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SERVICE PROVIDERS AND SUPPORTERS: ORGANISED CARITAS IN NEED

LEHNER, M. & MANDERSCHIED, M., eds. (2001) *Anwaltschaft und Dienstleistung: Organisierte Caritas im Spannungsfeld* (Freiburg i.B.: Lambertus) 208 pp., ISBN 3-7841-1325-7, €14.40.

Discussions and debates within the German Caritas were already underway in the nineties and have now become extremely heated. These discussions mostly revolve around the role the organisation should play within society, or to be more precise its *modus operandi*. What is caritas? What should its tasks be? How should it perform them and what exactly should it do? These appear to be the questions that are the most burning internal issues of this huge organisation.

Caritas is in search of its role in today's world, a world which is very materialistic. The expression *materialistic world* highlights the true essence of these internal disputes: should the main emphasis be on the gospels, focusing on fraternal love, rejecting discrimination, and accepting people living under adverse conditions, even safeguarding their interests, or should it be on professional services? In the second case it would of course face market conditions and competition even within the field of social work. This would not only influence the identity of Caritas, the image it has created of itself, but it would also have a strong impact on the way it is generally perceived, and would expose it to generally existing market risks. Although Caritas currently considers both its market and its socially based profiles to be equally legitimate, it is not irrelevant for its future which path it chooses. While the environment in which it operates faces both recurring and new problems, Caritas needs to be prepared, indeed should be prepared, for the continuous expansion of this quasi market. The employment rate of German women aged 15-65, for example, has reached around 65% today while the traditional family model has all but disappeared. The market is therefore increasing, and Caritas will need to satisfy the new market demands in a variety of ways.

Despite recognising these issues earlier, Caritas only specified the guidelines it wishes to take into account and emphasise in the future as late as at the 1999 session of its Executive Committee, in Berlin.¹ These principles appear in the statement issued as the final document of the session: 'These activities are based on the mission that the free and benevolent love of God means in the world and which cannot be equalled by products available on the market. . . . Essential characteristics of Caritas as a service provider are support, mediation, social work and pity.'²

¹ Arbeitsrechtliche Kommission des Deutschen Caritasverbandes, Conference, Berlin, 1999.

² <http://www.caritas.de/2930.asp?f=1999&k=&l=0&x=110&y=27>

Anwaltschaft und Dienstleistung: Organisierte Caritas im Spannungsfeld ('Service Provision and Support: Caritas in a State of Tension'), a work prepared by 13 co-authors³ attempts to address the above problem. Ever since its conference in 1999, Caritas has been eager to justify its decisions and statements with support from analysts, and several such analyses can be found among the writings. However, the collection mostly includes determined statements and problem descriptions by theologically committed authors using Christian methods. It is interesting to note that although the volume was published in Freiburg in 2001, it is still relevant today. The analyses continue to be interesting and well received, but it is also important to note that the general statements accompanying these can assist many people in familiarising themselves with the problems of this field in an ever increasingly globalised world.

It is a clear tendency that in both analyses and statements authors are in general raising the issue of the credibility of Caritas. Can a Caritas that provides only certain of its services under market conditions, at a very reasonable but still competitive price, still be considered credible? How much should Caritas adapt itself to the globalising world, and to what extent is this adaptation possible? Does not constant adaptation endanger the existence of Caritas? Will it not first lose its identity, and then its goals, while not only conforming to changing needs, but also becoming assimilated in a market environment? Is Caritas still an organisation, a civil initiative set up due to social needs or a company? What should Caritas do for and what should it communicate to society and what should its internal message be? Drawing upon a huge theoretical background, the authors bring up and examine both these and similar issues, and clearly describe problems. This is a good foundation on which to base clear strategies for a solution.

Some interesting suggestions and solutions are also displayed such as separating the 'Company Caritas' from the 'Social Caritas', and the possibility of completely restructuring the organisation to provide an answer to problems and challenges at the same time. There are authors who would set a different course from this: separating the clerical and secular image, and who, at the same time, worry about Caritas's ever increasing business character. Again others write about the forms of the roles and functions of the organisation that also exist today, and that appear in the 1999 statement, the roots these have in the gospels, equally the emphasis of the role of these roots, and of Christ as an example.

The perception of Caritas by society and all of its duality is also dissected, starting with expected roles, through functions that society might not even notice, up to how Caritas positions and judges itself in our increasingly complex society. It is interesting that even the chances of Caritas becoming and surviving as a possible market player are contemplated; we can therefore not say that the work is edited from a single viewpoint. Finally, while discussing daily tasks and activities, it is even laid out that today Caritas is much more than it should be. Although none of the writings sets

³ Helmut K. Anheier, Helmut Hartmann, Sr. Basina Kloos, Warnfried Dettling, Konrad Hilpert, Karl Bopp, Ottmar John, Dieter Geerlings, Peter Neuhasuer, Markus Lehner, Michael Manderscheid, Karl Gabriel, Hellmut Puschmann.

forth any definite solutions, they are rather a collection of proposals, it is evident what kind of problems an institution faces that has a market but is unable to encompass and serve it. This is mostly due to its own unanswered questions and the shortcomings of its adaptability.

In conclusion, this is an interesting piece of work which deserves close reading. It has a well substantiated system of arguments in which problems are clearly identified. It provides a basis from which possible solutions to the real problems of Caritas might emerge.