life situations with limited welfare rights challenges the Nordic national churches to reconsider their role vis-à-vis the welfare state. The aim of this article is to discuss what such a reorientation should imply. Through an engagement with the works of William T. Cavanaugh, Gustaf Wingren, and Gyrid Gunnes, I argue for a church of diaconia that takes the situation of migrants with limited welfare rights into account by being a space of recapitulation and justice, while at the same time keeping the welfare state accountable to its responsibility of protecting vulnerable lives.

**Keywords:** Welfare state, Migrants with limited welfare rights, Ecclesiology of diaconia, William T. Cavanaugh, Gustaf Wingren, Gyrid Gunnes.

## Introduction

The Nordic welfare model is widely known for its emphasis on equality and solidarity and its allegedly non-stigmatizing universal welfare services based on individual rights (Kunhle & Kildal, 2018, pp. 23–24). However, “the right to have rights”, as Hanna Arendt famously put it (1966, p. 296), is also in the case of the Nordic welfare states related to citizenship, or at least to certain types of long-term connection to the labor market (Misje, 2019, p. 26). Accordingly, even though the Nordic welfare states are self-proclaimed protectors of universal human rights, they are, for all practical purposes, first and foremost national projects in which the principles of equality, solidarity, and universal welfare services are not extended to “others and outsiders” (Barker, 2018, p. 1).

In the expansion period of the Nordic model following World War II, this tension between national and global solidarity remained largely hidden (Trägårdh, 2018, p. 80). With an increasing number of migrants arriving in the Nordic region, however, the national framing of the welfare state has become impossible to ignore. The presence of migrants living under stressful socio-economic conditions has made it clear that access to public welfare is not granted to everyone. The dominating self-perception of the Nordic countries as being egalitarian, good, and caring has thus been seriously questioned, making politicians from across the political spectrum claim that the situation is a “disgrace to the welfare state” (Karlsen, 2018, p. 237).

The point of departure for the following discussion is that the presence of migrants with limited welfare rights not only challenges the self-understanding of the Nordic welfare states. It also challenges the self-understanding of the Nordic national churches. Historically, there has been a close alliance between state and church within Nordic Lutheranism. In the field of welfare politics, this has been expressed both through the ecclesial support of comprehensive welfare regimes (Christiansson, 2017, p. 4) and through the way the churches have conceived their own social practice, their diaconia, as being complementary to the welfare state (Edgards, 2019, pp. 138–139). The presence of migrants in precarious life situations puts this alliance to the test. When the state shows no intention of providing everyone within its territory with the necessary welfare services, the Nordic national churches are challenged to reorient their role vis-à-vis the welfare state. As recent research shows, this reorientation is already taking place: Through an array of hospitality practices, non-public welfare agents—religious and non-religious alike—seek to meet the obligations that the welfare states once were thought to guarantee for (Bendixen & Wyller, 2019, p. 1). *The aim of this article is to discuss what such a reorientation could and should imply for an ecclesiology of diaconia which seeks to take into account the precarious situation of migrants with limited welfare rights.*

I will begin the discussion by analyzing and assessing central features of the political ecclesiology of the North American Catholic theologian William T. Cavanaugh. Throughout his theological work, Cavanaugh has argued that rather than being the keeper of the common good, the nation-state—the Nordic welfare states included—is more than anything a threat to both local and transnational communities. This threat

also pertains to the situation of migrants. To counter this threat, Cavanaugh claims, the church is called to stand out as a distinctive political alternative to the state, a pilgrim church, which is rooted in the needs of the migrant poor, transgresses national borders, and animates local communities.

Although Cavanaugh effectively questions the exclusionary character of the nation-state and rightly emphasizes the transnational character of the church, there is, I will argue, a problematic oppositional interpretation of church and state running through his political theology. Therefore, I continue the discussion by revisiting the ecclesiology of the Swedish theologian Gustaf Wingren (1910–2000). Whereas Wingren (like Cavanaugh) fears that the welfare state is a threat to both local communities and international solidarity, he articulates this within a framework that still sees political institutions as potential instruments of God's creative activity. Combined with Wingren's claim that diaconia is an integral part of the church's mission, this paves the way for an ecclesiology of diaconia with a more differentiated interpretation of the relationship between church and welfare state than Cavanaugh allows for.

However, in order to serve as a resource for an ecclesiology of diaconia which takes the situation of migrants into account, Wingren's interpretation of the church also needs to be critically discussed. The tendency toward paternalism and neglect of the diaconal potential of the gathered church needs to be examined, and the transition towards a post-Constantinian understanding of church and state needs to be further developed. To pave the way for this, I bring the work of the Norwegian theologian of social practice, Gyrid Gunnes, to the table. By including Gunnes in the discussion, I argue that the church, as a transnational space of recapitulation, is called to embody the social justice that migrants with limited welfare rights are denied, without *a priori* playing this out against the responsibility of the welfare state.

