Diaconia as Care for the Poor?
Critical Perspectives on the Development of Caritative Diaconia

Kari Latvus

tutkimuskes

Kirkon tutkimuskeskuksen verkkojulkaisuja 53

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NARRATIVE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There is no greater story ever told in the entire world than the following: the poor are taken care of, seen and listened to. Such is the story of diaconia, sometimes written diakonia and sometimes caritas. Regardless of the historical questions or any possible misunderstandings, the core task of Christianity is to love the other, open closed doors, make communities inclusive and work against oppressive structures. My deep wish is that every reader of this book would remember the above passage even if from time to time, critical analysis may seek to tear traditional structures to pieces and instead, offer new ones for consideration. Even when the structures of conventional diaconia are questioned, it does not mean that loving the poor and weak are thrown away.

There are numerous people who have helped me in one way or another along my route from the first initial questions up until publication. In a way, these people are also an important part of my own narrative.

Above all, I wish to express my deep thanks to Australian scholar, Dr. John N. Collins, whose wise questions and excellent answers started the current quest. *Thank you John, for your help, comments and encouragement.*

My first academic presentation related to the theme of this book was probably in Helsinki in 2000. Present in the audience was Prof. Heinz Schmidt (Heidelberg, Diakoniewissenschaftliche Institut, DWI), with whom I have had the pleasure of collaborating on various occasions related to the study and education of diaconia. An early draft of mine was published in *Diakoniewissenchaftliche Perspektiven*[1] with the title "Origin of Diaconia Reconsidered." During the following years in Heidelberg, I had the opportunity to become acquainted with Dr. Johannes Eurich, later on Professor and head of DWI. I warmly thank both of them for organising practical matters during my research period in Heidelberg as well as for sharing academic interests. *Vielen Dank Heinz und Johannes.*

Another centre for the academic study of diaconia in Europe is in Oslo. Numerous colleagues could and should be named here, but on this occasion, I wish to mention Professor Kjell Nordstokke and Professor Trygve Wyller. Prof. Nordstokke has been my discussion partner related to diaconia since 2006, when the first International Conference for the Study and Development of Diaconia was organised in Järvenpää. Many of his lectures and publications have promoted the current ecumenical diaconia movement. Prof. Wyller has been one of the central figures during the last decade when the academic study of diaconia achieved its present level. Among the last decade's key achievements was the realisation of the international academic journal, *Diaconia – Journal for Christian Social Practice.*

1 Latvus 2002, 27–31.

Trygve Wyller was the first editor-in-chief; it has been a great opportunity to be a member of the editorial team throughout the years. *Thank you Kjell and Trygve.*

Two prominent American scholars are worth mentioning on this occasion: Professor Elsie Anne McKee (Princeton, Theological Seminary) and Professor Jeanine Olson (Rhode Island College). Without the use of modern technology like email, I had the wonderful opportunity to organise a meeting with Prof. Elsie Anne McKee in Princeton during Easter of 2009. Her publications on reformation and especially on Jean Calvin were extremely important for me. My stay in Princeton was hosted by my friend and the godfather of my son, Professor Martti Nissinen, who should not be ignored among the persons contributing to my work. *Thank you Elsie Anne.*

Prof. Jeanine Olson, who visited Finland in 2012, had already been a long time trailblazer for anyone interested in the origin and development of diaconia and diaconate. With deep gratitude and respect, I remember long conversations about the story of deacons. *Thank you Jeanine.*

Prof. Herman Noordegraaf (Protestantse Theologische Universiteit, Groningen) belongs to the core figures of European diaconia researchers. I owe Herman Noordegraf sincere thanks for raising my awareness. He has not only discussed various aspects of this study with me numerous times, but he was also able and willing to find and translate several historical Dutch documents which created the missing link between Calvin and Fliedner. Interestingly, Herman Noordegraaf and I were nearly neighbours in Schiedam (nearby Rotterdam) during the most challenging time of my life due to unemployment. Fortunately, this difficult period was happily followed by a new professional start as a seaman's chaplain and theological developer at Seamen's Mission (Helsinki/Rotterdam). Continuing this study was an important tool in keeping my hope alive. *Dank u wel Herman.*

At this point in my narrative, I am required to jump backwards two decades and focus on my Finnish roots. My professional and academic connection to diaconia started in August 1994, when I started as a lecturer at Järvenpää Diaconia College. The rector of the college, Rev. Jarmo Kökkö, belongs to a select group of legendary visionaries in the field of diaconia. The opportunity to work at the college was crucial for my future professional and academic development. It was Jarmo Kökkö who once asked me while in the campus courtyard: "What does it mean in the Gospel of Mark when Jesus says that he is διάκονος? You could clarify these roots for students." This book is definitely one attempt at answering that question. *Kiitos Jarmo.*

Rev. Tony Addy, whose professional carrier focused on communities and especially vulnerable people on the margins of communities, worked several years as my colleague at Järvenpää campus as the Head of International Education. In addition, he was also the first chair of REDI -- the International Society for the Research and Study of Diaconia and Christian Social Practice during the time that I served as vice-chair. Tony Addy has a special talent for seeing important

structures and key points, even in the midst of complex settings. I am deeply honoured that he accepted the challenge of reading several versions of this study, and last but not least, in writing the foreword. *Thank you Tony*.

Rev., Lic. Theol. Antti Elenius and I decided to write and edit a new academic Finnish textbook on the theology of diaconia in 2007. Among my duties was a task to write a chapter about the biblical and historical roots of deacons. That work triggered the process now visible in the following pages. Antti Elenius shared with me not only the editing process, but in addition, we travelled to meetings (SBL/AAR) in Gettysburg and Philadelphia (2004 with Trygve Wyller) and San Antonia (2005). During these subsequent journeys, we often dreamed about international diaconia conferences, an international academic diaconia journal and a research society. All those shared dreams became a reality. *Kiitos Antti.*

For over two decades Rev., Adjunct Professor Mikko Malkavaara, also my classmate at the Theological faculty in 1977, has shared with me the questions surrounding diaconia and deacons. We have worked together in Järvenpää and were both founding members of the Finnish Association for Research on Diaconia. Mikko chaired the society for several years, while I acted as editor-in-chief at *Diakonian tutkimus – Journal for the Study of Diaconia.* During the years Mikko's initial ponderings and scepticism regarding my theories has not only disappeared, but his personal endorsements have found their way to his own texts. *Kiitos Mikko*.

A special thanks for genuine enthusiasm and fruitful co-operation goes to Adjunct Professor, Dr. Esko Ryökäs (University of Eastern Finland) now also the chair of the Finnish Association for Research on Diaconia. Since 2007, we have both continuingly discussed and contributed in various ways to how a new paradigm earns more attention and more detailed studies than older conventions. This is of course, in order to re-assess conventional paradigms about the origin and development of diaconia and deacons. I wish you all the best on your future projects. Esko Ryökäs belongs to the group of somewhat abused colleagues who have read various versions of this manuscript and given several valuable comments. My deep wish is that Esko Ryökäs and his students will continue to dig deeper. *Kiitos Esko.*

At this point, three diaconia-oriented, high-rank members of the clergy within the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland are worth mentioning. Bishop, Lic. theol. Kaarlo Kalliala, Bishop, Dr. Jari Jolkkonen and Bishop Irja Askola have been, and probably will, continue to take part in the discussion regarding the future development of diaconate. I have learned a lot from all of them during the past years and hope to keep common discussions alive also in the future. *Kiitos Kaarlo, Jari ja Irja*.

Warm thanks belong also to Dr. Kimmo Ketola, currently acting director of the Church Research Institute. Finalising and publishing this study has a special value for me. The manuscript had already begun to collect some dust in the drawer and was in danger of being fully abandoned. I never consciously decided

to make an entire publication about deacons, but this topic chose me. Inspiration to find something new or to see things differently gave me the needed energy to go on. *Kiitos Kimmo*.

Among the first ones who encouraged me on this route was Prof. Heikki Räisänen who died last year. Because my results were unconventional, I wished to receive comments from a biblical scholar of the highest rank, but also one interested in diaconia. After he had read my first version about new paradigm, he responded very quickly, in less than a day, giving strong encouragement and saying: "You will probably write a book about this." Indeed, it seems that the book has now been written and published. *Kiitos Heikki*.

This manuscript was revised by Fiona Chow with care and skill.

This study is dedicated to all deacons and deaconesses.

FOREWORD

This study brings together important strands in the recent study of what have been called 'diaconia words,' in the New testament and the Christian – especially protestant – tradition. It presents an 'archaeology' of these diaconia words and aims to uncover their meanings in specific contexts and in addition, to trace the ways in which these meanings have changed. This is especially important in terms of Christian thinking, which claims to be rooted in tradition. This return to the roots or to the 'original meaning' has played a powerful role in church history, and we are especially aware of this during the anniversary year of the Lutheran reformation. Therefore, this text is an important contribution to understanding the rise and reinterpretation of the diaconal office in the various confessions. However, it is especially important in regards to the use of the diaconia words in connection with the social-caritative engagement of the whole church, including in some churches, ordained or lay deacons with a social-caritative function.

This study engages directly with and extends the challenges put forth by John N. Collins in his important finding that in the New Testament and its context, diaconia words did not have any overall specific social-caritative meaning, even if in a few contexts this meaning can be understood or has been 'read into the text'. This study also looks more deeply into the use of diaconia terminology in the period of the reformation – especially by Calvin and Luther – and its re-emergence in the modern diaconia movement during the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Latvus points out that the reformation's 'return to the roots of diaconia' was marred by a misunderstanding that Collins has also pinpointed. Furthermore, many writers in the diaconal field and the field of church history, have mentioned Collins' findings and then continued with the mainstream identification of diaconia with social-caritative engagement. At this point, it is worth commenting that all the major confessional traditions have found space for social-caritative engagement, but a variety of terms are used, such as Caritas and Filantropia and there seems to be little doubt that this was also a key aspect in the life of the early Christian communities. However, in the protestant tradition, it seems that recent research findings threaten the carefully built up identity of modern diaconia and (in some churches) the role of the deacon in social engagement. This present study invites us to squarely face up to the challenge and not to finesse it by adding other 'go-between' or 'messenger' aspects to the menu of diaconal tasks.

It is important in any field to learn as much as can be discerned about the historical roots of practice and action, as well as of structure and meaning. These are aspects in which we, in the 'living tradition' can build upon. This research shows how the meaning and use of 'diaconia words' has been understood in a plurality of ways, sometimes being transformed by the demands of the context,

notably in the time of the reformation and at the rise of the industrial economy. We can also detect the traces of a recently changed understanding under the influence of movements for social transformation reflected, for example, in liberation theology and reflected in recent statements by the World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation.

There is a whole tradition of study of the Hebrew Bible which is given over to the diversity of understanding and the developing usage of particular words – notably 'poverty' – and to place these understandings in their social and historical context. The study of diaconia words is by extension, a similar development. So far so good. However, if we acknowledge both the impact of the contextual framework on 'meaning' and in this case, on the misunderstanding of the usage of a key word in its 'original' context, what are we to conclude?

This study does not aim to provide a conclusion to the debate or to create a new paradigm, but instead, this small volume helps to formulate the terms of the debate in a clear and well-argued manner. It provides an entry point into and an analysis of the issues to be faced. Since no one disputes the fact that social-caritative work belongs to the essence of the church, we could simply conclude that we can drop the diaconia word as the key term in this field. This would not be so revolutionary, because in Catholic and Anglican traditions the functions of the deacon are not specifically defined in social-caritative terms. On the other hand, we could conclude that the context has so shaped the usage of the word that there is no reason why we should not go on to reinterpret it, albeit consciously, in our own context(s). Another way would be to try to integrate the diverse aspects of the usage of the 'diaconia' word in the early church context with the social-caritative function.

What cannot be avoided is, as I already mentioned, the fact that social-caritative engagement belongs essentially to the church and that the form of that engagement obviously should be contextually relevant! We have witnessed huge changes in the self-understanding of 'protestant diaconia' in the past 150 years and there is good reason to believe this process will continue. A best guess would be that those churches with a social-caritative understanding of the 'diaconia words' will continue to use the terms and develop their understanding as these are now quite embedded in our minds, perhaps not unlike the labelling of a 'brand identity'.

However, there is at least one further difficulty. In contexts where diaconia has been professionalised and institutionalised as a social-caritative task, (especially in Europe) effort is evidently needed to relocate 'social-caritative diaconia' to local congregations. This is happening now, in part spontaneously, due to the contextual pressures of, for example, cutbacks in welfare programmes, deepening inequality, growing food poverty and the commitment to work with refugees and immigrants. According to Latvus, this congregation-based development would be in line with the early church's self-understanding, even if the actual practice and content are very different and the word 'diaconia' does not appear!

The book is to be recommended as a very useful resource for starting a fundamental discussion regarding the future use of the diaconia words and the social-caritative task of the church, because it critically evaluates various academic discussions in a way that avoids easy answers, leaving space for deliberation and the production of consequent practice, spaces and structures.

Tony Addy
Head of Education, Interdiac
Founder member and chairperson ReDi, 2012–2016

1 INTRODUCTION

The megatrends

Naming a megatrend is always a somewhat hypothetical and suggestive task. The risk of undermining something and in a similar way, exaggerating other issues is a real challenge. With this in mind, I strive to identify three major themes, or megatrends, which belong to the most important trajectories relating to diaconia. At this time, I use the word diaconia as a synonym for the social and caritative acts of individuals, ministers and Christian churches. At the conclusion of this work, this terminology and its origin will be re-evaluated.

The three existing worldwide and ecumenical megatrends are 1) a growing awareness about and the importance of care/diaconia, 2) interest in confirming the permanent caritative ministry of deacons and 3) the scholarly debate regarding the origin and meaning of diaconia vocabulary. I will shortly describe each of the named topics.

