Abstract

caritas - the mercifully love of God as the foundation, transforming power, inspiration and real incarnation in the church social work (diaconia) reveals not only part of the Church’s nature, but underlines a central guide of the Christian faith, the action of Church, and human life. In this reopened interdisciplinary space by Benedict XVI, theology perceives the obligation and necessity to pronounce more clearly a transversal reading and a deeper understanding of caritas and its relevance for the different theological disciplines and the church charitable activities. Traditionally it is one of the core subjects of the caritas science or theology of caritas. In this paper the task is to show the importance of this discipline for theology and the difference to its well established sister SDC.

Introduction

It is not the first time to start an analysis of the relationship between two interrelated areas of theology. Historically there are many encounters and missed encounters of both areas that influenced especially in the last century the development and the profile of both areas as disciplines of theology. In order to do this reflection in the encounter of bishops actually is a welcome opportunity to promote the forgotten aspects of caritas in view of our charitable activities and to respond to the Holy Father with his encyclical letters “Deus Caritas est” and “Caritas in Veritate”.

1. What caritas reveals

Traditionally the concept caritas stands for a) God’s love transmitted to humankind through Christ in the Holy Spirit which enables people as a response to love God and neighbours; b) the Christian compassionate action in the spiritual and material works of mercy towards poor and people in need, and finally c) the charities of the catholic church (cf. Borgmann 1958). The description of caritas reminds us the clear theological foundation (Trinitarian, Christological and Soteriological), its implication for Christian life (anthropology) and the communitarian dimension (ecclesiology). Since the beginning of the church these three aspects formed significantly part of the self-understanding (identity) of Christian faith, the communitarian and individual practice and the mission of the church – a mission that has to be actively updated and contextualized in relationship with concrete social, cultural and historical situations and in face-to-face relations with the person in need.
As this is an interactive process, it is not surprising that we can find multiple forms, systems, themes and variations within the charities of the Catholic Church. Beside these multiple articulations, there are some core elements which definitely persists: charitable activity is essentially a personal relationship and an expression of a personal Christian faith inspired by the Holy Spirit (lived personal experience of God’s love in Christ, DCE 1), it is rooted in the community of faith and in its identity (Gal 6,10; Ap 2,44s., Phil 2,1-5, Jn 13,35). These activities also form part of the unity of martyria-letourgia-diakonia, and are essential for the understanding of God (Trinitarian love 1 Jo 4,18), faith (content and relationship), and the church (community of love, DCE 25a) along with its mission-action (service of love).

In my point of view caritas is a central theological issue, however it appears in the scientific-theological research as an outsider and overlooked in most of the formal academic teaching programs on our theological faculties. Mostly it just appears as a chapter in moral theology or Christian social ethics. Unfortunately this is very different from the situation of SDC as a well established lecture included in most of all study programs. In Germany and Austria, the situation in some faculties of theology was better, with own chairs on “caritas science” like in Freiburg since 1925, Münster, Paderborn since 1910, and later in Bonn and Passau. This situation prompted Liese in 1920 to request a specific academic program about the matter which received a great consideration from a lot of faculties that included a program in the curriculum. After steady and broad growing the interest in this matter faded down bringing about that in the 80th and 90th only a few faculties maintained lectures about caritas or own chairs. In fact with the European reform of the university studies in the new millennium, some programs in Germany were closed or reduced to optional Master Studies (Freiburg, Passau, Linz) with new implications or mergers like in Freiburg where you can only study a two year program of caritas science and SDC. However as a hopeful sign new Centres were born in the European East (Budweis 2004 and Olomouc 2006, Czech Republic) and South (Murcia, Spain 2004).

2. Frequent misunderstandings / misconceptions

*caritas* action is old fashioned material assistance

In literature and the common understanding of people mostly outside of church, but even by parishioners, we can find the prejudice that charity/ *caritas* action is just material help. Only introducing justice it can be converted in or replaced by promotional work with the person in need. For example, Caritas Spain introduces in the late 90 the slogan “We are working for justice” (Trabajamos por la justicia).