### **Nation-State, Migrants, and Pilgrim Church**

From his first book, the celebrated *Torture and Eucharist* (1998), the influential political theologian William T. Cavanaugh has been a fierce critic of the modern nation-state. A key element in this critique is that rather than being the keeper of the common good, the modern nation-state represents a threat to true forms of communal life, locally and transnationally (Cavanaugh, 2011, pp. 41-45). Cavanaugh gives two reasons for making this claim. First, by declaring that the central power alone has the right to enforce authority within state borders, the nation-state tends to disperse local associations pursuing the common good. Whereas premodern Europe was characterized by "complex space" understood as a plethora of communal bodies with overlapping loyalties, the modern nation-state envisions society as a "simple space" in which the individual is subject directly to the power center. In this duality of individual and state, the allegiance to the central power trumps all other allegiances (Cavanaugh, 2011, p. 18–19). The result is, as Cavanaugh puts it, "not the common good, but an (ultimately tragic) attempt to ward off social conflict by keeping individuals from interfering with each other" (Cavanaugh, 2011, p. 24). Second, by denying the legitimacy of transnational communities, the nation-state produces a kind

of competitive nationalism that makes national identity the only legitimate loyalty. Since the idea of sovereignty is built on the theory of an original anarchy among nation-states (rather than international cooperation), nationalistic accentuations of external differences become the only plausible option. Loyalty to the state thus takes precedence over other forms of belonging, and national identity becomes that which separates one's own nation from others. What is good can accordingly best be pursued at the expense of other nation-states (Cavanaugh, 2011, pp. 38–39).

In Cavanaugh's writings, the pathologies of the nation-state are identified in different forms of government, spanning from the military dictatorship of the Chilean Augusto Pinochet Ugarte (Cavanaugh 1998) to the liberal nation-states of Europa and his own North American context (Cavanaugh 2002; 2011). In two texts of particular interest to the topic of this article, Cavanaugh turns his attention to the Nordic Welfare state, primarily as it has evolved in Sweden (Cavanaugh 2010; Cavanaugh 2014). In these texts Cavanaugh argues that the welfare state is best understood as a simulacrum of true communal life, as a distortion of a Eucharistic body: When the welfare state liberates the individual from dependency upon others—"the poor from charity, the workers from their employers, wives from their husbands, children from parents (and vice versa when parents have become elderly)" (Trägårdh and Berggren quoted in Cavanaugh, 2014, p. 165)—the price is dependency upon the state. Just as in Foucault's image of the Panopticon, the relationship between the individual and the state (the center) cuts individuals off from relating to each other. What initially represented an admirable care for the Other, regardless of their *ethnos*, has thus been transmuted into a form of abstract care for the other as a generic individual (Cavanaugh, 2014, p. 170). Cavanaugh acknowledges that the welfare state may be understood as an attempt to institutionalize the gospel imperative to love your neighbor as yourself (Cavanaugh, 2010, p. 27). Yet he maintains that the atomizing tendencies of the welfare state contribute to local forms of belonging being superseded while international forms of belonging are truncated (Cavanaugh, 2014, pp. 169-170).

The situation of migrants with limited welfare rights effectively demonstrates what Cavanaugh considers to be the flaws of the nation-state. In the chapter "Migrant, Tourist, Pilgrim, Monk: Identity and Mobility in the Global Age" (2011), he describes how the purpose of the nation-state borders is not only to exclude migrants from entering the territory of the nation-state. It is also to define them, to give them a liminal identity of being neither fully here nor there: "National borders confer identity on those who are contained within their boundaries or who cross over them" (Cavanaugh, 2011, p. 73). Rather than giving shelter from the whirlwind of globalization, the borders of the nation-state function to confirm the liminal status of migrants as strangers (Cavanaugh, 2011, p. 74). In theory, Cavanaugh argues, modern nation-states developed to protect the right of humans as humans. The Declaration of the Rights of Man in 1789 states, for instance, that all human life is the subject of rights. However, as long as these rights are intrinsically related to citizenship, migrants without citizenship retain a liminal status. Persons without a nation-state thus become what Giorgio Agamben has called "bare life," that is, "lives whose biological needs may be attended to by humanitarian relief

efforts, but whose full identity as the bearers of rights is constantly held in question” (Cavanaugh, 2011, pp. 74–75).