The growing interest in the social-caritative responsibility of churches is sometimes, but not always articulated as "diaconia." For example, in the Catholic Church the word diaconia is often replaced with the words caritas, love or care. A special emphasis on social issues has in a way been the trademark of the Christian church since the early followers of Jesus of Nazareth; however, there are obvious differences in how churches have been aware of their holistic mission and how they have recognised the social-caritative dimension of faith. Since the 1960s, there has been a growing and active development stating that diaconia or social-caritative issues belong to the core of the Christian faith. Evidence of this has been observed in the texts of Vatican II, in the growth of Latin American liberation theology and in the Dalit-theology. Harvey Cox has named the new era which commenced at the end of the 20th century as an age of spirit: this era has a special social concern.[2]

Among the most interesting ecumenical statements on diaconia are the 1986 *Larnaca Declaration* and the theological document on diaconia in the 2012 *Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in 21st Century* in Sri Lanka. The former already mentions the word "diakonia" a couple of times and in the latter, it has become one of the core concepts, manifesting the Christian faith in the contemporary world.

Secondly, there is a growing and ecumenical interest in the permanent and social-caritative focused office of the deacons. The modern (semi)profession of deacons dates back to the early 19th century, but was activated once more by Vatican II and explored, for example, in the document *Baptism, Eucharist and*

2 Cox 2009, 1–20.

Ministry (BEM) in 1982. The ecumenical efforts of BEM did not primarily focus on diaconate, but invited member churches of WCC to reconsider their position on this matter. Since then, many protestant churches, for example Lutheran Churches in Sweden and in Finland, have given special attention to investigate potential resources of diaconate.

Recently Catholic Church has been reactivated to reassess the office of deacons. Pope Francis decided in 2016 to institute the Commission for the Study of the Diaconate of Women. According to an interview, Pope Francis noted, "Therefore, on the deaconate, yes, I accept, and a commission that clarifies this well seems useful to me, especially regarding the early days of the Church."[3] Thus, the origin of deaconate is an open and stimulating topic also in the Catholic Church.

Thirdly, and most importantly for the purposes of the present study, one has to mention the exegetical study of the Greek word διακονία (and its derivates) started by John N. Collins and continued by Anni Hentschel, Hans-Jürgen Benedict and the present author. The central questions raised by the scholars are: has academic scholarship, the diaconia movement, and the churches worldwide misinterpreted these words and mistakenly promoted wrong terminology? What possible consequences does misinterpretation cause to the terminology of diaconia, as well as to the understanding of diaconia and the office of deacons?

The present study offers an analysis, which especially focuses on the last megatrend but aims to connect this with other mentioned issues. Thus, the ultimate goal of this work is to offer solid tools for those who aim to develop diaconia and diaconate worldwide.

The quest of modern diaconia

Diaconia has been on the agenda of all churches in recent decades. This trend is worldwide and ecumenical. The current situation is not unique in the history of diaconia, but its inter-confessional reception is worth noting. Earlier in the history of modern diaconia, the first major peak occurred more than a century and a half ago, when the rise of the diaconia movement came to the forefront as a reaction to hard changes in society. Due to industrialisation and urbanisation, large groups of people were pushed into poverty and were in need of special help and care. Rapid changes in society made some rich and pushed others into poverty.[4] As one result of these changes, a diaconia foundation called Kaiserswerth Diakonia Institution was established, and expanded rapidly around the world.[5]

3 Montagna 2016.

4 On the situation in the 19th century, see Götzelmann 2005, 63–64.

5 On the current movement, see http://www.kaiserswerther-diakonie.de (cited 28 Sept 2007).

One of the leading figures in the 19th century diaconia movement was Theodor Fliedner (1800–1864). He was also one of the first to articulate the need to re-establish the ministry of deaconesses. During his visit to England and especially to the Netherlands, he was impressed by the practice of the Mennonite church in Amsterdam. His interest in the work of deacons and deaconesses in the Mennonite church was especially apparent. According to Fliedner, this Christian practice also "was worth being adapted to other evangelical confessions."[6] The general slogan during the following decades expressed the need *to re-establish the biblical ministry of deacon and deaconess*In Kaiserswerth and in other locations, several practical actions were taken in response to the needs of various vulnerable people groups: old people and children, newly released prisoners or those addicted to alcohol or drugs, those who lived in poverty or were without proper work. These are just a few examples of those benefiting from the actions carried out by professional workers and also by those who wanted to offer a helping hand to a fellow citizen or to a neighbour.

The second major peak in the development of diaconia started in the 1960s. The main reason behind it was the growing understanding and awareness of individuals, and also more collectively, the awareness and social responsibility of churches. Needs of the third world were noticed in a new way and this also created a commitment to work for change. Also, the growing inequality inside western societies alerted diaconal actions, for example, when innercity and suburban areas turned into deprivation. British urban theology and mission are good examples of this, even though the expression "diaconia" is not used in the British context.[7] One further example can be mentioned: liberation theology. Although the diaconia movement and streams of liberation theology have historically usually been separated, they share the same motivation to be aware, to see and to act. Compared to liberation theology, however, the diaconia movement has been much more restrained in its use of critical analysis and in using this to make judgments about the actions to be taken and done.

Several other examples of diaconia, either examples of the work of churches and diaconia foundations, or of individual Christians, could be mentioned as a sign of the growing current interest in the field of Christian social action and practice.

The Current quest of diaconia has also raised needs to reflect the ministry of diaconia and more specifically, the aims to strengthen the permanent and caritative office of deacon. This ecumenical phenomenon can be noticed also within

6 Fliedner 1831, 134–152. See especially page 151: "Diese lobenswerthe, urchristlichle Einrichtung sollte von den anderen evangelischen confessionen billig nachgeahmt warden. Die apostolische Kirche führte schon das Amt der Diakonissen ein (Röm. 16,1.). ... Warum hat die spätere Kirche diese apostolische Einrichtung nicht beibehalten?"

7 See for example documents Faith in the City 1985 and God in the City 1995.

the Catholic Church, which often speaks about *caritas* (lat. love) and uses other terms derived from the same root, such as charity.

The Catholic Church confirmed in Vatican II (1962–1965) the interpretation that the office of deacon can be understood as a permanent and lifelong commitment to the social-caritative work of the church, instead of a transitional status.[8] In 1967, pope Paul VI confirmed this resolution in his encyclical *Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem* (18.6.1967).[9]

A few years later, the same issues were discussed in an ecumenical document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. BEM section 31 defined the status of deacons as follows:

> *Deacons represent to the Church its calling as servant in the world. By struggling in Christ's name with the myriad needs of societies and persons, deacons exemplify the interdependence of worship and service in the Church's life. They exercise responsibility in the worship of the congregation: for example by reading the scriptures, preaching and leading the people in prayer. They help in the teaching of the congregation. They exercise a ministry of love within the community.* (BEM 30)

In the following commentary section, the BEM document both confirms the known ecumenical interest in diaconate, but also raises several questions about it:

> *In what sense can the diaconate be considered part of the ordained ministry? What is it that distinguishes it from other ministries in the Church (catechists, musicians, etc.)? Why should deacons be ordained while these other ministries do not receive ordination? If they are ordained, do they receive ordination in the full sense of the word or is their ordination only the first step towards ordination as presbyters? Today, there is a strong tendency in many churches to restore the diaconate as an ordained ministry with its own dignity and meant to be exercised for life.* (BEM 31)

The interest and focus of the Catholic Church is recently analysed in the encyclical of pope Benedictus XVI *Deus Caritas Est*. The charitable work of the church is dealt with widely, but the word diaconia appears only once as a loan word from the Greek. The key term in the English text is "charity."

> *Thus far, two essential facts have emerged from our reflections: a) The Church's deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the*

8 Lumen Gentium 1964, section 29.

9 Osborne 2006, 56–72, 92–123; Barnett 1995, 145–148.

> *word of God (kerygma-martyria), celebrating the sacraments (leitourgia), and exercising the ministry of charity (diakonia). These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable. For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being.* (Deus Caritas Est 25)[10]

In the Catholic context, diaconia/charity is connected with the holistic mission of the church, as a work to benefit the poor and needy.

During the papacy of Francis, there has been growing discussion and activity concerning care for the poor: one can even argue that the poor have been among the key issues on Francis' agenda.

Within the Orthodox Church, a new quest for diaconia is well known. In addition, diaconia vocabulary is increasingly used.[11]

Among the most important international documents on diaconia is the work completed by the Lutheran World Federation, namely *Diakonia in Context. Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment*.[12] Preparatory work for this document was published some years earlier as a result of a LWF consultation: *The Diaconal Ministry in Lutheran Churches* (LWF consultation in São Leopoldo, Brazil 2005). Both texts spell the word diaconia with k: diakonia.

These documents were written as a collective effort, but the central moderator and architect in the process was Kjell Nordstokke, director of the LWF department for Mission and Development. In the introduction of *Diakonia in Context*, Nordstokke says that "a strict definition of diakonia is not given in this document." However, some guidelines are mentioned. Thus "diakonia is *a theological concept* that points to the very identity and mission of the church" (emphasis added). Furthermore Nordstokke reminds the reader that the working concept has "a practical implication." Therefore

> *diakonia is a call to action, as a response to challenges of human suffering, injustice and care for creation. This rather open-ended understanding of diakonia is also due to the fact that the concept itself does not allow for a precise definition, not even when used in the Greek New Testament.* (Diakonia in Context, 8)

The document begins with questions of current context (p. 12–22) and identity of diaconia (24–38). The third and fourth chapters focus on the action and methods of diakonia (p. 39–92). A major achievement of this document is the introduction of a contextual approach which starts with social analysis. At the

10 http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html

11 See for example http://www.orthodoxdiakonia.net

12 Diakonia in Context 2009.

same time, the document aims to emphasise a community approach and participatory methods as innovative tools in diaconia.

Despite the fact that the precise meaning is not defined in the document, the text implies that for the authors, the New Testament usage of the Greek word διακονία forms a central basis:

> *Thus, diakonia became a fundamental concept in the life of the Christian congregations all over the Roman Empire. Diakonia also became the term for the designation of leadership positions in the Church* (e.g., Romans 11:13; 2 Corinthians 4:1; Colossians 4:17). (Diakonia in Context, 27)

The document refers to passages such as Acts 6:1–6 (the choosing of the seven men) and 2 Cor. 8–9 (collection to Jerusalem) as central examples of "the diakonia" (p. 27–29). Furthermore, the authors seem to think that the present usage of the word "diakonia" and the New Testament meaning of the word are strongly connected together, or can even be assimilated. The following example makes this clear:

> *Because Christians themselves experience reconciliation at the Lord's Table, it motivates them for the church's ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18). It is worthwhile noticing that the Greek original reads* ***"diakonia" of reconciliation****, certainly modeled by the diakonia of Jesus and holistic approach in dealing with suffering and injustice.* (Diakonia in Context, 33; emphasis added)

Such interpretation and mixed usage of the Greek and English words is, however, not a common way. A comparison to the modern New Testament translations illustrates this well.

> *All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us* ***the ministry of reconciliation****; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.* (NRSV 2 Cor 5:18; emphasis added)

The LWF document illustrates both the current interest and the confusion related to the Greek word διακονία. On one hand, the present meaning of the concept "diaconia" is difficult to define precisely and it is left without specific definition. On the other hand, the authors have assumed that the Greek word διακονία is more or less the same as the meaning of diaconia in the churches in the 21st century. Thus, the Greek word is assumed to have a special social-caritative meaning. This view however, has not been in alignment with the scholarly work of biblical scholars during the last two decades. This will be discussed at the end of this introductory chapter.

Exegetical study of diaconia/diakonia words and concepts

The study and development of diaconia and the diaconal ministry has not been clear and logical during the last decades.

> *It is surprising that there are only a small number of investigations focusing on the office of deacons although there are otherwise numerous studies about the diaconate. Theological publications about the diaconate are mostly articles or reports and essays written for church decision-making.*[13]

Finnish theologian Risto Ahonen used these words in describing the situation in 1991 in his report *Diakonaatin uudistus* [Renewal of the Diaconate]. A similar view was earlier represented by Elsie Anne McKee who wanted to speak about a "new quest for the diaconate, because clarity on the matter is still a considerable distance away."[14] Both authors were still unaware about coming turn of events. A year later, Australian catholic theologian John N. Collins published his surprising thesis, which argued that the entire modern concept of *diaconia* was a misinterpretation.

Collins' doctoral thesis was actually accepted already in 1976 at the King's College London. The publication was delayed for over a decade due to the lack of time to reorganise the scholarly work into a more readable form, as a book for non-specialists. During these years, Collins was a teacher in a school in Melbourne and was left practically without any resources to continue his research. Even the editing of the doctoral dissertation occurred during his evenings and days off.

The work was finally published in 1990 by Oxford University Press. The new version included a short historical introduction and an analysis of the Greek word διακονία and its derivatives, both in the ancient Hellenistic literature and in the New Testament. The area of the survey is rather large and the study was carefully written and well argued. *Diakonia. Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources* also proved that 20th century German biblical studies had given a misleading interpretation of the Greek concept of *diakonia*. The major actors were H. W. Beyer and Wilhelm Brandt. Beyer wrote an article in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* on diaconia using the results published in the exegetical dissertation written by Brandt, *Dienst und Dienen in Neuen Testament* (1931). Both described diaconia as a humble service. Later Collins described "Brandt's description of *diakonia* as lowly and costly love of one's neighbour soon began to edge out the concept of office in theological reflections on ministry."[15] According to Collins, the German context and especially the tradition of deaconesses had strongly affected the

13 Ahonen 1991, 15.

14 McKee 1989, 94.

15 Collins 2006, 15.

understanding of diaconia. Thus, the modern context had been projected onto the biblical texts against the original usage of the concept.[16]

In his analysis, Collins rejected the idea that the Greek expression *diaconia* meant humble service or table service, and instead offered a new explanation. According to Collins, the principle meaning of the concept is connected to the role of a messenger. A *diakonos* is a "go-between," an authorised figure that acts under the service of a higher power. Thus, the term *diakonia* could refer to functionaries such as an intermediator and emissary and functions, such as administration and ministry. Collins did not, however, deny that occasionally the word may also refer to service. Furthermore, to identify the current social-caritative deacon with the *diakonos* in the early church is a misinterpretation.