SDC is only theory – *caritas* is practice

SDC shows a broad and over hundred year old experience of Christian social thinking, set up on social principles, natural law, philosophical and theological reasoning with
papal teaching authority. It appears like a big mountain of theory. Theology of *caritas* never received such an extensive dedication by the papal authority, but the church always maintained a very dynamic intensive and extensive charitable practice by congregations, lay associations, Episcopal facilities and in 20th century the growing Caritas organizations.

In my opinion, to change this narrow and unhistorical view, it would be important to strengthen the research on *caritas* theory, to make it accessible and visible in and for our charities and also to communicate and show the practical relevance and presence of SDC.

**SDC is a well established discipline with a clear profile and a strong pontifical refutation – CT/CS has no clear profile and academic program – there is a lack of papal support.**

This question is more present in the academic field and in relationship with the previous misunderstanding. The encyclicals “Deus caritas est” and “Caritas in Veritate” of Pope Benedict XVI. opened the way to recognize more the *caritas* theology and gave a great support. Further I want to show that there doesn’t feature a unique academic program in *caritas* theology and either for SDC, but there are some core elements in all programs, that have to be more present in our faculties.

3. **Common points of SDC and CT / CS**

To avoid an artificially separation of both disciplines, it would be important to emphasize the common points of SDC and CT/CT. Both disciplines are not totally separated, but interrelated: one need the other to fulfil its aim: “I have come that they have life in plenty”. In this sense we understand that both disciplines share one common theological anthropology as you can find it for example in the *Compendium of SDC* 2004, nº105-159: being a person in the image and likeness of God (imago dei) with its human dignity, liberty, responsibility and sociability etc. Both are working on the same social realities: the person and its social relations and have the same eschatological horizon of the beginning Kingdom of God. They have the same mission: build up the civilization of love. SDC and TC share common structural elements: both have theory, practice, spirituality, a community-based and universal dimension; they are forms of evangelization (cf. Evang. Nuntiandi nº29+31), need reflection, analysis and research. They are authentic manifestations of the church’s life. In metaphorical speech we may say that they are like two sisters, or the two sides of the coin. In theological speech we may use the Christological Chalcedonian Formula (451) about the two natures of Christ: each of them have an own property inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably and they are not parted nor divided. Their main concepts *caritas* and *justice* are inseparable (CiV nº6).
4. Main differences between SDC and CT/CS

Understanding of SDC
The SDC initially was not thought as an organic system but by the time conduced to a unified system of a special theological social moral (cf. Laborem exercens nº3, Sollicitudo Rei Socialis nº41). It can be described in the most cited description of John Paul II. in SRS nº41 (1987) as “the accurate formulation of the results of a careful reflection on the complex realities of human existence, in society and in the international order, in the light of faith and of the Church’s tradition. Its main aim is to interpret these realities, determining their conformity with or divergence from the lines of the Gospel teaching on man and his vocation, a vocation which is at once earthly and transcendent; its aim is thus to guide Christian behaviour.”

As the Compendium remarks, SDC reflects three levels of theological-moral teaching: the foundational level of motivations; the directive level of norms for life in society; the deliberative level of consciences, called to mediate objective and general norms in concrete and particular social situations. These three levels implicitly define also the proper method and specific epistemological structure of the social doctrine of the Church. (Compendium nº73).

Understanding of CT / CS
Comparing different formulations about CT / CS there are some core elements that authors share and can be summarized in the following items.

- All authors share that CT / CS is a theological discipline with a proper status
- It belongs to practical sciences, the sciences of action.
- The field of study is the charitable practice of the church.
- It stays in dialogue with other social sciences.
- The research comprises empirical and theoretical analyses of the relevant faith contents and traditions for the individual and communitarian charitable practice and its organizational forms.

As an example in the context of a highly institutionalized charity in the German Welfare State System, I cite Pompey 2001 who explains the research field very clear in its five dimensions (face-to-face relations; faith implications for the specialized charity; ecclesiological implications and structural implications for the society):

1. What is the meaning of faith for suffering and searching people?
2. What is the meaning of faith for helping people (full-time job or honorary activity)?
3. How can the organized special charity (quality management, staff development etc) be evaluated?
4. What kind of relationship exists among the three services martyria, leitour gia and diakonia of the church?