To counter the pathologies of the nation-state, Cavanaugh urges the church to embrace its status as a pilgrim church. The pilgrim church, Cavanaugh argues, is a church which knows that the primary citizenship of its members is in heaven rather than in any nation-state and which responds to globalization by turning migrants into pilgrims. On the one hand, this pilgrim identity relativizes the borders of the nation-state, which defines some people on the move as “illegal.” By insisting on being an international body that transgresses the borders of the nation-state, the pilgrim church embodies a more global and catholic social vision than any national identity could allow for. The pilgrim status thus enables the church to distance itself from artificial segmentations, transforming it into a liminal body at the margins of law and national identity (Cavanaugh, 2011, p. 86). On the other hand, the pilgrim identity of the church challenges the nation-state by enabling strong local communities practicing hospitality for the stranger to flourish. Rooted in the concrete needs of “the migrant poor,” the pilgrim church resists the atomizing effects of the nation-state by hallowing the local and the particular and, through this, offers shelter to those who must travel out of necessity (Cavanaugh 2011, pp. 87).

Through the celebration of the Eucharist, the Christian social practice *par excellence*, the church is formed into distinctive local communities that embody more personalized forms of social care than the welfare state can ever offer (Cavanaugh, 2014, p. 156). Only such a Eucharistic body is able to challenge the narrow particularity of the state and anticipate the heavenly polity on earth (Cavanaugh, 2011, p. 45). Infused by the performative practice of the Eucharist, the pilgrim church is thus enabled to “complexify” political space, i.e., create local and trans-local communities that counter the simple space produced by the nation-state. By so doing, it contributes to a micropolitics that inspires Christian grass-roots groups to resist the nation-state’s colonialization of the Christian social imagination (Cavanaugh, 2011, p. 5), creating grass-roots movements that welcome and rever migrants as Christ (Cavanaugh, 2011, p. 86).

When arguing for the potential of the pilgrim church to resist the state, Cavanaugh frequently refers to Augustine. Cavanaugh writes:

“To accept our status as pilgrims on our way back to God is, as Augustin saw, to accept the provisional character of human government. Our status as pilgrims makes clear that our primary identity is not what is defined for us by national borders. The pilgrim seeks to transgress all artificial borders that impede the quest for communion with God and with other people” (Cavanaugh, 2011, p. 82).

Augustine’s acknowledgment of the pilgrim status of the church thus offers an alternative to the modern conception of a single public space defined by the nation-state. For Augustine, there are namely two cities without clearly defined boundaries, two conflicting sets of practices competing for the same goods (Cavanaugh, 2011,

p. 49; 63). Envisioning the two cities as sets of practices helps to avoid simply identifying the city of God with the empirical church and the earthly city with the state. However, since Cavanaugh, on the one hand, maintains that the church is ontologically related to the city of God (59), and claims, on the other hand, that Augustine sees the government as part of the earthly city (62), the competition ascribed to the practices of the two cities inevitably also becomes a competition between church and state. The permeable and ambiguous character of the boundaries between church and non-church is thus, perhaps, not as evident as Cavanaugh would have us think. Cavanaugh writes:

“[T]he Church is itself an alternative “space” or set of practices whose citizenship is in some sort of tension with citizenship in the *civitas terrena*. For Augustine, not the *imperium* but the Church is the true *res publica*, the “public thing”; the *imperium* has forfeited any such claim to be truly public by its refusal to do justice, by refusing to give God his due” (Cavanaugh, 2002, pp. 83-84).

Here we see clearly that the state, the *imperium*, is identified with the earthly city and that citizenship in the church is seen to be in tension with citizenship in this political institution (Shadle, 2010, p. 256). Cavanaugh’s way of contrasting the pilgrim status of the church with the nationalism of the state is thus backed up by his interpretation of Augustin.

Translated into the idiom of diaconia, there are several lessons to be learned from Cavanaugh. First of all, he pointedly exposes some of the failings of the nation-state seen both in the liminalization of migrants and in the disciplining effects on grassroots communities practicing diaconia. Moreover, his description of the pilgrim status of the church effectively points out the diaconal welfare potential in transnational associations for embodying hospitality to migrants in precarious life situations; a potential new research in the field of migration studies increasingly are giving attention to (Shutes & Ishkanian, 2021; Gray & Levitt, 2022).

Still, Cavanaugh’s interpretation of the relationship between church and state is characterized by an oppositional approach which makes it difficult to acknowledge the positive purposes the welfare state serves, despite its national framing (Doak, 2007, p. 378). First, due to the exaltation of the pilgrim church as the paradigmatic form of communal life, there are no adequate theological resources left to value the welfare state on its own terms, so to speak, or to see it as a potential albeit fallible instrument of God’s creative and caring activity in the world. The result is a debunking of the welfare state that is both superficial and simplistic. True, the welfare state does not solve the situation of migrants with limited welfare rights. But this does not in itself justify Cavanaugh’s undifferentiated discreditation of all aspects of the welfare state.

