Spirituality in diaconia

A reinterpretation of diaconal professionalism within the framework of Theory U

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Abstract

The subject of this article is the role of spirituality in diaconal work. This raises two questions: first, what do we mean by spirituality, and second, what characterises the field of diaconia and diaconal practice? To begin with, a few conceptual clarifications are necessary. C. Otto Scharmer's Theory U (TU) provides the conceptual and methodological framework for operationalising spirituality in diaconal work. It is argued that the concept of "presencing" is an adequate way to express "spirituality", and that, overall TU is an appropriate model to describe and develop the essential features of diaconal social work and diaconal leadership. I shall use the Danish Blue Cross as an example of an organisation that can be interpreted as working on the basis of TU.

Introduction

C.Otto Scharmer's Theory U (TU) has inspired various professional fields to harness innovation and clarify their professional identities. Health workers, educators, social workers, managers, engineers and economists have used TU on both the organisational and personal level to promote future-oriented, sustainable actions. In this article I wish to provide another example of how to apply TU. I shall argue that diaconal work will gain from being reframed within Scharmer's theory and, in particular, that TU will give us another interpretation of spirituality, which is supposed to be a key concept in diaconia.

Conceptual issues

Diaconia has commonly been understood as "Christian social practice". Christian social practice, however, is a practice that does not distinguish between Christians and non-Christians -- if it did, it would not be Christian. Christian social practice is based on unconditional help for all those who are in need and providing that help based on social inclusion. Fighting social exclusion is a main concern in all diaconal work. Although many non-Christians do similar work, for Christians, it is a constitutive feature of their religious belief and an obligation, following Jesus Christ's example. Developing and showing a "diaconal attitude" is a central part of being Christian.

       The Danish theologian and philosopher Knud Ejler Løgstrup wrote very little about *diaconia* due to his aversion for organised diaconal work. Organised Christian social work is problematic as it

highlights the helping organisations and their members and moves attention away from both God and those receiving care (Zeitler 2009, 19-20). To avoid that risk, we should refrain from using the term *diaconia*, but still act like social deacons. Whether this is right can be discussed at another time; at this time, it serves to remind us that the focus on *diaconia* is not without problems.

The research on *diaconia* reveals various definitions that can be placed on a continuum from interpretations connecting *diaconia* to the office and the working tasks of deacons to interpretations equating any social work with diaconal work. (Nissen 2008, 27-30) In our context, where spirituality is given a trans-religious interpretation (see below), how closely *diaconia* is connected with Christianity is irrelevant, although one might think that the term *diaconia* would lose any justification if diaconal practice is totally secularised.

We must next address the concept of spirituality, which is used in many different contexts. Christian interpretations emphasisethe attachment of individuals to Jesus Christ (Affognon 2012) and identify spirituality with God´s presence in our everyday lives, a place where we can explore our common sinfulness. (Jeppesen 2012) In this specific sense, spirituality presupposes a special attentiveness to the presence of the transcendent in our experiences and a belief in our fundamental sinfulness, and being attentive means perceiving, rather than recording, God´s presence. Perception itself, however, does not divulge the divine nature of everything. To have this kind of perception, one needs God´s help. It is a fundamental axiom of Christianity, formulated in detail by Saint Augustine (among others), that all human knowledge, formed by perception and reflection, is due to some kind of divine intervention (illumination) and God´s compassion. This same compassion makes it possible for man to handle his sinfulness, to which he learns to attend in the condition of spirituality.

A more specific interpretation of spirituality is intended by the expression "diaconal spirituality". Diaconal action is not action 'for others' but actions 'with others', implying spiritual partnership; that is, a spirituality where everybody is both giver and receiver (Nissen 2012). Sharing a common sinfulness but also an encompassing divine love, in spiritual situations we are inspired to follow the speed of love that makes lived time meaningful.