Reception of the book was very modest and hesitant during the 1990s. It is most probable that the results were all too surprising and perhaps also embarrassing for the professional diaconia sector. Only a few biblical scholars joined the discussion, while other researchers in the field of diaconia found the task difficult. The ability to understand arguments and results, and based on these, to formulate an adequate scholarly opinion, was not an easy task. In many instances, the philological problem was agreed upon, but there was obvious hesitation to say more regarding the book.[17]

One reason for the difficulties stems from the book itself; the book did not contain a conclusion or summary, but the results were analysed within each individual chapter. Furthermore, the Greek word διακονία is an elusive, contextual and flexible term. It is difficult to formulate definitions, which apply to all circumstances. Actually, this very nature of διακονία words has been the major reason for the variety of contradictory interpretations given to the word over the centuries.

Among the first diaconia researchers was Swedish church historian, Sven-Erik Brodd who paid attention to the new questions in his article "Caritas and Diakonia as Perspectives on the Diaconate." Brodd agreed with Collins in general and wanted for example, to make a distinction between the words *diakonia* and *caritas*. Furthermore, he expressed that the word diakonia had several meanings in the New Testament. Diakonia and charity were not the same thing. Thus, from a biblical point of view, there is no evidence "that the deacon's ministry is a ministry of love because they take care of the poor. That is a nineteenth century idea." Brodd's view about the caritative nature of diaconate's origin was, however, ambivalent because he also stated, unlike Collins, that "The idea that the

16 Collins 1990, 5–11.

17 About the reception, see Herrmann & Merz & Schmidt 2003; Gooder 2006, 33–56; Collins 2009, 133–147.

deacons have responsibility for social welfare in the local church is known from the early church."[18]

At about same time, Kjell Norsdstokke raised similar questions and shortly summarised the central outcomes of Collins': "There are very few linguistic indications that *diakonia* can be related to charity work and that the deacon would have any special responsibility within that area."[19]

The present author gave a paper at a Nordic diaconia conference in Helsinki in 1999, arguing that the problem was real, but that the solution required more careful analysis. In retrospect, it is possible to notice that the problems were recognizable, but the complete meaning of the new results could not be connected with current models of care.[20]

The following book written by John N. Collins, *Deacons and the Church* (2002) forced scholars and also diaconia functionaries to analyse the case more carefully. Earlier discussions focused more on the debate of whether the diakonia in the New Testament referred to service or to being a messenger. The new book modified the question in a more radical way. Collins made it very clear that the essential question related to diaconia words in the New Testament was not about whether the words servant or messenger were the correct translation. Instead, the real issue is that according to Collins, diakonia words in the New Testament did not mostly or even at all refer to social-caritative actions or functionaries.

Thus, to identify the current social-caritative deacon with *diakonos* in the early church is a misinterpretation. Collins modified the thesis: "It is no longer possible to continue claiming social work as an expression of what the early church meant by the term *diakonia*."[21]

Among the scholars who joined the discussion, Paula Gooder is a good example. Although she raised questions about the possible consequences related to the deacons' present role, her main argument was positive. She concluded that

> *What Collins tries to do is to disentangle the notions of humble service and diakonia. He does not deny that the two do have connections; he just argues that they are not synonymous. In this I find his theories entirely convincing.*[22]

Finally, it was Anni Hentschel who gave the new direction a major confirmation. Her study *Diakonia im Neuen Testament. Studien zur Semantik unter besondere Berücksichtigung der Rolle von Frauen* gave a careful and detailed analysis of the terminology related to the Greek word *diakonia* and its derivatives. Hentschel

18 Brodd 2000, 36, 45.

19 Nordstokke 1999, 38–39.

20 Latvus 2001/2002, 27–31.

21 Collins 2002, 121.

22 Gooder 2006, 55.

focused on Paul and Luke-Acts. The results of the study were in line with Collins' disagreement with the traditional view that *diakonia* means humble service. Throughout the work, her emphasis is on the contextuality of diakonia words. Hentschel avoids translating the Greek word *diakonia* but instead, she carefully analyses the semantic context of the word, asking what the *diakonia* of certain people was in the New Testament. In addition, she avoids using the modern word diaconia (in German *Diakonie*) to avoid anachronistic terms and modern questions regarding diaconia are limited beyond the research task. However, this distinction is not followed in the first chapters of her work, where a selection of views on diaconia is introduced. Thus, the introduction potentially raises expectations that are not met. Hentschel's conclusions have several implications on the understanding of the diaconia concept, and to be sure, even a short discussion at the end of the study would have increased the importance of the research.

According to the central result of the study, the word *diakonia* has been used in varying ways, both in the ancient Greek and in the New Testament. Thus, it is misleading to offer only one basic translation. In the New Testament, the word is often used in a context that describes the persons who are responsible for the transmission of the gospel, and these persons act as the authorised figures. [23] The core meaning of the word *diakonia* in the New Testament is thus connected with the proclamation of the gospel. This meaning was so conventional at the end of the first century that in fact, the worker of a local church could have been called *diakonos*. The *diakonia* was an authorised call (*Beauftragung*), which meant that the meaning of the word comes close to the Pauline term of the apostolic call (*apostole*).

Hentschel articulates very clearly that the modern meaning of diaconia as social-caritative acts does not fit in with the ancient use of the word *diakonia*. Unfortunately, the study does not offer any further tools to understand later developments, for example, during the Reformation or in modern diaconia occurring since the 19th century.

In her analysis of Acts 6, Hentschel argues that the seven men represented the leadership of the Greek-speaking congregation and that they were responsible not only for practical matters, but also for the proclamation of the Gospel and other needed functions. The function of the story is to show that the seven men were under the apostolic leadership. Thus, the story aims not to introduce a new ministerial position, but to locate the Seven under the authority of the twelve apostles.[24]

Even though Hentschel treats the results of John N. Collins critically, she mostly confirms certain points of view. The discrepancies between the two should

23 Hentschel 2007, 433–444.

24 Hentschel 2007, 341–346.

not confuse the reader in ignoring the major agreement between Collins and Hentschel. Namely, both represent the understanding that the ancient Greek word διακονία and its derivatives in the New Testament usually did not refer to the social-caritative acts. In this sense, the debate raised by Collins was strongly supported and ought to be taken much more seriously.

In addition, Hentschel wrote a separate article on the New Testament deacons. She argued in the article that in the New Testament writings, a specific social-caritative office of deacons does not exist.[25] Similar results are repeated in her recent study *Gemeinde, Ämter, Dienste. Perspektiven zur neutestamentlichen Ekklesiologie* (2013).

A recent publication written by John N. Collins, *Diakonia Studies. Critical Issues in Ministry* (2014) continues to explore both the exegetical grounds of the above analysis and the reception of the theory in recent academic studies.

An illustrating parallel case for international scholarly discussion is the development in Finland. In 2002, a new professional textbook on diaconia was published (*Diakonian käsikirja* [Handbook of Diaconia]). The authors represented specialists from academic disciplines, such as professors Timo Veijola (Old Testament) and Esko Koskenvesa (Church History/Practical theology) and docent Risto Ahonen (Missiology). All the scholars followed the conventional understanding of the origin of the diaconia without any hesitation. Ahonen even briefly referred to Collins' study although he also avoided a real discussion about the contents and consequences.[26]

In Finland, the discussion started in earnest only in 2005. The Finnish journal *Diakonian tutkimus – Journal for the Study of Diaconia*[27] published articles written by Ismo Dunderberg[28] and the present author[29]. Furthermore, in 2006 Esko Ryökäs described the Collins debate in his book *Kokonaisdiakonia. Diakoniakäsityksien opilliset liittymät* [Total diaconia. Doctrinal connections of diaconia views].[30]

An overall analysis regarding the new quest, along with some further conclusions was published in 2007 by the present author in a textbook *Auttamisen teologia* [Theology of Care].[31] The article included an analysis of the New Testament and early church texts, as well as the reinterpretation of biblical ideas during the history of the Church. A central new element was the analysis of the Reformation, especially underscoring the roles of Martin Luther and John Calvin. [32]

25 Henschel 2008, 290–306.

26 Ahonen 2002, 71–85.

27 www.dts.fi/aikakauskirja.

28 Dunderberg 2005, 69–79.

29 Latvus 2005, 80–97.

30 Ryökäs 2006, 41–45.

31 Latvus 2007.

32 Latvus 2007, 52–82. Since then, a scholarly version of the article has been published in English (Latvus 2008) and in Swedish (2009).

This introduction has made clear that many key questions still need re-confirmation and especially a new synthesis, which would connect the existing confirmed results together and create a basis for a new theological presentation about the central concepts of diaconia: their origin, development and present status.

The task of this study is

- To analyse the thesis first formulated by John N. Collins and later supported by Anni Hentschel, according to which, the study of the NT texts of diakonia do not support the conventional view of the origin of diaconia and caritative diaconate
- To analyse the arguments supporting the conventional views as modified by James Barnett, Gottfried Hammann and Jeannine Olson
- To carefully analyse the passage of Acts 6:1–6 and its reception in the early church and during the Reformation
- Finally, to ask what are the consequences of the new quest and what kind of theological foundations are needed for the social-caritative work of the church

The work will be done in the following chapters:

- What is the origin of the social-caritative deacons ministry?
- Exegetical analysis of Acts 6:1–6
- Reception history of Acts 6:1–6
- Arguments of the conventional theory
- How and when did the caritative notion of the word διακονία/diaconia develop?
- Consequences and theological grounds for future diaconia

2 FROM NEW TESTAMENT *DIAKONOS* TO CARITATIVE DEACONS

Plurality of deacons

Churches worldwide often use the attribute "deacon," although this call appears to be interpreted in a variety of ways: it may refer to a professional church worker who focuses on social caritative tasks, or a lower ranked pastor or layperson authorised for certain practical and relatively limited tasks, such as helping with the offering during the mass. Who are the deacons, what is their origin and what could be the explanation behind the current confusion? Such questions are studied within the framework of loving and caring for our neighbour: is the core existence of the deacon related to the general invitation to take care of the people closest to you? In the first part of this chapter, I will analyse some key texts in the New Testament. Conventional exegetical methods are used in this part. In the last section of this chapter, I also hope to clarify the tradition-historical development of the ministry of diaconia in relation to its biblical background. The basic research question to be answered is the following: If the major biblical texts related to διακονία, diakonia are in need of reinterpretation, and especially if the Greek word διάκονος, diakonos does not refer to social-caritative work, then what actually happened in the rise of modern diaconia when the biblical ministry of deacons and deaconesses was re-established?

Analysis of the New Testament origin and the follow-up in the early Church

There is no other dictum in the whole Bible, which compares in importance with the instruction on how to live with other people. The latter part of the double commandment of love "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Mark 12.28–34) or the so-called golden rule "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Luke 6.31) does not leave much room for speculation. To love and care for others are such cornerstones of the Judeo-Christian tradition, that the whole structure would collapse without them. This theme has its roots deep in the Hebrew Bible; actually it is more or less borrowed from there. The commitment to love your neighbour is a quotation from Lev 19:18. In the Hebrew Bible, the primary object of love was the extended family, the clan, and in a larger sense, all those with whom one has lived amongst as one's own people. This practice was continued in Christianity too: in the gospel of John, the new commandment is

articulated "that you love one another." (John 13:34; cf. 1 John 3:11) The parable of the last Judgement in Matt 25:31–46, one of the key texts in the Magna Charta of diaconia,[33] also belongs to this category. In its historical context, it probably was not referring to every poor and needy, but instead sought to describe relationships to other poor Christians, who were called "brothers."[34]

Sociologist Rodney Stark has noted that one key element in the rise of Christianity during the early centuries was the attitude of Christians. Compassion and care for others were the most important factors in the early history of Christianity. According to Stark, one of the decisive moments were the plagues. These disasters in the middle of the second and third centuries killed a large portion of the population -- estimations vary between one-third and two-thirds. Because of this horrifying mortality rate, people usually abandoned all who were sick, including relatives. Christians broke this pattern and, instead of fleeing, gave help to those who were suffering. In addition, the burial of corpses became known as a Christian practise. These acts had several effects. Even the most simplest care of sick people saved many, as they received water to drink and food to eat which assisted in their recovery. Thus, it was possible to cut the average mortality rate by two-thirds or more, even without any medication.[35]

These activities were mainly focused on those inside of the Christian community -- to those who belonged to the local Christian communities; however, the extreme circumstances also pushed Christians to act outside the boundaries of their regular circles. Therefore, Christians were known for their willingness to help not only their own, but also those whom they did not know. These personal relations between Christians and non-Christians also led to more conversions to Christianity.

In this connection, we are led to ask whether there were special duties or ministries related to these activities among the Christians. Can we expect that there was a special group called *deacons* who had a decisive role during the plagues? In the early church, there was a ministry, which in Greek was called διάκονος, *diakonos* and is translated as "a deacon." They are mentioned often and in particular, in a text describing Christian behaviour during the epidemics.

> *Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty; never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in*

33 Strohm 2006, 15. Strohm refers to passages Matt 25:31–46 and Luke 10:25–37 as the "Magna Charta of diaconia." See also Luz 1997, 522.

34 Luz 1997, 516–544. Note also the possibility of the reinterpretation of the text in the current world. Based on Christian understanding, it is meaningful to interpret the text as referring to every person in need (against the original meaning).