Second, the diaconal significance of the Eucharist assembly is somewhat overloaded in Cavanaugh. Whereas the welfare state, according to Cavanaugh, at best can be understood as imperfectly institutionalizing the gospel, it is the Eucharist that represents “the truest way we know of relating to one another” (Cavanaugh, 2014, p. 172). The problem with this way of centering diaconia around the Eucharist is the tendency to

downplay the eschatological tension between “the already” and “not yet” (Sigurdson, 2010, p. 134). The result is a chauvinistic view of the pilgrim church’s ability to care for migrants in precarious life situations. While Cavanaugh claims that he does not advocate a triumphalist view of the church as the realized eschaton (Cavanaugh, 2011, p. 67), he still directs his well-developed hermeneutic of suspicion rather one-sidedly against the state and not the church. This results in a romanticized understanding of the diaconal potential of the latter.

Finally, Cavanaugh’s oppositional approach makes it difficult to appreciate the migrant other in their alterity. When the truest form of sociality is located in the pilgrim church, the risk is that “the others” are made into generic objects of Eucharistic charity rather than subjects exercising emancipatory agency. Surely, there is a kind of radical inclusiveness in the ecclesiology of Cavanaugh, in the sense that he maintains that all people are members or potential members of the body of Christ. However, as Ulrich Schmiedel has argued, to see others as potential members of the body of Christ does not ensure that they are appreciated or accepted on their own terms (Schmiedel, 2019, p. 169).

### Creation, Diaconia, and a Church for Others

As an alternative to Cavanaugh, I move on to revisit the theology of Gustaf Wingren. Wingren is perhaps not the most obvious choice, given the topic of this article. After all, he does not reflect on how the church and its diaconia ought to respond to the destiny of migrants with limited welfare rights. Nor does he write extensively on the proper role of the welfare state (although references to the welfare regime of his day, as we shall see, are not entirely absent).<sup>1</sup> What Wingren *does* offer is a theological framework that paves the way for a more differentiated interpretation of the relationship between church and welfare state than Cavanaugh’s approach allows for. Whereas Cavanaugh operates with a contrasting view of church and non-church and sees the Eucharistic as representing “the truest way we know of relating to one another,” Wingren holds that an adequate description of what is specifically Christian must be understood against the backdrop of the idea of God’s universal presence in creation.

“Openness and distinctiveness (= creation and gospel) are not striving in different directions, and need therefore not [...] be balanced out against each other. Rather, they support each other, indeed, they are one” (Wingren, 1979b, p. 140, translation mine).

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<sup>1</sup> Overall, Wingren seems to be more concerned with interpersonal relations and local communities than with the state. As Kristensson Uggla puts it: “His theology was deeply anchored in an organic view of society, one that sought, in an almost communitarian way, to protect the cohesion of organic human community” (Kristensson Uggla, 2016, 272). Even after his political awakening in the beginning of the seventies the social democratic welfare state is not in the center of his attention. Although he increasingly develops a more leftist political outlook, he never thought of socialism in terms of statification (Ibid). This said, it is still the case that Wingren not least through his elaborations on Luther and Irenaeus discusses issues related to power, law and political authorities. As such, it is certainly material in Wingren of discussing the legitimacy of political institutions such as the welfare state.

In relation to the topic of this article, this implies that an adequate understanding of how a church of diaconia should relate to other providers of welfare needs to make God's creative activity in all creatures and all creation the horizon of interpretation.

To the extent that Wingren treats questions related to the welfare state he saw developing in the aftermath of World War II, his outlook is characterized by a twofold attitude. On the one hand, he acknowledges the ability of the welfare state to give those in need what they lack and to take away from the "idle rich" what they don't need (Wingren, 1960/1964, p. 184). Accordingly, he describes the redistributive laws of society as our neighbor's "demand-note" (Wingren, 1974/1981, p. 61). This affirmative attitude is grounded in a theological interpretation of creation as an ongoing activity. In opposition to the pre-war German theology of orders, where the "orders of creation," which included state, economy, and family, were treated in static and hierarchical terms, Wingren maintains that creation is not to be confined to a particular moment "in the beginning." Rather, God continues to create, and in a fallen world "the law in its civil use" or "the earthly government"—concepts Wingren uses almost synonymously (Wingren, 1960/1964, p. 175)—are tools for God's life-giving and caring activity in the world (Wingren, 1958/1961, p. 152). To the degree that the welfare state acts in accordance with the law and the earthly government, it can thus be seen as an instrument for God's ongoing creation, of God's way of caring for the "really neglected" (Wingren, 1979a, p. 119). This does not mean, of course, that the given laws of society are always expressions of God's law or that representatives of the earthly government always reflect the standards of neighborly love. Due to the existence of evil and sin, there is a constant temptation for anyone exercising power to abuse the law for selfish ends. Political authorities and the given laws of society should, therefore, continuously be scrutinized to confirm that they serve the welfare of the neighbor (Wingren, 1958/1961, pp. 153–156; Wingren, 1974/1981, pp. 61–63).