The primary attractiveness of the concept of spirituality is not its applicability in a Christian and diaconal framework; it has a wider applicability in non-confessional contexts. Spirituality is a source of communication, development, orientation, innovation, intervention and the promotion of a higher quality of life, beyond any religious or theological assumptions. This is elaborated in management theory (see below), works of art (Herrmann 2010) and professional social work (Kornbeck 2010). Within this secular context, spirituality is an internal force that allows people to take action and master their lives; it is an act of creation, of transformation and of liberation. "Spirituality seen in this way is not so much a matter of otherworldliness and something that we cannot explain. It is more and primarily a matter of an emerging space of acting together in terms of permanently building bridges in social time and social space" (Herrmann 2010).

Spirituality creates open space, emptiness and diversity. The open space and emptiness allow the act to be performed, the neighbour to make an impact, the idea to unfold, the plan to be tested, the future to emerge. The open space allows a normality of difference, of struggles with dilemmas, inconsistencies and contradictions. It is the tension between past and future, individual and social, liturgical life and practical work, voluntary and socially enforced action that gives us preliminary answers, and where final answers are out of reach. Spirituality is approaching meaning and sense, is

exploring our living space where we find out who we are, and hopefully, who we are going to be--but it is also a room of security and rootedness, a bed behind me on which I can fall back and rest.

A detour is required to reach the place where spirituality unfolds. It is not something we can simply download; it must be awaited, and sometimes, fought for vehemently. Later, we will see that this necessary detour is the central move in Theory U (TU).

Different aspects of spirituality

"To be human means to be spiritual. Human beings have longings and aspirations that can be honored only when the person's spiritual capacity is taken seriously" (Gratton 1995).

Scientific and social changes, as well as religious traditions, sustain the susceptibility of spirituality in public opinion and professional discourses. An example of the appearance of spirituality in professional literature is the last decade's growing attention to spiritual leadership (Fry 2003; Fairholm 1996).[1] Spiritual leadership is a trend and research field in management theory that draws attention to the sources of mental development as a key to professional innovation. It includes Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP), various coaching techniques, mindfulness, value-based organisation theories, and other areas etc. Below, I shall discuss a major contribution to this literature and its potential to impact the development of social work (Scharmer's Theory U). First, however, an important qualification must be made.

Thus far, I have taken little trouble to define the difference between Christian spirituality and spirituality in a broader sense; nor have I sought to strongly distinguish between Christian social practice *(diaconia/caritas)* and social work in general; nor will I do so below. There are two major reasons for ignoring these differences: first, if it is tenable, a more general concept or theory that is more universal in application is to be preferred *ceteris paribus* to a more specific and narrow concept or theory. If we can say something reasonable about spirituality in general, it will open the discourse for a broader range of people, both laymen and professionals. Second, if the main difference between Christian and non-Christian spirituality is the former's link and commitment to a Christian community and the latter's to privatisation and individualisation, this difference will break down if it is shown that spirituality even in its private form must necessarily be interpreted in terms of its interconnectedness with community and the universe. Although I shall try to speak in terms of a broad concept of spirituality, I shall later discuss the specific contribution of a Christian interpretation to the broad concept of spirituality. To clarify these considerations, I shall now turn to a deeper discussion of the concept of spirituality and its connection to social work.

In his discussion of the revitalisation of spirituality in diaconal and social work, Herbert Haslinger (2009) assumes that the growing attention to spiritual practices is due to the economic and developmental pressuresto which social workers are exposed. Moreover, Haslinger emphasises that the spiritual movement is a bottom-up movement, which makes it more likely to be successful and sustainable. What counts against it, however, is the lack of a consensus on the definition and use of the concept of spirituality. Haslinger summarises several positions: on the one hand, there is the easy but theologically less satisfying statement that spirituality is the inexpressible. This position is con-

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[1] Here I am only referring to the secular use of the term in mainstream organisational and leadership theory. Fry (2003) in particular gives a comprehensive overview of the literature.

ceivable but also academically unwieldy. On the other hand, one may say that spirituality is "lived belief", but what is "non-lived belief", and is not "lived belief" simply belief? Finally, does it make sense to identify spirituality with the Christian dimension of *diaconia?* What do we mean by that? None of these definitions seem particularly useful.