35 Stark 1997, 89.

> *Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbours and cheerfully accepting their pains. Many, in nursing and caring for others, transferred their death to themselves and died in their stead. … The best of our brothers lost their lives in this manner, a number of presbyters, deacons, and laymen winning high commendation so that death in this form, the result of great piety and strong faith, seems in every way the equal of martyrdom.* (From the letter of Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria, around 260 AD, cited in Eusebius, Hist. eccl. 7.22.7–8)

In this text, deacons do not have a special or prominent caritative role, but they are mentioned in the list of ministry and laity. Deacons are mentioned, but only among others, not as a specific group responsible for caritative acts. This seems to reflect the basic convention in the early church. Actually, the good reputation of Christianity on these occasions was strongly dependent on the collective responsibility and care given to those who were in critical situations. The deacons alone were not responsible for caritative acts.

If love for others seems to be the responsibility of every Christian, what then is the specific role of the deacon, *diakonos*? To answer this question, we must first analyse some central texts in the New Testament: Romans 16, Acts 6, and 1 Tim 3. These passages offer crucial evidence in answering our question.

The Greek expressions διακονία and διάκονος are common in Paul's letters. The verb *diakonein* appears 14 times and the substantives *diakonia* and *diakonos* 18 times and 11 times respectively. A variety of different passages indicate that Paul did not use the word with a specific meaning or as a technical term. For example, *diakonos* can be used as a self-expression for Paul (1 Cor 3:5; 2 Cor 3:6; 6:4) or it may refer to a person who is under some higher authority: God, Christ, Satan or sin. In some of these cases, the translation *servant* fits quite well.

In Rom 16:1–2, there is reference to a female *diakonos* called Phoebe in the church of Cenchreae. Traditionally, Phoebe has been interpreted as the first known social-caritative worker of Christianity.[36] Thus, the image is understood somehow to reflect the work of modern deacons or deaconesses. Paul says that Phoebe has *helped many*, but he does not articulate anything about the specifics of her actions. There is, however, one important but often ignored clue for the interpretation. Phoebe is described with the Greek term προστάτις, *prostatis*. The expression means that she was a leading figure, a *patrona* or benefactor who financially supported others.[37] The traditional misinterpretation of imagining Phoebe as a deaconess is based on the assumption that *diakonos* is a social-caritative worker

36 For example Wilckens (1989, 131) speaks of Phoebe as a "Diakonisse."

37 Marjanen 2005, 494–508; Hentschel 2007, 168–172. – Cf. Collins 2002, 73–74, who builds his analysis on the idea that Phoebe was a delegate of Cenchreae. There is limited evidence to support this view.

in the early church. At this point, we do not have any evidence of this. The expression *prostatis* actually alludes to a different kind of status and function: the *prostatis* is a wealthy person who uses her funds for the life of the church and for other people. Although our pre-understanding might easily imagine Phoebe's role to be a founder of the diaconia movement, we should be careful and not project ideas from our own context onto the story of Phoebe. We can say that she was an important and wealthy person because she brought Paul's letter to Rome and that she had a prominent position in her own church, but everything beyond that is based on speculation.

The next key text is in Acts 6 which I address only shortly here, as the following chapters focus on that specific passage. This scenario, which started with an ethnic conflict between the Greek- and Hebrew-speaking groups and which led to the selection of seven men, has traditionally been interpreted as the origin of the diaconate.[38] There are, however, good grounds for other opinions.[39] These men, who represent the Greek-speaking section of the church, are never referred to as *diakonoi*. The verb *diakonein* (6:2) and the noun *diakonia* (6:1, 4) occur in the text, but only in a general meaning connected to preaching (service of the Word, 6:4), daily food distribution (6:1), or service of tables (6:2). Although chapter 6 seems to imply that the seven men were chosen mainly for food distribution, the outcome was different. In the following chapters in Acts, these men worked as preachers or evangelists (Acts 6–7; 21:8). Instead of being caritative deacons of the church, these seven men were the leading figures in the Hellenistic section of the church.[40]

Only rather rarely do scholars note that in Acts 1 there is actually a reference to a special ministerial call that is connected to the word *diakonia*. In Acts 1:25 the ministry of Judas is expressed with two Greek words used in parallel: *diakonia* and *apostole*. Also on this occasion, *diakonia* does not have any articulated connection to social-caritative work, but is an indicator of a call in a general sense. Hentschel has also argued on good grounds that Acts 1:25 ought to be seen as an authorisation to proclaim the gospel.[41]

Let us now turn to the last key passage from the New Testament. In 1 Tim 3:8–13 we can read the first description of the work of *diakonoi*. The text belongs to the Deutero-Pauline letters and was written at the end of the first century. It probably reflects the structure of the ministry in local Pauline churches. The local church was led by one *episkopos* with the help of several *diakonoi*. The general opinion about the text is expressed well by James Barnett: "Scholars generally agree that by the time of the later strata of the New Testament, the term 'deacon' is used

38 This opinion was still recently expressed by Benedictus XVI in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (section 21).

39 See the history of interpretations in Barnett 1995, 28–33.

40 Pesch 1986, 231; Lüdemann 1987, 81–91; Hentschel 2007, 319–346.

41 Hentschel 2007, 298–318; 2013, 87.

unquestionably to denote the office in the technical sense. The deacons were not assistants of bishops at this time, but rather 'dispensers of the Church's charities; they 'served' the poor and the sick.'"[42] This traditional view cannot, however, stand up to critical analysis, and even a plain reading of the text is quite illuminating. What information can we gain regarding *diakonos* in the text? The main criteria are connected to personal characteristics, like the necessity of being serious, not drinking too much wine, and not being greedy for money. A *diakonos* must have good knowledge of the Christian faith. Finally, their most important activity is to declare faith in Christ with great boldness. There is no verb for "declare" in the text, but the intention is clear. It is also possible to translate this section "achieve great freedom of speech/action in the faith in Jesus."

Does this refer actually to public presentations and preaching? Although there is a long tradition of reading 1 Tim 3:18–25 as a description of social-caritative deacons,[43] there is actually no single piece of evidence for this in the text. A *diakonos* was an authorised person in a local church and was probably involved with all central activities such as worship and sacraments.[44] Actually, the burden of proof belongs to those who claim that *diakonos* at the end of the first century was a special ministerial call that concentrated on social-caritative tasks.

A *diakonos* as an authorised person in a local church in the New Testament texts does not have any *specific* social or caritative responsibility. If and when they were involved with the sick and poor, it was based on their call as Christians, not because of their special ministry. On the other hand, when the term is used as a technical term, it seems appropriate to interpret it as an authorised person in a local church. Partially against the thesis by John N. Collins, their specific task was to be a messenger or "go-between," there are passages which do not fit so well this theory, such as presented by Mark 1:31, Luke 10:38–42 and Matt 25:31–46. In some instances, such as that of Phoebe (Rom 16), this messenger aspect is possible, but perhaps not the most prominent. Although it is not possible to fully agree with Collins' results, he still deserves all the credit, because his correct questions triggered the newest quest for the meaning of the Greek word *diakonia*.

Hentschel's detailed study also makes it clear that one single meaning can hardly describe the content of the word *diakonia* and its derivatives in the New Testament. On quite a few occasions, the appearance of the words *diakonia* and *diakonos* are connected to an honourable and high-level authorisation for mission. This action also creates a relation between the one who gives authorisation (God, Christ, the Church) and the person who is authorised.[45] This view also has its

42 Barnett 1995, 36, 40–41.

43 See, for example, Barnett 1995, 36–41; Roloff 1988, 148–168.

44 Hetschel 2007, 396–406 underlines the task of diakonoi to proclaim the gospel without any articulated caritative dimensions in their duty.

45 Hentschel 2007, 433–444.

limitations. When Hentschel interprets texts like Luke 10:38–42 as a metaphor for unsuccessful mission and criticism of the active role of women in the church, she treads upon hypothetical soil.[46] In this particular text, it is much easier to interpret the word *diakonia* as a work or service related to the household.

In the future, the study of the Greek expressions of *diakonia* and its derivatives will be continued and our understanding will be modified, but Hentschel seems to clearly demonstrate that understanding *diakonos* as a messenger or a go-between person is too narrow a view. This does not mean that the traditional interpretation of the word *diakonia* primarily as a lowly and humble service or related to table-serving should be preferred. The traditional view was based on projecting the viewpoints and concepts of the modern world into the ancient texts, as Collins noted. Thus one major conclusion seems to be well argued. Both Collins and Hentschel agree that in the New Testament those persons who had the status of *diakonos* in the local church did not necessarily have a special social caritative function or task.

The view of *diakonos* as a general worker in, or an authorised person of a local church without any specific social-caritative responsibility, can be re-confirmed by reading descriptions from the first three centuries after Christ. *Diakonos* is mentioned quite often in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers (end of the first century/early second century), in the collections of church fathers, and also in the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, a handbook for *episkopoi*, from about 250 AD.

If one has presuppositions or expectations of detailed descriptions of how *diakonoi* were helping the financially poor and giving special care to the sick, studying these texts will be disappointing. The only recurring theme about *diakonoi* in these texts is the general notion that they had a remarkable role in local churches (*Did*. 15:1; Herm. 13:1; Ign. *Magn.* 6:1; Ign. *Trall.* 2:3; Ign. *Phld.* 4:1). Furthermore, the letters' main interest are in worship and the sacraments, and therefore we may assume that this is also the main activity of *diakonoi*.

In the Shepherd of Hermas, we have one rare text that seems to connect the *diakonoi* and the poor: "they that have the spots are deacons that exercised their office ill, and plundered the livelihood of widows and orphans, and made gain for themselves from the ministrations which they had received to perform." (Herm. *Sim*. IX 26 [103]:2) The accusation that *diakonoi* were misusing their office shows that they had access to the funds of the church and their biggest crime was the plundering of widows and orphans -- the vulnerable ones, who traditionally ought to be protected (Deut 24:17–18). No explicit statement regarding the relationship between *diakonoi* and the poor is made and there is no further clarification. On the other hand, in the Shepherd of Hermas there are references to the care

46 Hentschel 2007, 185–297.

of the poor, without explicit reference to *diakonoi* (50:8; 56:7). In general, the care of the poor belonged to the tasks of the bishops.[47]

During the first centuries, the number and status of *diakonoi* reached a climax. Barnett even speaks about "the golden age," stating: "As the diaconate developed in this period deacons flourished in numbers and in importance. They oversaw the pastoral care of the Church."[48] Barnett does not, however, articulate how the *diakonoi* were involved in the care of the poor and needy. At the same time, several references in the writings from the early centuries connect *diakonoi* to worship and the sacraments: Didascalia 16; *1 Apol.* 65, 67. The well-known legend of Lawrence, dated from about 250 AD, and first documented in the writing of Ambrose (*Off.* II, 28, 140–141) in short form more than a century later, underlines only that the church had a responsibility to invest its wealth to care for the needs of people. The legend of Lawrence describes one story in a very concrete situation and explains hardly anything about the standard duties of *diakonoi*.

This brief survey of the "golden age" of the diaconate does not bring any essentially new features to the picture which emerged from the analysis of the New Testament. The solid and explicit evidence to prove that *diakonoi* had a special social-caritative function in the early church is missing. On the contrary, we have frequent and broad evidence that they were involved in basic church activities such as worship and the celebration of the sacraments.

Representatives of the traditional paradigm have been in agreement that the special social-caritative role of *diakonoi* existed in the early church, but diminished during the following centuries. This view is expressed by McKee: "Between the fourth and sixth centuries deacons lost most of their charitable role and acquired more and more liturgical duties."[49] This model of the caritative origin of the diaconal ministry seems to be a myth. In the early church, there was a special concern for the poor and needy, but ministers called *diakonoi* did not have a special or exclusive role in this situation.

This conclusion leads to a dilemma. The rise of modern diaconia in the 19th century was based on the idea of re-establishing the apostolic and biblical ministry of diaconia. How is it possible to re-establish something that did not exist earlier? To answer this question, we have to turn to the decisive moment in the history of diaconal ministry – the period of the Reformation.

The Reformation and the role of Calvin

47 Stewart 2014.

48 Barnett 1995, 43.

49 McKee 1989, 34.

It was no accident that the social-caritative role of the church became more intensive during the Reformation. Older structures for the relief of the poor and caritative support could not respond to the growing needs of those who were pushed into poverty because of wars, epidemics and other social disorders. Earlier on, monasteries and hospitals had played an important role, but they were weakened by the social, political, financial and religious changes of the time.

During the Reformation, there was naturally a special interest in the reorganisation of the ministry. Because the Bible had taken the role as the decisive authority for the faith, changes in the ministry also had to be supported with biblical evidence. In the Catholic Church, there was still a ministry called *diaconus*, a Latin form of the Greek word *diakonos*. This was mostly a liturgical position, a lower level on the way to full priesthood. One major difficulty in the analysis of the diaconal ministry during the Reformation stems from the inconsistent use of the word deacon. Thus, the concept may refer to a lower level priest, a social-caritative lay person (civil servant) or even a minister of the church who had social-caritative responsibilities.[50]

Martin Luther saw the importance of the ministry of the Word, but was also ready to change the traditional position of deacons towards a caritative direction based on his interpretation of Acts 6 in the year 1522.[51] On the other hand, Luther was not clear in his use of terminology and spoke also about deacons as liturgical figures.[52] Luther's proposal to reformulate the function of the ministry of the deacon (*diaconus*) in a caritative direction was by no means abandoned. During the 1520s, there were enterprises in Lutheran parishes in Braunschweig, in Hamburg and in Lübeck to solve the caritative task at the local level by collecting funds for the poor and choosing deacons to take care of the distribution of money. Practical issues, inability to create functioning formats and finally, a growing emphasis on doctrinal issues eventually led the Lutheran churches to give up their active role in supporting those who were in need of special care. At this point, discussion about caritative deacons in the Lutheran churches lost its significance because the relief of the poor was mostly given over to local civil actors. In the latter part of the century, concern for relief of the poor also diminished in the orders of Lutheran churches.[53]

The solution to the dilemma mentioned earlier in this article can eventually be solved by analysing the Calvinist stream of the Reformation. While Lutherans

50 McKee 1984, 129; McKee 1989, 62–64; Arffman 2008, 179, 193.

51 Luther WA 6, 566, 26–567 (in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*). – According to an unpublished MTh thesis by Harri Hautala in 2013, this well-known reading of the passage may need re-evaluation. According to Hautala, Luther may not have been arguing for the caritative tasks of the deacons.