On the other hand, Wingren is also critical of the welfare state. First of all, he criticizes the welfare state for being unable to foster true fellowship among human beings. The doctrine of individual rights, the organizing principle of the welfare state, runs the risk of cutting the individual off from personal relationships. What is then lost are the innumerable relations in which human beings altruistically give to each other freely (Wingren, 1960/1964, pp. 184–185). As Wingren puts it:

"The old community-building components, such as the family and the local parish and community, have lost their diaconal role without any people-protecting communities emerging. Money, contributions in the form of financial support, is given to the sick or the poor, but not human community. Fellowship is not included in our vision of 'welfare'" (Wingren, 1991, p. 46, translation mine).

In addition, he also develops a more internationally oriented criticism of the welfare state. In his later writings—that is, writings from the seventies and eighties—he bemoans the inability of national democracies to deal with issues of poverty and human rights reaching beyond national borders (Wingren, 1974/1981, pp. 61–63). Although

national democracies may be effective in fairly distributing resources within given borders, they prevent just distribution on an international level. In this perspective, they are nothing but nationalism in disguise (Wingren, 1979a, p. 120; Gerle 2021, p. 38).

Wingren's understanding of the role of the church and diaconia reveals a similar twofold attitude. On the one hand, he claims that diaconia is not to be understood as the supreme or unique task of the church, since there are many who can feed the hungry and heal the sick (Wingren, 1960/1964, pp. 157–158). In opposition to what he takes to be the dominating christocentric and ecclesiocentric theologies of his day (Wingren, 1979, pp. 74–75), he emphasizes that God's creative activity through the law and the earthly government is universal in scope. It is present wherever the needs of the neighbor are taken care of (Wingren, 1958/1961, p. 162). The church is, therefore, not alone in caring for the needs of the body, just as it does not have a privileged insight into how care for the body is to be practiced (Fagermoen, 2018, p. 127). Wingren writes: “[T]o do what needs to be done in the world God the Creator has appointed and continues to uphold earthly government among all [human beings], independently of the preaching of the Gospel” (Wingren, 1960/1964, p. 158). The church should therefore refrain from justifying its existence based on the social achievements it brings about.

On the other hand, Wingren still holds that diaconia remains an integral aspect of the mission of the church. Against Luther's spiritualizing confinement of the works of the gospel to the conscience, he claims that the church should learn from the early church and acknowledge diaconia as originating in the gospel and the spiritual government (Wingren, 1960/1964, p. 166). Drawing on Irenaeus' doctrine of salvation as recapitulation of creation, he argues that the gospel not only expels guilt from the conscience; it also restores and recapitulates, and is as such, closely related to the needs of the body (Wingren, 1960/1964, pp. 167–168). In line with this, he asserts that the church is “the spot where Christ in this very moment ‘recapitulates’ Adam (=heals human beings)” (Wingren, 1983, p. 59, translation mine). Diaconia is thus an integral aspect of the church's double obligation vis-à-vis creation, an obligation that consists of both preaching (mission) and action (diaconia) (Wingren, 1960/1964, pp. 155–157).

While Cavanaugh locates the socio-political significance of the church in the Eucharistic body, Wingren emphasizes that the true context of diaconia is each church member's everyday service for the neighbor: “Each individual is in baptism called to the task of being a Christ for his or her neighbor, of being a deacon” (Wingren, 1991, p. 47, translation mine). Wingren argues against a “Marcionite view of the church,” which, due to its lack of creation faith, is characterized by a movement out of everyday bonds of solidarity into exclusive groups entertaining a distinct Christian ethos (Wingren, 1971, pp. 126–129). In contrast to this “Marcionite” view, Wingren considers diaconia to be closely related to the concept of *vocation*, the daily responsibility every baptized individual has for their fellow human beings (Wingren, 1960/1964, pp. 161–162; Wingren, 1991, 47). However, this “ecclesiological individualism” (Håkansson, 2001, p. 240) does not imply that the community dimension is absent in Wingren's understanding of the

church. It is more accurate to say that the church in Wingren alternates dialectically between being gathered and scattered (Alden & Gustafsson Lundberg, 2014, p. 125): On the “Lords Day,” the baptized are formed into a worshipping community, bound together as members of the same body. However, when the Sunday service is over, those gathered are spread out into the everyday callings they are situated within, healed and forgiven, with new resources to serve their neighbor (Wingren, 1960/1964, p. 240). Hence, Wingren’s ecclesiology can be characterized as eccentric, in the sense that the church is centered outside of itself in two ways: In relation to the gospel from which it is born (Wingren, 1960/1964, p. 5) and in relation to the neighbor towards whom it exists (Wingren, 1979a, p. 158). As Kristensson Ugglå puts it, summarizing the ecclesiology of Wingren: “The church [...] does not control its own center; rather, the church’s center of gravity lies outside the church itself, in a life lived *for others*” (Kristensson Ugglå, 2016, p. 363).