John Coates (2007a, p.8) quotes R. Furman et al. (2005), who see spirituality as "the search for meaning, purpose, and morally fulfilling relations with self, other people, the encompassing universe, and ultimate reality, however a person understands it". This broad definition emphasises that spirituality is defined more by the quality and degree of awareness and relation than by the content of belief. (McKernan 2007, p.106) "Mindfulness" and "the idea of connectedness" are central to an understanding of spirituality as an "inner" (mental) quality (Coholic 2007, p.121-124). Yet, this inner dimension has an external pendant that connects our mind with the universe, and so spirituality "finds expression in the way that we choose to live our lives" (Wagler-Martin 2007, p.136) while recognising "the intrinsic interconnection of all beings", which implies a "respect and reverence for one's own and other's intrinsic wholeness, sacredness, and value" (Butot 2007, p.149; similarly, Baskin 2007, p.192).

This holistic and inclusive concept of spirituality is often identified with a "global consciousness" and sustainability (See Coates 2007b, p.222; Schwartzentruber 2007, p.342; Zeitler 2008). Consequently, it presumes to be cross-cultural and universal (Ortiz, L. et al. 2000). At the same time, it has normative ontological-ethical implications in the sense of demanding respect for life and the acknowledgement of interdependence. Albert Schweitzer had his own way of expressing this ontology of meaning by saying: "I am life which wants to live in the middle of life which wants to live" (Wolf 2001, p.70).

The phenomenon of "spirituality" is often seen as a special human competence. Well aware of the problems that spring from the rhetoric of competence, particularly the danger of social exclusion (Madsen 2006), I nevertheless see some advantages in overtaking this concept due to its suitability for developmental thinking.[2]

By "spiritual competence" I mean *the competence of being open to the experience and sensation of what makes sense right now in a forward-looking perspective for interdependent existences.* Beate Hofmann summarises the core qualities as attentiveness, relational quality and communicative abilities, and accordingly, defines spiritual competence as the competence of "being aware of own traditions meeting the challenges of the present and forming the future" (Hofmann 2007, p.116).

"Spirituality", in the above specified sense as future openness, is a central element in C. Otto Scharmer's "Theory U" (TU), which is a theory of development that has achieved growing importance in management and leadership theory and practice. It remains to be investigated, however, whether TU and the emphasis on spirituality have any relevance for *diaconia* and the practice and theory of social work. The question is how far does TU illuminate and explicate certain important aspects of diaconal self-understanding and practice, and how can TU make a contribution to social education and social work under conditions of advanced secularisation?

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[2] The use of the term "competence" is not always a step towards social exclusion. Spiritual competences do not necessarily give exclusive access to vital communities, but if they do so, we should reconsider their desirability.

Theory U and spirituality

TU is a third generation approach to the theories of professional practices. The first generation is the experience-based paradigm, which was the dominant paradigm in welfare professions until the late 1980s. The theoretical framework of this approach was rather underdeveloped. The second generation emerged with the introduction of evidence-based thinking, and evidence-based practice has been a core agenda in nursing ever since. Only reluctantly have the pedagogical and social professions followed this trend. One decade later, while still working on implementing the evidence-based paradigm, a new approach has emerged, this time evoked by management theory, which had been working with spiritual leadership for some time. This third generation approach challenges evidence-based practice and argues for a future-oriented development strategy in professional life.

C. Otto Scharmer is one of the outstanding representatives of this generation (Scharmer 2007). The presumption of this chapter is that Scharmer's theory – henceforth TU - may throw light on the theory and practice of diaconal and social work on the basis of its critical attitude towards history-based approaches and emphasis on spirituality as a major source of developmental thinking.