5. How can the plausibility of charitable engagement in the society be demonstrated?

Main differences

caritas inspired action requires not only an ethical reflection about justice with its political implications. It is not only an ethical judgement about fair or unfair structures, organizations and institutions, but a deeper understanding of the interpersonal helping-relations, the organized forms of charity and the impact and relevance of faith for these relations. CT/CS analyses more the micro (face-to-face) relations of helping and meso-systems of organized charitable activity. SDC focuses on political aspects in the areas of economy, politics, family, health, ecology, work etc.). CT/CS helps SDC to act closely with the persons and on the realities. SDC helps CT/CS to include social principles in the organization of charitable activities and remember the importance of a social and political caritas.

Differences in the fields of work

CT/CS researches the material, psychological and social dimensions of helping, based in the spiritual helping motivation and power. The field of work is the existing helping-relations of the charities as opus proprium of the church (DCE nº29). SDC promotes a social and political engagement of persons at a society level by moral orientations.

Differences in the theory

CT/CS research biblical foundations, the theories of the Patristic traditions and doctrine and the history of charitable action and of the charities of the church. There is also a research about the systematic-theological place of caritas in Soteriology, Ecclesiology, Christology and Trinity and its relevance for the helping-spirituality in the charitable activities.

SDC researches the biblical-ethical commandments, social order and justice concepts in the history of the church, the philosophical foundations of ethical decisions and the formulation of social principles in the pontifical teaching since 19th century.

Differences in relation to secondary disciplines

CT/CS strongly operates in dialogue with non theological disciplines like psychology, pedagogy, social pedagogy, medicine, health and social care. SDC strongly operates in dialogue with non theological disciplines like sociology, statistics, and politics. Both are doing theological and empiric research.
Different ways of the same mission

The divine message in the whole bible reveals the love of God towards its people and especially persons in need. The action of God requires the response of the believer and the whole people as manifestations of His justice and mercy. Justice and merciful caritas are fruits of the faith and testimony of a life sustained by God. This reveals that our response is an act of faith and to stimulate these acts of faith, the Bible offers “ethical orientation” and “concrete charitable practice”. Jesus used public spaces and encounters to give ethical orientations like in the sermon of the mountain and helped concrete persons as signs of Gods real presence in His beginning Kingdom. We can observe the ethical difference between the Sermon of the mountain and the Speaking about the last judge (Mt 25,31ss.) or the merciful Samaritan (Lk 10,25-37). CT/CS promotes concrete practical transformation processes through faith-based helpful face-to-face relations. These relations are more than ethical based an act of a soteriological spirituality: the mission is to counsel, to go down into the shadow experiences (ad inferos) and to go along with persons in their processes (Emmaus) as Christ did it. SDC promotes transformation processes through ethical action by the orientation of values and social principles on personal level and structural level: the mission is to influence politically (advocacy, mobilization, organization etc.) for a fairer society.

5. Why caritas science at our faculties of theology?

Caritas is a privileged theological place, one of the signs of identity and nature of the community of faith (church) and a practical testimony of our faith – there should be an answer of the church with a real place in its identity, being, practice, reflections and even also in the training centres. Some reasons in this context are:

The Second Vatican Council recovered a dynamic ecclesiology where we can understand the church of Christ as a church of caritas (ecclesiam caritatis in Lumen Gentium nº 8, 9; 23) and the historical realization of the mystery of God’s love to mankind with its special mission to the world (GS nº45a). Caritas is like a prism to comprehend our faith and church – a result of the deeper understanding of caritas which expand the moral idea of caritas. In this sense we can understand better the efforts of Benedict XVI with his encyclical letters a) to include the anthropological aspects of caritas in our vision of caritas, its divine connection and the relevance for the charitable action; and b) the radical ecclesiology that caritas is the church and not an additional activity. Church more than never needs the testimony of the works of love to be credible in our world (Centesimus Annus nº57). This means that the social message of the gospels has to be converted into action by all Christians, and in a more radical way, that Church at itself is caritas – diaconia. For this task we need formation, research, and communicative channels.
Within the complexity of our world and the deep crisis of humanity, the Church’s collaboration and broad, strong engagement with its worldwide and locally specific programs and community based charitable activities in social questions, need to be inspired and guided by the bishops as the fathers of the poor and the pastors of the local church (DCE nº32). The bishops, directors of organizations, the volunteers, and paid staff need theological and professional support in their duties and tasks – especially the formation of the heart (DCE nº31). Therefore the profile of centres for CT/CS is not only the intra academic theological and trans-disciplinary research, but more training and assessment in view of the professional and spiritual needs of the staff. This means to intensify the experience that caritas in truth is the power that transforms life and to live it as the deepest expression of a Christian humanism (CiV nº78) which promotes an integral human development.

Some of the benefits for the academic field

CT/CS makes present that caritas forms part of theology and training and helps theology to incarnate in the practical field of faith-based helping relations. It complements the established lectures of SDC and avoids the artificial separation of the basic dimensions liturgy-testimony-diakonia of the community. CT/CS animates the community to live its diakonia, and brings caritas back in the discourses about faith. It offers theological-scientific practical support for the church, helps to understand closer the signs of our time and what redemption means in situations of suffering. Against only technical professionalization processes in our charities, CT/CS roots them in the spiritual identity of the charitable action.

Conclusion

If God is love, if caritas is the most important social commandment, if it is really “at the heart of the Church Social Doctrine” (CiV nº2), if “true mercy is the most profound source of justice …, and only love (including that kindly love that we call “mercy”) is capable of restoring man to Himself … the most perfect incarnation of “equality” between people, and therefore also the most perfect incarnation of justice as well” (Dives in misericordia nº14), and if Church can be understood as caritas (Lumen Gentium nº8, 9 and 23; DCE nº20-22; 29 and 31-32) and finally if “caritas christi urget nos” (2 Cor 5,14-15), then it is very difficult to understand, that SDC stands alone in our faculties, that there are only a few CT/CS proposals in our established theological training programs. There is a clear need to guarantee a theological practical guidance, formation and support for our charities. In this sense this document not only wants to describe the actual situation of CT/CS in theology, but to offer some inspirations and motivation to do steps towards a stronger presence of caritas in our faculties and formation programs.
References


Preferring the use of caritas is because of its historical catholic tradition, the actual relevance underlined by Pope Benedict XVI. and has to be understood with the dimensions of service (diakonia).

This dialogue can be observed in the tensions between the concepts of justice and caritas. In the 100th anniversary of Rerum Novarum in 1990, first encounters of academics of both fields in Freiburg (Germany) started to clear up the interrelationship and the necessity to re-open the connections between both disciplines (Glatzel & Pompey 1991). Another encounter was the World Congress of Charity organized by Cor Unum in 1999 (see contributions of Pompey 1999; Marx 1999). Other works in this line are Hilpert 1997, Junglas 1999 and Marx & Wulsdorf 1999.

In June 2012 a consultation realized on lectures of caritas-theology as part of the bachelor training programs published in the web sites of all theological faculties in Spain (a country of a waste catholic tradition) showed that all offer lectures about SDC. Only San Damaso in Madrid includes some specific lectures about love in its master/licentiate program of moral theology. The absence of diaconical lectures in the faculties of theology is criticized in the 80th (cf. Albert 1982; German Congress of Pastoral Theology in 1989).

Hilpert 1997:18-20 talks about another two reduced understandings that definitely cannot be maintained in theology after Deus caritas est: a) “Caritas is a not a core field of theology; it is not central and not constitutional to church; it is just social work to engage new members b) “it is an autonomous area of the church and managed by professionals”.

Both encyclical letters received an intensive attention in the theological field and by the society as it can be seen in contributions like Fisichella 2006, Klasvogt & Pompey 2008, Roman Flecha 2006, Scola 2007 and Tremblay 2007.