In his early writings, Wingren argues in favor of a revised folk church ecclesiology in the tradition of the Swedish bishop and theologian Einar Billing. This can be seen both in his insistence on the open character of the church (in opposition to a distinct community with fixed boundaries) and in his defense of the geographically defined territorial parish (Håkansson, 2001, pp. 97–101; pp. 108–112). However, as he from the seventies and onwards shifts focus from the academic sphere to the contemporary social context, he increasingly understands the church to be in a minority situation, not unlike the position of the early church (Kristensson Ugglå, 2016, pp. 290–296). This shift is reflected in a more explicit socio-political ecclesiology in which the church, freed from the nation-state, is called to solidarity with the least powerful. Wingren writes: “The freer the church becomes in relation to her own state, the more she is merged internationally and the stronger she may act in favor of the oppressed people who need her social contribution” (Wingren, 1975, p. 139, translation mine). As a minority freed from the state, the church is enabled to both strengthen its international bonds and to act for the benefit of marginalized people in need of protection. Wingren emphasizes, however, that this post-Constantinian way of performing social responsibility does not imply the dissolution of the two-kingdom doctrine’s acknowledgment of the state. Even though the church in the post-Constantinian era is given a more independent role vis-à-vis the state, and even though the potential conflict between church and nation-state thus may increase, God’s service to the protection of life through the state still stands: “The church may be different from the state, but her members cannot live without the state, without the protection the state gives, in the service of God for the protection of life” (Wingren, 1975, p. 139, translation mine).

What, then, can be said about the possibilities in Wingren for developing an ecclesiology of diaconia which seeks to take into account the situation of migrants with limited welfare rights? It is, to begin with, interesting to note that Wingren shares some of the concerns of Cavanaugh. Like Cavanaugh, he worries that the welfare state, with its individual rights, is a threat to local communities; like Cavanaugh, he emphasizes the problematic exclusionary character of the nation-state; and like Cavanaugh, he sees the potential in the church for solidarity with the marginalized, a solidarity which

transcends the nation-state. These overlapping concerns all point toward a local and transnational ecclesiology of diaconia with the potential to be attentive to the needs of migrants. What distinguishes Wingren from Cavanaugh is that the interpretation of state and church/diaconia is articulated within a framework that affirms God's creative activity through all sorts of people and institutions independent of faith or church context, while still maintaining that diaconia represents an essential aspect of being church. This paves the way for a dialectical and more differentiated interpretation of church, diaconia, and welfare state than the one we saw in Cavanaugh. Wingren provides an interpretation where the needs of the marginalized certainly demand a response from the church, without in advance framing this response in opposition to the social practices of other welfare agents.

Nevertheless, there are also aspects in the ecclesiology of Wingren that need to be interrupted (Stålsett, 2021, p. 101) and expanded (Afdal, 2022, pp. 89-92). First, just like in Cavanaugh, there is also in Wingren a tendency to describe the church as a church *for* rather than *of* others, thereby perceiving "the others" more as objects of neighborly love than as subjects performing liberating strategies. When Wingren addresses "the suppressed in need of the social effort of the church" (Wingren, 1975, p. 139, translation mine), they are consistently seen to be "the others," as pointed out by Witkowsky Bengtsson (2021, p. 140). Their potential status as subjects exercising emancipatory agency—a central perspective in more recent contributions to the ecclesiology of diaconia (Gunnes, 2017; Wyller, 2016; Dietrich, 2014)—remains unarticulated.<sup>2</sup> This focus on *the others* can, of course, also be interpreted differently, as an impetus for placing "those who are not members of the organization at the center" (Kristensson Uggla, 2016, p. 362). Moreover, there are also perspectives in the theology of Wingren which points towards reciprocity and responsiveness; perspectives which may be developed to include the experiences of the oppressed and marginalized (Fagermoen, 2020, p. 114). However, these perspectives need to be articulated more clearly to respond adequately to the charges of paternalism.

Second, despite Wingren's insistence on relating the gospel to the needs of the body, there is still a tendency in his ecclesiology to see the practice of diaconia as being exclusively performed in the "scattered" rather than the "gathered" church. For Wingren, diaconia is consistently linked to the daily responsibility the baptized individual performs for their neighbor but not to what happens in connection with worship or within the space of the church building. This focus on the eccentric and "everyday character" of the church (Håkansson, 2001, p. 319) makes it difficult to develop a theological interpretation of the potential for diaconia in the social and spatial

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2 The lack of critical reflection on agency and representation in the ecclesiology of Wingren should come as no surprise. After all, as noted by Johanna Gustafson Lundberg and Frida Mannerfeldt (2021, p. 109), epistemological questions related to gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status was not yet a part of the academic agenda when Wingren did most of his academic work. When the theology of Wingren (as here) is used as a source for developing a contemporary ecclesiology of diaconia, the absence of reflections on agency and representation still needs to be addressed. For a critical discussion of how more recent contributions to the so-called Scandinavian creation theology deals with issues such as representation, conflict and diversity, see Gunnes, 2021.

embodiment of the church. There is thus a need to clarify the diaconal implications of the claim that the church is “the spot” of recapitulation.