TU is based on the assumption, ascribed to Albert Einstein, that problems need solutions that do not come from what created them in the first place (Ibid. p.168). That is why, if we are aiming at progress and sustainable solutions, we need to stop "downloading" what we are accustomed to doing and instead operate from the "future as it emerges". Scharmer formulates a radical critique of experience-based learning, lambasting the concepts of "best practice" and "evidence-based practice" (Ibid. p.7). Taking the short cut of downloading past patterns to re-affirm practice (reproduction) – in other words, the development of professional practice on the basis of past experiences and research – initially seems to be the most reliable method. Sooner or later, however, it will be revealed to be inadequate because it lacks future orientation and sustainability. If problems are manifest, there is no way that existing practice can identify solutions for practice-immanent problems. The difference between the paradigms can best be illustrated by a time-metaphor: instead of saying time is passing, it is more future-adequate to say: time is coming. Our task is to catch the future, time, as it comes, not to reflect on time as it has passed.

Scharmer proposes a learning theory that makes creative learning and performing dependent upon "letting go", "presencing" and "letting come", an imperative detour that opens up to the future as it emerges. Without going into detail and oversimplifying, we could reformulate Scharmer's U-model as a triple structure with the following three ingredients: downloading, presencing and innovation/performing. There is no short cut from downloading to innovation/performing. Any innovative performing that avoids the reproduction of unsustainable solutions must make a roundabout detour.
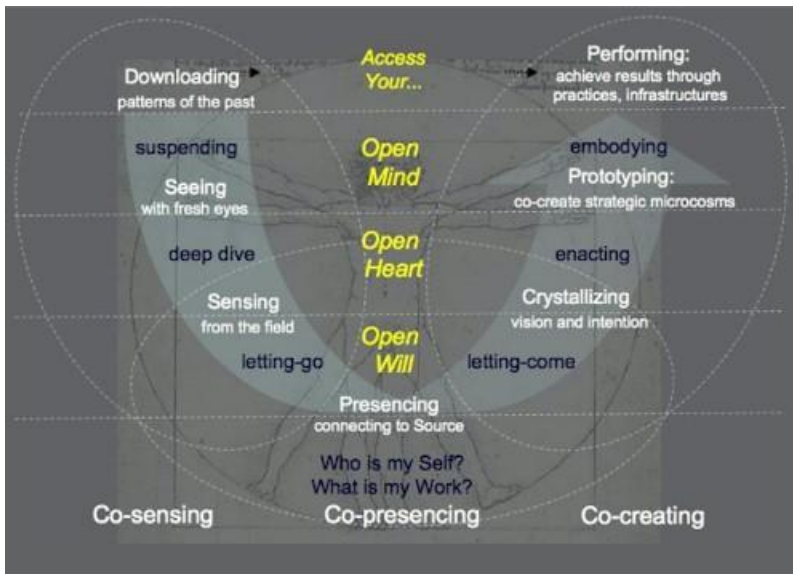
Fig. 1: Theory U (Scharmer 2009).

This triad (downloading-presencing-innovation/performing) is not exclusive. In fact, the triad reflects a common structure in daily life and professional development, and not surprisingly, we can find examples of the triad in the field of Christian social practice, among other fields. For example, the homepage of Blue Cross Denmark an organization that works with alcohol and drug addicts on a diaconal value base, explicates three key value concepts that show conspicuous similarities to Scharmer's model. These values are professionalism, empathy and new opportunities. In professional social work, we always fall back on professional standards, theories, concepts, categories and diagnosis. When meeting the client, however, a diaconal attitude demands the partial and temporary suspension of professionalism. Approaching the human being behind the client and exploring future opportunities calls for a radically different mindset and context design than what experience and evidence-based practice gives access to.

The re-interpreted Blue Cross Model could be describes as follows: the starting-point is the meeting with the client, who should not be called client but "fellow citizen" (Danish: "medborger"). We meet this fellow citizen on an equal basis, without prejudices, expectations, demands, or reservations. We identify needs, potentials and dreams and look forward, having eyes for what may be possible, for what is emerging. We make plans and experiments. Being on the way together, we may need certain instruments, methods and concepts, but not before. "New professionalism" is the competence of giving the human being a chance in the world of emerging opportunities.