52 Luther WA 6, 440, 30–441, 2 (in *To the German nobility*).

53 Arffman 2008, 255–274.

gave more responsibilities to the civil government, Calvin turned in a different direction. McKee argues that actually, in the Reformation only Calvinists

> *defined the church's ministry of diakonia as distinct and in theory separable from the charitable activity of the civil government. --- Calvinist Reformed also redefined the office of deacon. No longer were deacons liturgical assistants to priests; their office was an ecclesiastical ministry of care for the poor and unfortunate, an office which should be permanent in the church.*[54]

This paradigmatic change in the theology of the ministry was based on an interpretation of the Bible. In the early 1540s, Calvin interpreted Acts 6 after Luther's example. Luther's views were transmitted by Martin Bucer.[55]

McKee offers the following summary of Calvin's exegesis. According to Calvin, Acts 6 describes the origin of the office of deacons and can be connected to other New Testament passages: 1 Tim 3:8–13; Rom 12:8 and 1 Tim 5:3–10. Thus, it was possible to interpret Phoebe's activity in light of a passage such as 1 Tim 5. Such an interpretation was possible during the days of pre-critical biblical study because Calvin thought that all scriptural references were describing a single reality in the apostolic period and his task was to clarify the biblical truth abandoned after the apostolic church.[56]

Calvin also formulated practical instructions for the local church entitled "Ecclesiastical Ordinances." These instructions included the idea of caritative deacons, including female ordained deacons.[57] The rise of the social-caritative ministry of diaconia in the Reformed Church and the opposite development in the Lutheran Church may not only be a practical matter based on historical context. It may also reflect different theological presuppositions on the question of the third use of the law and the way in which God's actions in everyday life were understood. Furthermore, if there were differences in the ministry of deacons between the Reformed and Lutheran Churches, there was nonetheless a common understanding of the call of all Christians. All reformation churches underscored the call of every Christian to be a servant, that is, a minister. The common phrase spoke of a priesthood of all believers, and that included also a deaconhood of all believers, though the latter is a neologism – promoted (in 2005) in the LWF document *The Diaconal Ministry in the Lutheran Churches*.

Before closing the circle of this tradition-historical survey, it is necessary to add one last link to the chain. How can we explain the transition from Calvin's interpretation of the Bible in the 16th century to the 19th century diaconia movement

54 McKee 1989, 38, 40.

55 Arffman 2008, 307.

56 McKee 1984, 265–268; McKee1989, 64–77.

57 Hughes 2004.

in Germany? There are some circumstances that may shed light on this question. The three centuries in between were not a complete vacuum with regard to the ministry of diaconia. There were diaconal ministers in the Reformed churches and the biblical interpretation of Calvin was esteemed. Even if the development was not always consistent, "the diaconate as such, though, continued to be strongly affirmed, and the Reformed practice even spread to some other communities, for example, from Dutch Reformed to Dutch, English, and (later) American *Lutherans*" (emphasis added).[58]

However, perhaps the Reformed church in the Netherlands eventually played an important role in the process. The Dutch Confession of Faith was strongly influenced by Calvin via a draft that he had sent to the synod of Paris (1559):

> *Regarding the real church, we believe that she should be governed in the way as our Lord Jesus has established (Acts 6:3, Ef. 4:3, 1 Tim. 3), in order that the pure teaching can have her course, the failings be restored and rebuked and all other people who are destitute are assisted in their needs.*[59]

The Dutch Confession, *Nederlandse Geloofbelijdenis* (1561) thus mentioned the deacons as caritative functionaries in article 30:

> *We believe that the real Church should be governed in agreement with the spiritual order, that our Lord has taught us in his Word, namely that there should be servants or pastors (shepherds) to preach God's Word and to serve the Sacraments and supervisors and deacons to model the council of the Church and to maintain the real religion and to take care of the progress of the real Faith, that the offenders be punished in a spiritual way and be kept in control and that the poor and those who are distressed are aided and consoled according to the measure they need this. In this way, all things of the Church should take place in good order, persons be elected who are loyal according to the rule that the holy Paul gives for that to Timothy* (1 Tim. 3).

Similar views were voiced at the *Convention of Wezel* (1568). This convention was not a synod, but a meeting of church leaders. However, its importance for the formation of reformed churches in the Netherlands should not be ignored. The Convention of Wezel (Cap. V.1 De Diaconis) refers to the deacons' work among the poor.

The tradition was confirmed in two regional synods: The Synod of Dordrecht (1574) and the Synod of Middelburg (1578). The Synod of Dordrecht later

58 McKee 1989, 85.

59 Original in French. Translation from Dutch to English by Herman Noordegraaf.

became very influential even if it did not represent the whole church. The synod articulated the tasks of deacons very clearly in the field of caritative functions:

> *The Deacons shall have a meeting every week to discuss with care (with attention) the matters of the poor. As regards to the distribution of the alms, the way in which this is be done and the amount, the deacons should decide. With the eye on this they have their meetings in order that they do not do things without advises to each other in ordinary matters. In important matters it is wise to use the advise of the Consistorie [ministers and elders]. It belongs also to the office of the Deacons to give himself the money to the poor. This should not be done by another.*
>
> *It belongs to the office of the Deacons to collect the assistance and other goods for the poor assidious and after that to distribute it scrupulous and inconspicuous according to the needs of the destitute people, to visit who are oppressed and to console them and to take care that nobody misuse the alms.*[60]

The line was once more confirmed in the Synod of Dordt (Dordrecht) in 1618–19, which in essential sections formed the basis for all later church orders in the Reformed church in the Netherlands.

However, in terms of future development, the most important players may have been the Mennonites who lived in the same geographical area. Interestingly, it seems that the Anabaptists followed Calvin's idea regarding female diaconate. The Mennonite confession of Dordrecht (April 21, 1632) makes this clear. (Article IX. Of the Election, and Offices of Teachers, Deacons, and Deaconesses in the Church):[61]

> *That they should also see diligently to it, particularly each among his own over whom he has the oversight, that all places be well provided with deacons (to look after and care for the poor), who may receive the contributions and alms, in order to dispense them faithfully and with all propriety to the poor and needy saints. Acts 6:3–6.*
>
> *And that also honorable aged widows should be chosen and ordained deaconesses, that they with the deacons may visit, comfort, and care for, the poor, feeble, sick, sorrowing and needy, as also the widows and orphans, and assist in attending to other wants and necessities of the church to the best of their ability. I Tim. 5:9; Rom. 16:1; Jas. 1:27.*
>
> *Furthermore, concerning deacons, that they, especially when they are fit, and chosen and ordained thereto by the church, for the assistance and relief of the*

60 Translation by Herman Noordegraaf.

61 http://www.bibleviews.com/Dordrecht.html. The Dordrecht Confession of Faith. Translated by J. C. Wenger.

> *elders, may exhort the church (since they, as has been said, are chosen thereto), and labor also in the Word and in teaching; that each may minister unto the other with the gift he has received of the Lord, so that through mutual service and the assistance of every member, each in his measure, the body of Christ may be improved, and the vine and church of the Lord continue to grow, increase, and be built up, according as it is proper.*

The development in the Netherlands was not limited to the Reformed or Mennonite church. There is also proof of inter-confessional interaction: this is well documented in the writings of Theodor Fliedner. In the 1820s, he travelled to England and Holland to collect funds for his evangelical (Reformed) parish in Kaiserswerth. Retrospectively this journey formed a culminating moment in the theology and practice of Fliedner. In England, he was influenced by Elisabeth Fry, a Quaker, and in Holland he came in contact with the Mennonite Church. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, Fliedner wanted to establish a biblical ministry of deaconess as a result of his experiences during this journey. Although Fliedner does not refer directly to the writings of Calvin, his attitude towards inter-confessional co-operation is obvious in his book *Collektenreise nach Holland und England*.

Summary and conclusions

The classical paradigm saw the apostolic and biblical age as a wonder world for diaconia. All Christians were expected to be involved in the care of the poor and these actions were emphasised by the important role of the diaconal ministry. This glory continued for just a few centuries and finally withered during the medieval period. According to this study, the traditional outline is not historically accurate, or at least is in need of impressive new evidence arguing for the biblical origin of a social-caritative diaconal ministry.

As a result of misinterpretations of New Testament texts especially by Calvin, the diaconia movement of the 19th century projected a life of its own into the ancient texts. Thus, the return to the biblical ministry of diaconia actually turned out to be a significant new interpretation of biblical and early church writings. The ministry of *diakonos* in the early church was not a novelty, but the new meaning embodied: this modern movement gave a totally new meaning to the ancient Greek concept and in addition, launched a new way of using *diakonia*-derivative vocabulary.

Does this new tradition-historical view dash current ecumenical efforts to confirm the permanent diaconal ministry? It seems very clear that social-caritative activity was a central part of the life of the early church, but it was not especially connected to one particular group of people called *diakonoi*. Social responsibility

and love of one's neighbour were the essential characteristics of the early church and this view still stands firm. Furthermore, it is worth remembering that in the early church, several different ministers were needed in the surrounding social context. Presumably they all included a social-caritative function.

Based on the analysis of this chapter, social-caritative responsibility belongs first and foremost to the whole Christian community. According to this view, the social-caritative call belongs equally to all ministries of the church as an elementary part of each call. This view does not exclude, however, the possibility of special social-caritative duties. Based on the demands of the context and the people who suffer, social-caritative tasks can be emphasised within one kind of ministry (special social-caritative ministry), but not at the cost of the call given to the Christian community as a whole.

3 ACTS 6, AN EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS

In the previous chapter, some central questions on the passage in Acts 6:1–6 were discussed briefly. This biblical passage is, however, so central that it requires further detailed study. When one focusses on the biblical roots of diaconate and its later development, there is no passage in the entire New Testament comparable to Acts 6:1–6. Whether this passage was somehow related to deacons in an earlier context, is another question, but at least there is a well-documented history of reception in the early church and in the Reformation, which gives evidence that at least some individuals were convinced that this passage speaks about deacons. Even more complicated is the question of whether the seven chosen men (may-be-deacons) had a caritative function in the book of Acts. The next chapter will focus on the reception history. However, before we commence, we must first introduce several central exegetical questions related to the passage, as well as formulate some answers.

The passage in Acts 6:1–6 is part of a larger literary work -- the double work Luke-Acts. Although we are not able to identify the author, addressee, and date of the work, we note that the majority of scholars seems to support the idea that Acts was written at the end of the first century.[62] The addressee, named Theophilus in Luke 1:3 and in Acts 1:1, is an imaginative or real person who represents a respected individual somehow included in the Greco-Roman elite.

A later date is proposed by R. Pervo, who argues that several details indicate a second century origin for the work: about 115A.D. According to Pervo, the author was familiar not only with Paul's writings, but also the texts of Josephus. Differences between Paul and Luke-Acts in style and themes can be explained, according to Pervo, assuming that the author wrote several decades later than Paul.[63]

Acts was written in Greek and its audience located in the Greco-Roman world. This means that the gap between audience and the society described in Acts chapter 6 possessed at least geographical, cultural and mental dimensions. Perhaps the time span from the described moment in verses 6:1–6 to the actual writing of Acts might be half a century or almost a whole century later. In both cases, it is obvious that we cannot argue that Acts 6 is a precise documentation of events which actually occurred. First and foremost, we have a text, a small story, which is written at the end of the first century (or later). What may (or may not) be the historical occasion behind the text has yet to be analysed and proven – not to be taken as a certainty or as a self-evident and detailed historical episode of early Christianity.

The central tasks and questions that require answers are as follows: How does one understand and translate the text? Are the seven chosen men in the text understood as deacons? What are the main functions of the chosen seven men?

62 Among others Pesch 1986, 28 (about 80–90); Fitzmyer 1998, 51–54 (in the 80s).

63 Pervo 2006; 2009, 5.

The text and translations

The following table gives three parallel texts: the Greek version of Nestle-Aland's 28th edition, a translation of the *New Revised Standard Version* and my own version of some verses modified from the NRSV. The footnote of the NRSV offers some alternative translations and they are mentioned in brackets.

Nestle 28th	NRSV	Author's modified version of the NRSV in key verses
Ἐν δὲ ταῖς ἡμέραις ταύταις πληθυνόντων τῶν μαθητῶν ἐγένετο γογγυσμὸς τῶν Ἑλληνιστῶν πρὸς τοὺς Ἑβραίους, ὅτι παρεθεωροῦντο ἐν τῇ διακονίᾳ τῇ καθημερινῇ αἱ χῆραι αὐτῶν.	Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food.	Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily ministry.
προσκαλεσάμενοι δὲ οἱ δώδεκα τὸ πλῆθος τῶν μαθητῶν εἶπαν· οὐκ ἀρεστόν ἐστιν ἡμᾶς καταλείψαντας τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ διακονεῖν τραπέζαις.	And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, 'It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait at tables [or: keep accounts]	And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, 'It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to minister to tables.
ἐπισκέψασθε δέ, ἀδελφοί, ἄνδρας ἐξ ὑμῶν μαρτυρουμένους ἑπτά, πλήρεις πνεύματος καὶ σοφίας, οὓς καταστήσομεν ἐπὶ τῆς χρείας ταύτης,	Therefore, friends, [Gk brothers] select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task,	
ἡμεῖς δὲ τῇ προσευχῇ καὶ τῇ διακονίᾳ τοῦ λόγου προσκαρτερήσομεν.	while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.'	while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.'
καὶ ἤρεσεν ὁ λόγος ἐνώπιον παντὸς τοῦ πλήθους καὶ ἐξελέξαντο Στέφανον, ἄνδρα πλήρης πίστεως καὶ πνεύματος ἁγίου, καὶ Φίλιππον καὶ Πρόχορον καὶ Νικάνορα καὶ Τίμωνα καὶ Παρμενᾶν καὶ Νικόλαον προσήλυτον Ἀντιοχέα,	What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch.	
οὓς ἔστησαν ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀποστόλων, καὶ προσευξάμενοι ἐπέθηκαν αὐτοῖς τὰς χεῖρας.	They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.	