Third, although Wingren, in his later writings, moves from a “classical” folk church ecclesiology towards an ecclesiology that underlines the transnational ability of the minority church to act to the benefit of marginalized people in need of protection, this conception of the church needs to be further elaborated upon. Migrants in precarious life situations with limited welfare rights represent a transnational challenge to nationally organized welfare. A church of diaconia aiming to take the situation of migrants with limited welfare rights into account thus needs to develop its transnational sensitivity. The question remains, however, if this can be achieved by expanding rather than abandoning the folk-church concept (as Wingren seems to argue for in his later writings).

To interrupt and expand the ecclesiology of Wingren along these lines, I will, in the last part of the article, bring the work of Gyrid Gunnes into the discussion. I will argue that a dialogue between Wingren and Gunnes makes it possible to develop an ecclesiology of diaconia in which the church—together with other non-public welfare agents, religious and non-religious alike—is called to embody the social justice that the welfare state does not extend to migrants with limited welfare rights, without falling back into the church-state dichotomy of Cavanaugh.

### **A Transnational Space of Justice**

In her dissertation *Towards a diaconia of displacements: An empirical theological inquiry*, Gyrid Gunnes investigates how unconventional uses of religious practices, artefacts, and spaces might become sources of justice and transformation for people in marginalized life situations (Gunnes, 2020, p. vii). The empirical material of the investigation is gathered in the Church of Our Lady, an open church of care run by the Church City Mission of Trondheim, the third largest city in Norway. Gunnes notes that whereas the guests of Our Lady for many years mainly consisted of people belonging to the drug-using community in the city, a shift occurred in 2012 when EU-citizens carrying out informal street work started to appear in the city. The growing presence of poor migrants with basic needs not covered by the welfare state has challenged the core identity of Our Lady. When so many of the people attending the church have unmet social and health care needs, Our Lady has been forced to reconsider its self-understanding as being a community where “We do not help” and to find ways of addressing the physical needs of its guests (Gunnes, 2020, pp. 29–31). Our Lady is thus a telling example of the beforementioned reorientation taking place among non-public welfare agents in the face of the precarious situation of many migrants.

When interpreting how unconventional uses of religious practices, artefacts, and spaces become sources of justice and transformation in Our Lady, Gunnes uses the late American critical geographer Edvard W. Soya’s concept of *spatial justice* (Soya, 2010). In Soya, spatial justice is a concept that reveals how spatial arrangements are productive in creating justice. Employed on the material from Our Lady, the concept makes it possible to become aware of the spatial justice that follows when people experiencing

marginalization are no longer excluded from the ecclesial space (Gunnes, 2020, p. 67). According to Gunnes, this “ecclesial spatial justice” can be operationalized in several ways. I will mention two. First, Gunnes describes Our Lady as a space of *facultative justice*. This refers to a range of practices, policies, and organizational arrangements committed to allowing those who attend the church space—the so-called guests—to actively participate in the creation of community, fellowship, and care. The guests of Our Lady are thus not only treated as receivers of help and care. They are also seen to perform guest agency, i.e., to use their talents and resources to provide help and care to other guests and hosts (Gunnes, 2020, p. 69). Second, Gunnes describes Our Lady as a space of *material justice*. This refers to the capacity of Our Lady to redistribute material resources such as food and a place to sleep and to share information about how the social security system works (Gunnes, 2020, p. 71). Although the material redistribution of Our Lady is meager compared to the actual needs, it is still of great importance—especially for the international guests—since it represents some of the very few resources available to them for improving their living conditions (Gunnes, 2020, p. 72).

Besides describing Our Lady as a space of justice, Gunnes also reflects on how it may contribute to a re-imagining of the traditional Scandinavian folk church ecclesiology. Whereas the “folk” in folk church ecclesiology has often been understood as a territorially qualified folk of the majority culture, the international guests of Our Lady represent a trans-local “folk” consisting of people who respond to marginality by continuously traveling between “Norway and Romania, Norway and the Baltic states, Oslo and Trondheim” (Gunnes, 2020, p. 107). The diaconal practices of Our Lady thus challenge the folk church ecclesiology from within, by qualifying the “folk” of the folk church in terms of precariousness rather than affiliation to a nationally defined majority culture. As such, the folk church is an eschatological category that renounces the idea of “the folk” being those who belong to the nation-state as citizens. Rather, “the folk” of the folk church comprises “all those who through being subjected to experiences of degradation and exclusion [...] need to fight for their membership of humanity” (Gunnes, 2020, p. 108).