Theory U and *diaconia*

The main concern in this paragraph is to show how *diaconia* as Christian social practice can be reinterpreted within the framework of TU, expecting that this re-interpretation may improve our understanding while meeting the well-known quality requirements of Christian social work.

As argued above, Christian social work is not Christian because it incorporates exclusive Christian elements. According to Haslinger, the paradox can be formulated like this: Christian social

work is Christian only as long as it does not emphasise Christian religious features. *Diaconia* does not become Christian by being identified or signified as Christian. The focus or matter of *diaconia* is the human being as a human being. Therefore, the human being as a human being is the specific Christian (Ibid. p.313). In this context, the quest for specific diaconal values can never be highlighted as exclusive Christian virtues but, on the contrary, must elucidate and unfold core human values that are also basic to Christian prophecy (Løgstrup 1956, p.10; Zeitler 2009).[3]

This raises our expectations of finding similarities between diaconal and non-diaconal reasoning. The following reflections are based on the presumption that the conceptual structure in TU, due to its assumed universal validity, will turn out to be rediscovered in descriptions of various professional practices, including social work and *diaconia*. To begin with, I should like to discuss three challenges to *diaconia* from the perspective of TU – downloading/ letting go, presencing and innovation/co-creation.

Theory U speaks about periodically suspending habitual patterns, "the dogma", and demanding a total "letting go", not unlike the Buddhist practice of emptying. "After suspension you have to tolerate that nothing happens" (Scharmer 2007, p.36). At this stage of "presencing" (being present, aware and sensing), you have left the boundaries of "my position" and entered a state of positionlessness or universal presence: "a place of deep connectedness and essential emergence begins to open up" (Ibid. p.281). Christian religion is not unfamiliar with this kind of meditative practice, particularly in mysticism. The question, however, is whether this thinking makes sense in everyday diaconal practice and in particular, how it is compatible with professionalism.

There are at least two important considerations, one having to do with the concept of professionalism, the other with the interpretation of meditation. To qualify as a profession, several criteria must be met. Among them are the presence of ethical standards, shared organisational affiliation and an independent and specific scientific basis. Professional social work must, as must any other profession, be able to defend its decisions on the basis of shared and widely accessible standards and values. To suspend habitual patterns does not mean to suspend ethical values, professional standards or to contest organisational rules; however, it is sometimes necessary to challenge certain professional practices. This is particularly salient when the clients are suspicious of professionals, as is regularly the case in social and diaconal work. Moreover, professionalism also has a natural inertia that retards professional development and innovation. For this reason, operational issues must be separated from development projects.

The other consideration concerns meditation. Meditation is often identified with introverted activities. To recommend meditation seems to imply subjectivisation, privatisation and arbitrariness in professional practice. The essence of meditation is none of these, however, but the search to ground one's thinking and acting in ultimate reality, which is reality in its most concrete expression. From this perspective, a science-based practice is rather abstract, general and dissociated, while a meditative practice is concrete, specific and associated. In social work and particularly from a diaconal perspective, the core event is the meeting of the other and the identification of the ethical demand in this meeting. This event is concrete and not abstract and requests being present and sensing what comes. This situation is taken into consideration by Scharmer's concept of "*presencing*".

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[3] Human values are necessary but not sufficient conditions of Christian values. Christian values are sufficient but not necessary conditions of human values.