Meaning of the word διακονία

The conventional reading of this passage assumed that the controversy between the ethnic/language groups was charity-related and that the seven men were deacons, responsible for food or money distribution and care of the widows. Such views were echoed during the Reformation by Martin Luther[64] and Jean Calvin[65] and repeated up to the latter part of the 20th century, by (among others), P. Philippi[66] and J. Fitzmyer[67]. According to James Barnett, the story has been understood as evidence "that almost from the outset the Church found it necessary to appoint those who would assist in looking after its poor."[68]

Since the 1980s, these views have been widely disagreed upon, because the actual text does not support such readings. However, the traditional presupposition still affects the readings. Thus, for example, the NRSV adds the word "food" in Acts 6, verse 1 and speaks about "distribution" and Pervo translates the task of the seven men in verse 2 as "to administrate charity."[69] Verse 1 does not say anything about food and interpreting verse 2 as caritative functions is a possible, but hypothetical view.

The dilemma of the passage is that certain Greek expressions are rather rare and ambiguous. Verse 1 illustrates this well. The confrontation between Hellenists and Hebrews refer to two social groups inside of the congregation. The dividing line is cultural and probably refers to the spoken language.[70] "Hellenists" complained that their widows were not treated well enough in "daily ministry" (ἐν τῇ διακονίᾳ τῇ καθημερινῇ). Unfortunately, the actual content of the daily issue is left without further explanation. The precise content of the word διακονία in Acts 6:1 may refer to the well-being of widows, but it is not possible to reach a more accurate definition. It may also be related to money, food or meals,[71] but also other kind of needs, such as rituals.[72] Furthermore, the meals and rituals may be interwoven as Acts 2:42 indicates.

Actually, we cannot even be sure that the expression refers to material things because the same word διακονία refers to the authorisation of the apostolic preaching in Acts 6:4 (διακονίᾳ τοῦ λόγου) without any connection to material or caritative issues. Such usage of the word διακονία during the rest of the story excludes the possibility of interpreting the noun only or mainly as an expression of caritative

64 Luther WA 6, 566, 26–567 (in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*).

65 Calvin Institutes 4.3.9.

66 Philippi 1982, 621–622.

67 Fitzmyer 1998, 344.

68 Barnett 1995, 28.

69 Pervo 2009, 151.

70 Hentschel 2007, 325.

71 Hentschel 2007, 321–322; Haenchen 1971, 260–264.

72 Collins 1990, 231.

acts. Based on these various contexts regarding usage of the word διακονία, it makes sense to translate the word as *ministry* or *authorised acting*. The words ministry and ministering includes taking care of sacred meals and rituals, as well as being responsible for preaching. With certainty we can say that the word διακονία can refer to ministerial preaching, but the expression to minister at tables (διακονεῖν τραπέζαις) remains difficult to interpret. Does it refer to meals,[73] sacred meals,[74] prayers or other dimensions of the early Christian community?

Even if these options are not explicitly articulated in chapter 6, the textual world in Acts includes all mentioned elements. Acts 4:35, 37 and 5:2 remind us that the apostles collected money and distributed it to the needy. On the other hand, the passage in Acts 2:42–47 speak about daily prayers, communion and the breaking of bread as signs of early community. When the textual world of Acts contains these elements, it is no wonder that interpretations during the centuries have projected these also onto chapter 6.

The word διακονία may refer, on some occasions, also to charity but its basic meaning is different. In Acts 6, it simply refers first to daily ministry, which is partially neglected in verse 6:1, then amended in verse 2 in order to provide needed space for the apostles own ministry, which is also named as διακονία. Later on, in Acts, in Acts 20:24 and 21:19 the very same word refers to the apostolic ministry of Paul without any connections to caritative acts.

The missing deacons

The next essential question is: were the seven men the first deacons? If the answer was searched during the Reformation, both Luther and Calvin were ready to agree. Their opinion was not new in the church, but may have represented a mainstream, though not unanimous opinion. John Chrysostom, for example, disagreed with this reading already in the fourth century. The history of its reception will be studied in the next chapter, but on this occasion, attention will be focused on more central textual details – namely, what are the grounds on which to say that the seven men were deacons and which arguments disagree with such an assumption?

The names of the seven men reference the Greek-speaking cultural background. Although the task of the seven men was not based on language or culture background, it is clear that they are symbols of a non-Aramaic part of the community. Based on the information given in the text, they were Jews, but probably Greek-speaking, Jewish Christians.[75] A further detail about the men is the criteria that they had "good standing" and they were "full of the Spirit and of wisdom" (6:3).

73 Lüdemann 1987, 82.

74 Schille 1983, 169.

75 Pesch 1986, 230; Hentschel 2007, 325; Pervo 2009, 151.

Acts chapter 6 does not say anything about what the seven men actually did. If their ordination was aimed to solve the neglect described in verse1, the text is not specific regarding the consequences. The rest of the information is available only in fragments in the following episodes of Acts.

The first of the seven men mentioned was Stephen, "full of grace and power" who did great "wonders and signs" and argued with people (Acts 6:8–12). Before his martyrdom, he preached in front of the council (7:1–53). The second name on the list was Philip. He was also the second person described (8:4–40). The list of his actions is impressive: in Samaria, he was a preacher, exorcist and healer (8:4–8). He also baptised several people (8:12). Later, the story describes how Philip was led by the spirit to go south where he met an Ethiopian eunuch and subsequently converted and baptised him (8:26–40). Much later in Acts, Philip is mentioned still once more in the passage 21:8–9 -- this finally specifies that Philip, one among the seven men, was actually not a deacon but an evangelist (εὐαγγελιστής).

Last but not least, it is important to notice that the word deacon (διάκονος) is not even mentioned in Acts 6:1–6. The text does not claim that the seven men were deacons and their ordination is the beginning of new functionaries in Christianity. Actually, classification and closer definition of the seven men is difficult to undertake. If the author of Acts saw a connection between the seven men and the deacons of his own historical context, it is strictly hidden between the lines.[76]

The purpose and historicity of Acts 6:1–6

The story of Luke-Acts illustrates how early Christianity was finding its way from Palestine to the heart of Imperium, from Jerusalem to Rome. In a similar way, Luke-Acts describes how the different functionaries in the Jesus movement belonged together and supplement each other peacefully. Instead of controversies and competition, the Spirit is led the Jesus movement onto a new direction and opening new ways.[77]

Can such a position be understood as a view – namely, one that the author of Acts recommends for all Christians? Or is the real target of the text somewhere beyond the Christian inner circle, say, the Greco-Roman elite and authorities? If the latter idea is followed, one of the motives of the author could be to describe Christians as a peaceful and trustworthy group for the Roman audience, who might expect fights and difficulties spreading to the western part of the imperium with the new religion growing from Jewish roots.Chapter 6 has an important task in the chain. First of all, early Christians seem to be ready and able to handle cultural and

76 Barrett1994, 304–305.

77 Salo 1991, 294–295.

social crises as well as find good solutions. Conflict between two groups, Greek and Aramaic speaking Jews, does not lead to an open fight, but are peacefully resolved.

In addition, the main figures of the story, the groups of twelve and seven men, are harmoniously linked together. According the gospels, the twelve disciples had a historical role in the early Jesus movement, but besides Peter the major players in Acts are the other persons: the seven men and Paul. Paul's conversion was based on divine authority (ch. 9) and the seven men were chosen by the twelve just before first steps were taken where Christians became a multicultural and multinational movement. Probably the seven men had a known and important role in early Christianity.[78] This may also be the major motive in Acts 6: to reconcile existing traditions and demonstrate how there was no competition or struggle between the groups, but instead that they were originally connected to each other. According to Anni Hentschel, it is also very possible that the author wanted to illustrate both how the seven were subordinated by the twelve and that their mission was authorised and agreed upon by the twelve.[79]

Summary and consequences

Based on this exegetical analysis of the key aspects in the text, a well-argued consensus could be described as follows. Among the confirmed facts is that the author of Luke-Acts does not claim that the seven men were deacons or that the chosen men represented a new and fixed group of the early church ministry. Instead, the seven Greek- speaking Jews were a group of important, early Christian figures, and were probably some kind of leaders.

Secondly, it is clear that the terminology connected to the word διακονία as a noun or verb does not have an explicitly caritative meaning. This is obvious in Acts 6:4 where the word is listed as an attribute of preaching. In this passage, the word διακονία can be translated as a ministry or as an authorised task. Such a task can have several practical targets -- the well-being of the community, but also liturgical functions.

On the other hand, there are questions which cannot be fully solved. Such a detail would for example be the content of the "daily ministry" found in Acts 6:1. It is too much to say with certainty that the verse refers to the distribution of food or money. Daily ministry could have liturgical elements and if it is a question of food distribution, the sacred aspect may also be included: the distinction between sacred meals and other kinds of meals may be misleading at this point. The daily breaking of bread in the early community was part of the story in Acts.

78 Lüdemann 1987, 84–85.

79 Hentschel 2007, 329–333.

4 THE MINISTRY OF DEACONS: THE RECEPTION AND RE-INTERPRETATION OF ACTS 6

Introduction

The idea that social caritative diaconal ministry was created during the Reformation and, even more, that John Calvin had a special role in introducing the social caritative ministry, would have been considered nonsense two decades ago. The classical paradigm before the 1990s unanimously considered the early apostolic and biblical age as a special time for diaconal ministry. According to this view, in the early church, the deacons had a prominent position in their local churches and took major responsibility for social-caritative actions.

Conventional view

The position of the diaconal ministry experienced its golden age during the first three centuries in both quantity and quality: the amount of diakonoi was remarkable and quite often, during the election of a new episkopos, the new one was chosen from among the diakonoi.

According to this view, the important role of the diaconal ministry continued only for a few centuries and finally withered in the early medieval period. In the western part of the church, the ministry still existed and was called in Latin diaconus. This ministry functioned only as a transitional step on the way to full priesthood. In the Eastern Church, the role of diakonos was more and more connected to worship and church music. According to this traditional view, the restoration of the caritative diaconal ministry was already proposed in the Reformation but it was not until the 19th century that socially oriented Christianity restored the diaconal ministry of men and women. German innovators, such as Theodor Fliedner, Johan Hinrich Wichern and Wihelm Löhe, played an important role in this development, along with many others. Such a view is represented by the majority of earlier studies and textbooks, such as Barnett (1995), Hammann (2003) and Olson (2003).

According to recent biblical studies (John N. Collins, Anni Hentschel and the present author)[80], this traditional outline is not historically true – at the very least, we need some new evidence to argue for the biblical origin of social-caritative diaconal ministry.

In a nutshell, the main arguments – presented at large in previous chapters – are as follows. The New Testament expressions that are derived from the word *diakonia* do not have any specific or exclusive social-caritative content. The words are *also*

80 Collins 1990; 2002; Hentschel 2007; 2008; Latvus 2007; Latvus 2008; Latvus 2013a; Latvus 2013b.

used in caritative connection (especially in Mark 10; Matt. 25), but not necessarily in the fixed or specific meaning of *diaconal serving*. In other New Testament contexts, the words may refer to almost any kind of work, act, task, delegation or spiritual leadership. *Diakonos* is even a close synonym for *apostolos*. Actually, the thesis that has triggered this current quest was presented by John N. Collins, who said that *diakonos* is not only a servant, but often also a messenger under a higher power or a go-between person. This view gives a satisfactory fit especially to the Pauline letters. Anni Hentschel claims that *diakonos* mostly refers to a person who has an authorisation, *Beauftragung*.[81] The new semantic debate regarding the meaning of the words *diakonia* and *diakonos* is not yet finished, even though the intermediate results can be seen in the new Greek–English dictionary.[82] At any rate, it is clear that even if Collins and Hentschel do not agree on some readings of the *diakonia* words, they do agree that, in the New Testament, we cannot find a specific and fixed usage for these words in the meaning of social caritative acts. The same is even more evident if the expressions describing *diakonos* are analysed; *diakonos* does not have any specific reference to social-caritative responsibility. The best example of this is the description of *diakonoi* found in 1 Tim 3.

Finally, one more part of the current debate needs to be addressed. If the *diakonos* was not a social-caritative agent in the early church, then we have to ask: when was the idea of social-caritative diaconial ministry introduced? According to my analysis, the doctrine of a social-caritative diaconal ministry was not introduced earlier than during the Reformation. Martin Luther and Martin Bucer helped John Calvin to formulate the doctrine and also introduced the practice of the caritative ministry. Later in the 19th century, these reformed ideas were rediscovered and launched as a return to the biblical doctrine of the diaconal ministry. In practical terms, this was actually not a return to the Bible, but a projection of contemporary questions onto biblical texts. On the other hand, the reformers and the 19th century diaconia innovators were right, but only in part. Love and care were included in the characteristics of early Christianity, but this task was considered to be a collective Christian call and an essential part of *all* ministries (see above chapter 2).

In this chapter, my aim is to clarify in more detail the process between the New Testament and the Reformation using one text as a test case. More specifically, I aim to clarify the question of *the reception history of Acts 6 in the early church and in the Reformation*. In addition, the reception of 1 Tim 3 will be reflected on, but only in a very limited sense. In this chapter, the analysis of reception aims to clarify the historical steps of this process: *how has Acts 6:1–6 been understood and interpreted during the different historical periods?*

81 Hentschel 2007, 432–444.

82 BDAG 2000, 229–231.

Analysis 1: The Early Church

The following analysis will concentrate on a few selected texts: the writings of Irenaeus, *the Church History* by Eusebius, the sermons of John Chrysostom, the texts from the councils in Neocesarea and Trullo (Constantinople), the texts of Martin Luther, and finally the texts of John Calvin. These texts are the most prominent ones in regards to the reception history of Acts 6.