These insights from Gunnes make it possible to interrupt and expand the ecclesiology of Wingren along the lines indicated above. First, Gunnes’ interpretation of Our Lady as a space of facultative and material justice may interrupt and expand the tendency toward paternalism and the one-sided emphasis on the eccentric character of the church in Wingren. When Gunnes interprets the international guests attending the church space as subjects performing “guest agency,” this may challenge Wingren’s tendency to describe the church as being *for* rather than *of* others. And when Gunnes describes the capacity of Our Lady to redistribute material resources such as food and a place to sleep, this may challenge Wingren’s tendency to neglect the potential for diaconia in the social and spatial embodiment of the church. Perspectives from Gunnes make it possible to articulate what it may imply to interpret the church as a “spot” of recapitulation, by pointing towards the potential of the church as a space of facultative and material justice.

Nevertheless, situating Gunnes' understanding of Our Lady as a space of justice within the framework of Wingren's theology of recapitulation also suggests that the justice the church is called to give space to is not *a priori* to be contrasted with the justice performed by other welfare agents (the welfare state included). When Wingren, citing Irenaeus, holds that salvation is best understood as the recapitulation of creation, he is at the same time, as pointed out by Trygve Wyller, arguing that God, regardless of faith, acts through all human beings (and I would add: institutions) and that "justice reveals a common sharing and fundamentally profiles what Christianity is all about" (Wyller, 2021, p. 186). The church, interpreted as a space of recapitulation, is thus not an alternative social space in competition with the welfare state, as in Cavanaugh. Instead, it is a space which understands itself to be a part of a network of overlapping spaces, religious and non-religious alike, which all—in the face of the precarious situation of migrants with limited welfare rights—strive to take seriously the spatial dimension of a common shared justice. As a part of such a network of overlapping spaces, the church does not in advance dismiss the potential of the welfare state to be a tool for God's caring and creative activity. Rather, it keeps the welfare state accountable to the same standards of justice that all people and institutions are called to embody, without ceasing the call to be accountable to these standards in its own practices.

Insights from Gunnes also make it possible to elaborate further upon the transnational character of the church, which Wingren gives attention to in his later writings. When Gunnes describes how the international guests of Our Lady represent a trans-local "folk" consisting of people who respond to marginality by continuously being on the move, this resonates with Wingren's claim that the minority situation makes the church more capable of strengthening its international bonds and act to the benefit of the marginalized. However, whereas Wingren develops a transnational perspective on the church by leaving the traditional folk church ecclesiology behind, Gunnes does the same by qualifying the "folk" of the folk church in terms of precariousness rather than in terms of national affiliation. Thus, she contributes to a re-imagination of the Scandinavian folk church ecclesiology, which may prove fruitful for an interpretation of the church as a transnational space of recapitulation. Again, it should be noted that situating such an ecclesiology of diaconia within the framework of Wingren's theology of recapitulation implies that the transnational character of the church is not put forth as an alternative to the welfare state, as in Cavanaugh. Although the national framing of the welfare state remains a challenge for those "without the right to have rights," the solution is not, at least from the perspective of Wingren's theology, to dismantle the welfare state.

### **Concluding Remarks**

When the welfare state shows no intention of providing everyone within its territory with the necessary welfare services, the Nordic national churches are challenged to reorient their role vis-à-vis the political authorities. The aim of this article has been to discuss what such a reorientation could and should imply. I have argued that although Cavanaugh effectively questions the exclusionary character of the nation-state and

rightly emphasizes the transnational character of the church, his oppositional approach to church and state obscures an adequate interpretation of both. As an alternative, I have therefore put forth the theology of Wingren. His way of holding together the dialectic of creation and gospel in the concept of *recapitulation* paves the way for an ecclesiology of diaconia which maintains that the precarious situation of migrants requires a response from the church, without dismissing the still legitimate role of the welfare state. In the last part of the article, however, I have also argued for the need to move beyond Wingren. I have therefore brought promising perspectives from Gunnes into the discussion. These perspectives make it possible to expand the ecclesiology of Wingren towards seeing the church as a local and yet transnational space of recapitulation—a transnational network of overlapping spaces that may contribute to the social protection of migrants. Situating these perspectives within Wingren's theology of recapitulation implies, however, that the justice the church is called to give space to is not on beforehand seen to be in opposition to the justice performed by the welfare state. The welfare state might not end all social ills, especially those experienced by migrants in a welfare limbo. Still, in the absence of adequate transnational political institutions, the welfare state's ability to contribute to the protection of life should not be dismissed. The reorientation of the Nordic national churches should accordingly be characterized by a twofold response: To take the precarious situation of migrants with limited welfare rights into account by being local and transnational spaces of recapitulation, of justice, while at the same time keeping the welfare state accountable to its responsibility of being “in the service of God for the protection of life” (Wingren, 1975, p. 139).

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