The key concept in TU is "*presencing*", an artificial word constructed by blending "presence" and "sensing". "Presencing" signifies a heightened state of attention that allows individuals and groups to shift the inner place from which they function (Scharmer 2009, p.1). Scharmer approaches a new consciousness and a new capacity for collective leadership to address challenges from the perspective of the future as it emerges. A new consciousness is needed because most of us in most situations are "blind to the source dimension from which effective leadership and social action come into being" (ibid.). This inner place from which we operate is often identified with spirituality. Scharmer uses this word on several occasions (Scharmer 2007, p.82, 90-92). At other times, he uses words like "grace" and "communion" (ibid. pp.13, 197), underlining the religious dimension of presencing.

At this stage (in the bottom of the U) we are engaging in "generative listening", i.e., "listening from the emerging field of the future" (ibid. p.13). Presencing is not unlike the experiences of top athletes when they describe how they move from regular to peak performances. These athletes experience "a slowing down of time, a widening of space, a panoramic type of perception and a collapse of boundaries between people" (Scharmer 2009, p.3). The essence of presencing is letting go of the non-essential and letting come of the essential, the important, the new. At this stage, what is at stake is the development of a sense of future possibilities.

The idea of presencing is a familiar idea in theology and the philosophy of religion. Friedrich Schleiermacher speaks about "moments of revelation", where all distinctions are dissolved, merged and determined by something bigger that is both manifest and emergent. This is the place and time of birth for everything living, and for religion (Oettingen 2007, p.15). "All religiousness is a transformation of consciousness under the influence of the operations of the universe" (Ibid.). It is notable that Schleiermacher also emphasises the importance of a "creative fantasy" in human relations (Ibid. p.18).

Another milestone is Paul Tillich's "religious dimension" or "deep dimension", which is meant to signify the necessary space for the meaningful interpretation of both paradoxical and inconceivable theological issues and existential ethical dilemmas - and before them all, the idea of a personal God. In Eberhard Harbsmeier's words, this is the place that needs to be the starting point for religious education and dogmatic instruction. This is the place or "ba/basho" where the narrow way and gate branch off (Harbsmeier 2006, p.83-84). Tillich's "Tiefendimension" signifies the religious quality of any social practice and is challenged by institutionalisation (Brömse 1999, p.26). Tillich's approach is anticipated by G.W.F. Hegel, who, in his radical young period, expressed views on religiousness that correspond to Tillich's. Hegel confronts "objective (dogmatic) religion" that kills all creativity and religious understanding with "subjective religion", which is living and a matter of the heart (Hegel 1972, p.15-17).

Knud Ejler Løgstrup is another author for whom "presencing" is access to art and religion, which in turn, prepares the way for morality. The Løgstrupean concept "allestedsnærværende sansning" is largely equivalent to Scharmer's presencing. Løgstrup summarises the basic function of art and religion, which are accessible through sensation, as the domain where the elementary and basic life conditions can be made visible and daily life can be put to stand.

Finally, an excursion to the Kyoto School (Kitaro Nishida and successors) is inevitable. Nishida's key concept is the concept of "pure experience". In "A Study of Good", Nishida explains:

> When one experiences directly one's conscious state there is as yet neither subject nor object, and knowledge and its object are completely united. This is the purest form of experience (Cit. from Carter 1989, p.1; Nishida 1924/1990, p.29).

Calvin Schrag labels this kind of pre-dualistic experience "sentient consciousness". Sentient consciousness "precedes any split between a subject and an object of consciousness" and is "a pretheoretical and predeterminate intentionality, disclosing a living and vital world in which consciousness simply experiences the presence" (Schrag 1968, p.204). For Schrag, as for Nishida, if sentient consciousness only designates a passive state of mind, it is not enough. For Schrag, the moral, historical, thematic and aesthetic consciousness are the four other dimensions of consciousness detected by phenomenological analysis. For Nishida, as for Scharmer, consciousness is also a willing and acting consciousness, and mind, heart and will all play a vital role in suspension, creation and performing (Scharmer 2007, p.40).