Analysis of the reception starts with Irenaeus of Lyons. He is often mentioned as the first person who asserted that the seven men in Acts 6 were deacons (*diakonoi*) and that the office of deacons was apostolic.[83] This interpretation of chapter Acts 6 is disagreed upon, as Barnett sums up: "Irenaeus thus begins the tradition, which modern scholarship finds almost certainly incorrect, that the Seven of Acts 6 were the first deacons."[84] Before formulating a verdict, there is a need for closer look at the texts of Irenaeus.

Irenaeus of Lyons: Against Heresies

Irenaeus of Lyons (born early in the second century, died c. 202) became the bishop of Lyons in 177 AD and wrote several texts that quoted and commented on the New Testament. For us, the most interesting of these is the document titled *Against Heresies*, written in about 185 AD. The text is originally written in Greek, but is nowadays mostly available only as a translation in Latin. The complete Latin version is from the year 380. A good summary of the life and theology of Irenaeus is offered by Eric Osborn.[85] This text is often mentioned as the first source to identify the persons in Acts 6 as *diakonoi*. Three parts of the text include the reference.

> *The Nicolaitanes are the followers of that Nicolas, who was one of the seven first ordained to the diaconate by the apostles [unum ex vii qui primi ad diaconium ab apostolis ordinate sunt].* (Against Heresies 1.26.3)

> *And still further, Stephen, who was chosen the first deacon by the apostles [qui electus est ab apostolis primus diaconus], and who, of all men, was the first to follow the footsteps of the martyrdom of the Lord, being the first that was slain for confessing Christ, speaking boldly among the people, and teaching them, says: "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham, … and said to him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee…"* (Against Heresies 3.12.10)

83 Pelikan 2005, 91.

84 Barnett 1995, 56–57.

85 Osborn 2001, 1–7.

> *Luke also has recorded that Stephen who was the first elected into the diaconate by the apostles [qui primus in diaconium ab apostolis electus est]* (Against Heresies 4.15.1)

In these three passages, Irenaeus provided some very important clues. Irenaeus is especially inspired by Stephen -- his martyrdom, and also by his preaching. Stephen is also the first one in the diaconate to be chosen by the apostles. For Irenaeus, there seems to be no hesitation or contrary arguments against the assumption that Stephen and the six other men really were *diakonoi*. This information is provided not as the main question to be defended, but as an already existing fact.

Unfortunately, Irenaeus did not articulate any arguments to support his view nor did he explain what the deacons were expected to do. The known combination in the early church was that each local church had one *episkopos* and several *diakonoi* and this followed the model of 1 Tim 3. In the text written by Irenaeus, the story in Acts 6 and the description in 1 Tim 3 are interwoven and assimilated: 1 Tim offers the title and position for the seven men, whereas Acts 6 explains the background to the story. Was Ireneaus aware of this assimilation or did he just simply follow the idea that the ceremony in Acts 6 was an ordination of ministers, and because the apostles were ordaining the ministers, they ought to be called *diakonoi*? These questions are left unanswered.

In the story in Acts, the seven men were chosen to lead the Greek-speaking group and to help solve an ethnic conflict. Irenaeus did not, however, pay any attention to the ethnic controversy, but instead focused on the martyrdom and preaching of Stephen. This leads to the following observation. The most important detail, which is usually ignored by scholars,[86] is that even though Irenaeus considered the seven men to be *diakonoi*, he never said anything about their social or caritative role. Obviously, this question was not as important as some other issues – or perhaps Irenaeus did not even consider this possibility. On this occasion, the important piece of information is that we have the first historical text that identifies the seven men in Acts as *diakonoi,* but did so without referring to any social and caritative aspects.

Eusebius: The Church History

More than a century later, we find a small reference to Stephen documented by Eusebius. Eusebius wrote his main work *The Church History,* during the early 4th century; the entire work was finished before the year 325.

86 Among others Barnett 1995, 56–57; Olson 2003, 23–24.

> *At this time the so-called sect of the Nicolaitans made its appearance and lasted for a very short time. Mention is made of it in the Apocalypse of John. They boasted that the author of their sect was Nicolaus, one of the deacons who, with Stephen, were appointed by the apostles for the purpose of ministering to the poor.* (Eusebius III, 29:1)

This chapter is in controversy with heretics. The previous chapter described the Cerinthus and in chapter 29, Eusebius attacked the sect of the Nicolaitans. Therein, Eusebius mentioned Stephen as a deacon in a similar way as Irenaeus and thus, he confirmed the belief from the early centuries that identified the seven men as deacons. The reference to Acts 6 is obvious.

However, the most interesting point is contained at the end of the quote. Eusebius stated that the deacons were "appointed by the apostles for the purpose of *ministering to the poor*." What does this sentence actually mean? The expression was not a direct reference to Acts 6 because the word 'poor' (πτωχός) is not mentioned there. There are two possible explanations. The first explanation is to connect 'the poor' with the widows in Acts 6:1. The second, and perhaps more adequate interpretation of this, is that Eusebius speaks about the early church in Jerusalem in a larger sense and refers to them as the poor ones. The same expression was used by Paul in Gal. 2:10 when he spoke about the Christian community in Jerusalem: "They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do." (Gal. 2:10 NRSV)

Both interpretations embody the idea that the first deacons, who were appointed by the apostles, were linked to the poor in Jerusalem. Unfortunately, Eusebius did not specify the contents of the ministerial work in any way. This means that we cannot be sure that the reference had any social or caritative function because the seven men in Acts were mainly preachers. Could it actually mean that, according to Eusebius, the seven men preached to, and served an audience which included poor people?

Saint Chrysostom

John Chrysostom was born in the middle of the fourth century (probably in 349) in Antioch. As an educated person and a great orator, he created a remarkable position in the church: he was ordained as a deacon in 381, as a presbyter in 386 and chosen in 398 as the archbishop of Constantinople. Due to controversies, he was later exiled to the Caucasus region.[87]

As part of his large collection of homilies, John Chrysostom also addressed Acts 6 (Homilies XIV and XV on Acts). He did not hesitate to call the choosing

87 Mayer & Allen 2000, 3–11.

of the seven men an ordination, but raised questions on what to name the seven men: were they deacons?

> *But what sort of rank these bore, and what sort of office they received, this is what we need to learn. Was it that of Deacons? And yet this is not the case in the Churches. But is it to the Presbyters that the management belongs? And yet at present there was no Bishop, but the Apostles only. Whence I think it clearly and manifestily follows, that neither Deacons nor Presbyters is their designation: but it was for this particular purpose that they were ordained.* (Hom. Act. XIV: 90–91)

The Antiochian exegetical tradition is well-known for the literal exposition of text. John Chrysostom's homilies followed this approach, offering a detailed and concrete analysis. He does not refer to the seven as deacons. This happened probably because the text in Acts 6 did not call the seven deacons, and consequently, Chrysostom clearly hesitated in using the title. On the other hand, Chrysostom seemed to be occupied by his contemporary conventions because he said that 'the management' (ἡ οἰκονομία) did not belong either to the deacons or to the presbyters. Leadership and especially financial control seemed to belong to those who were in higher positions in the church.

Instead of referring to the seven men as deacons, John Chrysostom chose to describe some of the tasks the seven performed. According to his understanding, the tasks were mostly connected to money collection and the needs of widows. Such tasks were not great enough tasks for a large group of ordained, so preaching, spiritual things and long journeys were mentioned among their duties in Chrysostom's homily.

In the homily of John Chrysostom, the choosing of the seven men was supported by two biblical quotes. The first is a reference to Moses' need to delegate some of his duties (Num. 11:14) and the second is a quote from Paul: "we should remember the poor" (Gal. 2:10). Obviously, the poor and the widows were more or less the same in Chrysostom's thoughts. To succeed in their duties, the seven men needed "superiority of the mind to bear the complainings of widows" (*Hom. Act.* XIV: 91) – a comment which is not free from sexist prejudices.

John Chrysostom lived in an ascetic way and, in his sermons, he was affected by the situation of the poor and also reminded of the Christian call to help those in need (*Hom. Matt.* 50:3–4). It was also said that Chrysostom supported the care of the sick by building hospitals "each of which he staffed with *two presbyters* and an unspecified number of doctors, cooks and other persons devoted to the ascetic life" (emphasis added).[88] In the context of John Chrysostom, there

88 Mayer & Allen 2000, 48.

were deacons, but not deacons who would have a special call and authorisation to serve the poor.

These well-documented sources did not, however, contain any specific information according to which the deacons and the poor, or the deacons and care of the poor could explicitly be linked together. The short reference by Eusebius mainly repeats the words of Acts but does not add any new interpretations.

The two councils: the summary of the period of the early church

We do not have much material from the first centuries, but the material we have follows the same pattern as earlier texts. After Irenaeus, some writers refer to the seven men as *diakonoi,* deacons. This view can also be easily confirmed by the documents of the ecumenical councils in Neocaesarea in the year 315 and Trullo (Constantinople) in the years 680–692.

One of the decisions of the council in Neocaesarea was as follows: Canon XV: "The deacons ought to be seven in number, according to the canon, even if the city be great. Of this you will be persuaded from the Book of the Acts."

This decision clearly connected Acts 6 to the diaconate and even confirmed that the number of deacons was fixed, in spite of the size of the church. The number was obviously understood to be holy and divinely determined. However, the decision was not strictly followed and – as can be imagined – it caused difficulties, especially in larger churches.

This decision was further discussed in the Council of Trullo. The council started in the year 680 and lasted for 12 years, 680–692. The same council also made decisions on the proper age of ordination, rights of the clergy to marry, and the lower status of *diakonoi* compared to presbyters.

The canonical text contained several details worth noticing in the "additional canons 2: Canon XVI." The motivation of the discussion was obviously caused by the earlier decision of Neoceasarea that had become too mechanical:

> *the synod of Neocæsarea in the canons which it put forth, determined that there ought to be canonically only seven deacons, even if the city be very large.*

Thus, the Trullo Council studied biblical and other ancient sources:

> *we, having fitted the mind of the fathers to the Apostles' words, find that they spoke not of those men who ministered at the Mysteries, but in the administration which pertains to the serving of tables.*

The study of Acts 6 was supported with the quote from John Chrysostom who had earlier disputed the identification of the seven men in Acts as deacons.

Finally, in the same text there is a highly relevant reference to Acts 6:

> *But on this account, therefore, we also announce that the aforesaid seven deacons are not to be understood as deacons who served at the Mysteries, according to the teaching before set forth, but that they were those to whom a dispensation was entrusted for the common benefit of those that were gathered together, who to us in this also were a type of philanthropy and zeal towards those who are in need.* (additional canons 2: Canon XVI)

The conclusion of the Trullo Council is important. It confirmed the traditional and general view which considered the deacons as liturgical figures: *deacons who served at the Mysteries*. To offer larger cities an escape from the decision that there can only be seven *diakonoi* in each church, the council gave a new exegesis of Acts 6. The new interpretation underscored the seven men in Acts 6 not as liturgical *diakonoi,* but persons with other functions: "to whom a dispensation was entrusted for the common benefit of those that were gathered together, who to us in this also were a type of philanthropy and zeal towards those who are in need." Within these words, we can probably find one of the first weak echoes of the caritative specialisation: "to whom a dispensation was entrusted for the common benefit." The questionable dimension of this finding is that the Trullo Council was not aiming to establish a caritative diaconate, but to do the contrary: the council wanted to open up more places for the liturgical *diakonoi* and thus argued for the idea of caritative functionaries in Acts 6. It is widely known that the role and function of all *diakonoi* withered in the period of late antiquity, and even more during the medieval era. The decision made by the Trullo council did not have any discernible effect during its own time.

Intermediate summary of the pre-reformation period

An intermediate summary can be made of the development of the pre-reformation period. Firstly, in the reception of Acts 6, the caritative diaconate hardly existed. It is often agreed that the seven men were understood as deacons (by Irenaeus, Eusebius, and the council of Neocaesarea), but at the same time, their caritative role was never articulated. However, Acts 6 also triggers some minor caritative references (in Eusebius, Chrysostom, and Trullo Council) but in varying ways. Nonetheless, these sources do not describe diaconate itself as a caritative ministry.

Conventional research paradigm has presumed that when the texts were speaking about deacons, they meant *caritative* deacons. As an example of this point of view, Olson summarises that deacons "were key figures in charitable work" but their role "in social welfare and property management" was no more retained after

the fourth or the fifth centuries.[89] Furthermore, Barnett clarifies that actually the decisive moment in the decline of the diaconate was the decision of Nicaea in 325.[90] In Canon 18, the synod decided that the offering of the Eucharist in the local church was authorised to the presbyters but denied to the deacons. Also, at this point, the caritative role of deacons is not the decisive question, but the decisive question deals with changes in the liturgy and hierarchy.

Thus, it seems that the reception history of Acts 6 does not support the traditional view: the caritative task of the seven men in Acts 6 is emphasised without any hesitation only in the later text in Trullo, not in the early ones (the short reference by Eusebius may be an exception, but it cannot be confirmed). This result leads to a logical question: does this prove that the caritative dimension did not belong to the spread of Christianity? However, drawing such a conclusion would clearly be a mistake. The care of the sick and poor are characteristic of Christianity and a key element in the rise of Christianity. Well-documented history underscores, however, that the call to love one's neighbour and to take care of the needy belonged to all Christians and to all ministries. (For a more detailed discussion about the social role of early Christianity, see chapter 2.) Thus, the deacons had no specific or exclusive caritative responsibility in the pre-Reformation era. To find an articulated description of social-caritative deacons, we must look at the Reformation period.

Analysis 2: The Reformation

The following analysis will show how decisive the reformation was for the caritative dimension of diaconate. This is evident also in the works of Hammann and Olson, but totally ignored by Barnett, who in his presentation, skipped from the early church to the renewal of modern diaconate.