The place of pure experience, Nishida continues, is the place where the sensing and willing self transcends itself and expresses itself as an acting self, "basho" ("The Place"). This movement of transcendence, originating in basho, is religious consciousness or spirituality (Nishida 1973, p.134-135; Zeitler 1993). Basho is Scharmer's source, the place where being and non-being (in their contradictory relationship[4]) emerge (Nishida 1999, p.81). The true place (basho) is not just a place for change, but the place where things come into existence and perish (Ibid. p.82). Locating reality in "nothingness" or "non-being" instead of being (as in European thinking) provides an opportunity to locate the potential for innovation. In Nishida's words:

> If being is in being, then the place [basho] is a thing. If being is in nothingness as objec-tified nothingness, then the thing which has been the place will transform into something with power. An empty place will be empowered and the place which before had been a thing will attain potentiality. (Ibid. p.102; my translation).

This reflects Scharmer's idea of suspension as the condition for the emergence of future possibilities. At least as important, however, is the idea that in basho, there is not the slightest gap between reality and knowledge (Elberfeld 1999, p.89). This means that we are at a place where man is man before any categorisation, diagnosis and stigmatisation. This is the place where social pedagogy in a diaconal spirit can begin, and where the spirit of the gospel and the source of the bodily and existential life-act can work together. This is the place where *diaconia* feels at home, a *diaconia* beyond distinctions between Christian and non-Christian. Gert Theissen explains the diaconal motivation for help behaviour by saying "that the charity expected by God can be practised exemplary by those who have no manifest religious motives." (Theissen 1998, p.382).

Motivation for help is "unconditional" (Ibid. p.394). The Good Samaritan is an example of humanitarian help, not of Christian social service (Ibid. p.383). In this sense, diaconal practice and religious education are about facilitating barrier-breaking experiences, i.e., the counter-intuitive para-

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[4] The difference between Hegelian dialectic and Nishida's use of contradictions is that according to Hegel, we cannot live with contradictions, which is why contradictions are transcending themselves. Nishida, on the contrary, insists on staying with contradictions: the tension between thesis and antithesis is vital (Carter 1989, p.55).

bles in the New Testament that challenge our sense of justice and the conventional moral sense (Tange 1999, p.16; Sløk & La Cour 2005).

The opportunity for presencing is to occasionally, intentionally or non-intentionally, leave space for breaks, respites, intermissions, crises, disruptions, exercises or any other life sequence, and in that way, to shape space for the future as it emerges.

Moving up the right side of Scharmer's U "is about intentionally reintegrating the intelligence of the head, the heart, and the hand in the context of practical applications" (Scharmer 2009, p.11). In this phase, one should avoid mindless action, endless reflection and endless networking. Instead, the basic need is "prototyping". Prototyping is about creating "living examples by integrating different types of intelligence" (Scharmer 2007, p.205). In this process, you are not alone if you are open to your ideas and the future that emerges. Quoting Alan Webber, Scharmer pronounces: "If you're open in relation to your idea, the universe will help you. It wants to suggest ways for you to improve your idea" (Ibid. p.209). The openness is not total. Some ways are more appropriate, or right, than others.

Turning to the Gospel and Christian (social) education, the open future of human existence is dealt with in a classic quotation from Matthew 7, v.13-14. According to Matthew, there are two ways to go: there is a narrow and an open gate or way. To begin with, and in the perspective of an open future ("Zukunftsoffenheit menschlicher Existenz"), a need for communication and orientation evolves. The narrow gate or way seems to be the obvious choice in the sense of the most economic choice (Obermann 2008, p.249).

> Go in through the narrow gate, because the gate to hell is wide and the road that leads to it is easy, and there are many who travel it. But the gate to life is narrow and the way that leads to it is hard, and there are few people who find it (Matth. 7, v.13-14).

The narrow way is not only the way out of chaos and confusion; it is also a way of forming a person's moral sensibility, responsibility and obligation:

> "Following the narrow way to justice corresponds to the religious educational objective of sensitizing the learner for the observance of their responsibility towards their neighbor and himself. The paradisiacal orientation of the narrow way as well as its orientation towards justice has the implication for religious education that the narrow way must be presented as worthwhile and worth living." (Obermann 2008, p.249; my translation)

Finding and following the narrow way is a kind of prototyping in Scharmer's sense. Meanwhile, it seems to forbid the critical potential that should be part of any innovative movement, including social pedagogical efforts. According to Skovmand (2007, p.35), education must therefore preserve the tension between the pre-critical and the critical dimension to promote people's open and active process of formation. It is a vital part of religious education and formation ("Bildung") to maintain the contradictory nature of all things – as part of religious dogmatics.

Transformative change, according to TU, is not an introverted activity but is basically extroverted and cooperative in nature. Scharmer uses the word "co-creation" (Scharmer 2007, p.337)[5] to express the idea that any formative, future-oriented process is conditional upon the co-operation and tuning of a social network and the state of the universe. In this context, Ulrich Baltzer has argued convincingly that cooperative action cannot be reduced to individual actions. On the contrary, individual actions are dependent on social action, just as individual ethics are dependent on social ethics and not the other way round (Baltzer 1999, p.18-21). According to Baltzer, social actions correct tuned acts of approval ("korrigierende, abgestimmte Anschlusshandlungen") (Ibid. p.29). Extending this position to include non-human nature as an actor and framework for action would lead us to Scharmer's final, cosmocentric position. Learning takes place and new formations emerge from the opportunities and possibilities that the universe and society make available (Hubig 1982, p.71). The co-construction of meaning is basically the invention of the co-creative process that emerges from the source that catches the obvious and most adequate, "tuned" opportunities of the future (Cf. also Zeitler 2001).

Holy Spirit, spirituality and sustainability in diaconal work: concluding remarks

Concluding, I should like to start with the Holy Spirit as the precondition of life on Earth, of what makes diaconal work possible. The Holy Spirit is God. The human equivalent is spirituality. It is what we may be able to grasp, perceive or sense of Godly nature. For this reason, spirituality is the mediating force in sustainable practice. Sustainable diaconal work is spiritualised work.
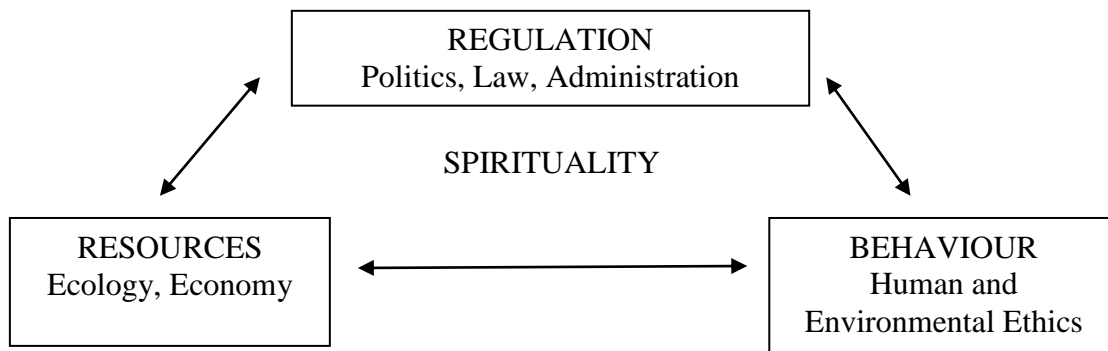

Fig. 2: Sustainability (Zeitler 2008).

According to this presentation of sustainability, spirituality is the "glue" and the source that balances the different elements. There is no systematic, rule-directed way of balancing economy, ecology, ethics, society, law, politics and administration, but there is an intuitive, holistic way of capturing the situation and feeling what is the right thing to do. This judgment is not an individual act, but a co-creative act emerging from the meeting between professional and client, or between human and hu-

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[5] Co-creation has since developed as a central category within the field of interprofessional and interdisciplinary co-operation.

man or man and nature and is located at the bottom of the U-turn, where space is provided for empathy and spirituality to evolve.

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