Martin Luther

The writings of Luther

During the Reformation, traditional social order faced many changes. The roles of monasteries, hospitals, church and local municipalities needed new formulations.[91] In addition to these social changes, church order was reshaped. In the re-evaluation and re-formation, basic principals were drawn from the Bible as if it was the only decisive source for Christianity. The slogan was *sola scriptura*. On many occasions, the Reformation aimed to organise its practice according to the

89 Olson 2003, 71, 91.

90 Barnett 1995, 88–99.

91 McKee 1989, 47–60.

models used among the first Christians in Jerusalem as described in Acts.[92] This view also provided new solutions, according to which social welfare structures were organised. Thus, "Luther went back to Scripture and to the early church to suggest that deacons play a role in poor relief."[93] However, in reality, the Bible was never read alone, but was interpreted within a specific social context.

In the early years of the Reformation, Martin Luther protected the practice that every local congregation should be able to choose its own ministry. Deacons were mentioned in that connection as a part of the clergy without any references to social issues, but solely as preachers and assistants at the ministry of sacraments.

> *So then we clearly learn from the Apostle that it should be the custom for every town to choose out of the congregation a learned and pious citizen, entrust to him the office of the ministry, and support him at the expense of the community, leaving him free choice to marry or not. He should have with him several priests or deacons, who might also be married or not, as they chose, to help him rule the people of the community by means of preaching and the sacraments, as is still the practice in the Greek Church.*
> Martin Luther (23.6.1520; WA 6, 440, 30–441, 2)

Later in the same year, on the 6th of October, 1520, Martin Luther produced the text called *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, which contains a well-known reference to Acts 6:

> *Let everyone, therefore, who knows himself to be a Christian, be assured of this, and apply it to himself, – that we are all priests, and there is no difference between us; that is to say, we have the same power in respect to the Word and all the sacraments. (Ordination, the Rite of Choosing Preachers) However, no one may make use of this power except by the consent of the community or by the call of a superior. For what is the common property of all, no individual may arrogate to himself, unless he be called. And therefore, this sacrament of ordination, if it have any meaning at all, is nothing else than a certain rite whereby one is called to the ministry of the Church. Furthermore, the priesthood is properly nothing but the ministry of the Word, mark you, of the Word – not of the law, but of the – Gospel. And the diaconate is not the ministry of reading the Gospel or the Epistle, as is the present practice, but the ministry of distributing the Church's alms to the poor, so that the priests may be relieved of the burden of temporal matters and may give themselves more freely to prayer and the Word. For this was the purpose of the institution of the diaconate, as*

92 Arffman 2008,76–84.

93 Olson 2003, 109.

> *we read in Acts 6:4. Whoever, therefore, does not know or preach the Gospel, is not only not a priest or bishop, but he is a plague of the Church, who under the false title of priest or bishop –in sheep's clothing, forsooth – oppresses the Gospel and plays the wolf in the Church.* (WA 6, 566, 26–567)

This text has often been recognised as the Lutheran doctrinal statement on how to organise a diaconate and how to consider its function. For Luther, the ministerial structure seemed to be twofold: pastors were responsible for preaching and deacons were expected to work for "distributing the Church's alms to the poor." We might want to ask -- from where did this interpretation originate? For Luther, the answer was clear: from the Bible, from which the diaconate had its origins in Acts 6. Luther even provided concrete grounds for the division of work: the priests needed time for the preaching of the gospel, that is, to be "relieved from temporal burdens." In 1520 life was certainly full of "burdens" because on many occasions, the Bull was issued by Rome (on the 15th of June, 1520) and canon law was burnt by Luther (on the 10th of December, 1520).[94] However, it is important to notice that the question of the diaconate is mentioned only in connection with other issues and not as a main theme.

Similar views can be discovered in Martin Luther's sermon three years later (on 26th December 1523). On this occasion, Luther also complained about the lack of capable persons to act as pastors and as social caritative deacons. (WA 12, 693, 33–694.6) These occasional ideas were not included in the instructions Luther later wrote for local churches.

Luther's interpretation connecting deacons and the giving of alms to the poor was based on a combination of elements ranging from traditional to a more contemporary need. Among the traditional elements was the idea of Irenaeus: the seven men in Acts 6 were identified as deacons. In addition, the canon from the Council of Trullo may have had a role of its own. Luther's interpretation also included his own needs and questions in his daily life. In October 1520, the local town of Wittenberg was processing decisions on social issues. The main questions were: How does one organise the roles of church and town? Who is going to plan the social order and what will be done for the local poor?

Lutheran practice

In order to understand the context of these questions, we need to briefly study the historical situation. In Wittenberg, the social situation was challenging. The traditional ways of taking care of the poor were not working and a great deal of the population suffered because of wars, diseases and other causes. In some calculations, it has been evaluated that one half of the German population was living

94 Chadwick 1964, 54–55.

close to the minimum level of survival, or that the survival of one tenth of the urban population was based on help from others. One recurring theme of debate was whether or not wandering beggars should be allowed. This attack was also targeted against the Franciscan brotherhood. Luther was strongly against the begging culture and especially strongly against the custom of wandering around and living off begging. In Luther's thinking, the local community, which was also the local faith community, constituted a communion of people who were responsible for others. According to Luther's idea, the new evangelic faith was an answer to several needs. He thought that pure and right faith would create a willingness to help those in need without any specific orders or laws.[95]

One further solution (accepted on 24th January, 1522 in Wittenberg town) was to create one single collection. All church funds were to be collected in a joint fund (*gemainer kasten*). With these resources, the local community was expected to take care of those who were unable to earn money themselves because of age or sickness. This also included poor orphans – especially girls (exposed to the danger of prostitution) – and everyone else who lived in poverty. Furthermore, poor but talented children were supported in their education. In Wittenberg, begging was forbidden and the orders were strict for those who were able to work: you either worked or you were expelled. It was hoped that life in the town would be organised according to the will of God and in imitation of the early church.[96] However, the practical agents organising the fund were not deacons. The fund was in the charge of two members of the magistrates' court, two representatives of the people and the scribe.[97]

The revolutionary character of this model was an appeal to joint responsibility. It would be anachronistic to say that care of the poor was given to the secular municipality, because the town and the church were constituted of one and the same community. Even though the magistrate was in charge of the fund, financial responsibility belonged to the local church that tried to follow "the model of the Jerusalem church described in Acts."[98]

Occasionally, Luther's idea about the new roles of deacons was discussed, but without any lasting effects. For example, in Braunsweig in 1528, the leading pastor Johannes Bugenhagen, wanted to restore the use of deacons and wanted to make them responsible for relief of the poor.[99] In Braunsweig, this led to the practice that the people who worked with the poor chest were called 'deacons'.[100]

95 Owen 1964, 67–71; Hammann 2003, 190–197; Olson 2003, 109–114.

96 Arffman 2008, 76–80.

97 Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des 16. Jahrhunderts, 1:1, 697.

98 Arffman 2008, 84. Translation of the quote by the present author.

99 Olson 2003, 114–117; Arffman 2008, 193–195.

100 Olson 2003, 115.

The new order, introduced in Wittenberg, was also copied and applied in several versions in many other evangelical towns. The order did not contain the idea of caritative deacons. Often, orders were accepted with hopes for a better future. However, the general development was not very promising. On the contrary, several funds faced difficulties. There were constant debates on the misuse of funds, the lack of resources, and also the lack of willingness to give money to the poor. In Wittenberg, this actually led to an open conflict between Luther and the congregation, and this was followed by Luther's refusal to continue his preaching activity for a while. During the following decades, the responsibility for relief funds to benefit the poor was more and more given to the local city administration, although these funds were part of the church finance.[101]

As a conclusion to Luther's use of Acts 6, the following aspects are also worth noticing. First of all, there was not only one definitive way of interpretation. On the one hand, Luther wanted to introduce deacons as caritative workers and change their existing profile, and on the other hand, the office of the caritative deacons was ignored in practice and the challenge created by poverty was met by general collections in the communities, and practical tasks were given to the laypersons and representatives of the local cities. Luther's view of the deacons was limited to a few texts and not one of them had a special focus on the diaconate, but the theme was more or less secondary. This attitude can be seen also in the practice of Lutheran areas.

> *Terminology associated with ministry and the diaconate within Lutheranism was complicated by the fact that, besides being associated with social welfare, the word deacon came to designate an assistant minister in Germany. [...] As with so many other practical issues, Luther and Lutherans seemed to care more about the substance of matters than outward forms. The crucial issue in social welfare was providing for the poor, not the title of those who did that work.*[102]

John Calvin

The writings of Calvin

In the span of less than fifty years, social issues lost their importance among the local Lutheran churches. Martin Luther died in 1546. During the same time period or "the generation after Luther,"[103] the impact of John Calvin was increasing. Many of Luther's views were transferred to Calvin by Martin Bucer,[104] who played an important role as a mediator between Luther and Calvin. Martin Bucer

101 Arffman 2008, 188–190, 298–306.

102 Olson 2003, 117.

103 Chadwick 1964, 83.

104 McKee 1984, 153; Hammann 2003, 241–261; Olson 2003, 120–121.

continued, and also developed Luther's views. He tried to establish a ministry of deacons in Strasbourg but was rejected.[105] According to McKee, the new interpretation was introduced by Calvin and this was done in a unique way in the reception history of Acts 6: "Calvin is both a creator and a key representative of the Reformed exegesis of Acts six."[106]

In his writing entitled *Institutes* (*Christianae religionis institution* 1536/1559), Calvin provided an important new analysis of deacons. The theme was already included in the first version of this text, but only the final version (1559) includes the noun "diaconia," however, in a very extreme way: in the midst of the Latin-only text, there is one word in Greek.

> *Institutes 4.3.9.*
> *9. The deacons*
> *The care of the poor was committed to deacons, of whom two classes are mentioned by Paul in the Epistle to the Romans, "He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity;" "he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness," (Rom. 12: 8.) As it is certain that he is here speaking of public offices of the Church, there must have been two distinct classes. If I mistake not, he in the former clause designates deacons, who administered alms; in the latter, those who had devoted themselves to the care of the poor and the sick. Such were the widows of whom he makes mention in the Epistle to Timothy, (1 Tim. 5: 10.) For there was no public office which women could discharge save that of devoting themselves to the service of the poor. If we admit this, (and it certainly ought to be admitted,) there will be two classes of deacons, the one serving the Church by administering the affairs of the poor; the other, by taking care of the poor themselves. For although the term διακονία has a more extensive meaning, Scripture specially gives the name of deacons to those whom the Church appoints to dispense alms, and take care of the poor; constituting them as it were stewards of the public treasury of the poor. Their origin, institution, and office, is described by Luke, (Acts 6: 3.) When a murmuring arose among the Greeks, because in the administration of the poor their widows were neglected, the apostles, excusing themselves that they were unable to discharge both offices, to preach the word and serve tables, requested the multitude to elect seven men of good reports to whom the office might be committed. Such deacons as the Apostolic Church had, it becomes us to have after her example.*[107]

105 Hammann 2003, 262–293; Arffman 2008, 307.

106 McKee 1984, 153.

107 See also Institutes 4.5.15; 4.5.5 and 4.19.32.

Furthermore, Calvin also interpreted Acts 6 in his sermon:

> *Because, as soon as the apostles knew that murmuring was beginning in the church, they called together all the multitude of the faithful to elect deacons (as they called them). This word simply means "minister." Those who have some task of serving in the church, whether of distributing alms or preaching, are rightly called ministers, and all apostles had this name in common. And all those who have the task of administering in the church are rightly called ministers of the Word of God, but the church names "deacons" without adding modifiers to the word, those who are charged with the poor.*[108]

Without any hesitation, Calvin articulated the existence of the specific ministry of the deacon. A deacon was seen as the one who takes care of the poor. There were two categories of deacons: those who concentrated on the administration of alms, and those who worked among the poor. The division of deacons into these two categories was based on a single quote from Romans.[109]

A major step towards this conclusion was that Calvin associated 1Tim 3 with Acts 6 in the same way as the wide consensus of other protestants and, unlike all (with one exception) catholic theologians. Thus, for Calvin, Acts offered a story about the origin of the diaconate and 1 Timothy confirmed the permanent position of the deacons.[110] This happened because "Calvin believed that in organizing the Church at Geneva he must organize it in imitation of the primitive Church."[111]

The most interesting part of Calvin's text is the following:

> *For although the term διακονία has a more extensive meaning, Scripture specially gives the name of deacons to those whom the Church appoints to dispense alms, and take care of the poor; constituting them as it were stewards of the public treasury of the poor. Their origin, institution, and office, is described by Luke, (Acts 6: 3.)*

With this statement, Calvin strengthened the development that already partially existed among the reformation churches. Like Luther, Calvin also referred to Acts 6 as the moment of the ordination of the first deacons, but did this with specific terms: *origin, institution* and *office*. These specific terms clarify that Calvin understood deacons as something more than occasional helpers of the poor.

How did Calvin define the diaconal ministry? In the office of the deacon, he pointed out five characteristics: it was a question of a special ministry (not a

108 Sermon on Acts 6:1–3 (fol. 184); translation by McKee 1984, 151–152.

109 McKee 1984, 185–204.

110 McKee 1984, 159–184.

111 Chadwick 1964, 83.

lay duty), diaconate was supposed to be a permanent ministry, the ministry was received in ordination (laying on of hands), the major tasks of deacons were the management of relief to the poor or direct caritative acts, deacons were closely related to worship and in addition, the ministry was also accessible to women. These were the central elements in the theology of Calvin – but they were realised in Geneva only partially, as we will note below.[112]

With these formulations, Calvin obviously created a new office in the church. Compared to community based funds (chests) with boards of trustees in the local Lutheran churches during the previous two decades, the decisive difference is to speak about an office of caritative deacons. In the Lutheran churches, deacons had been either part of the clergy (as in the Catholic Church) or lay people. Calvin was the first person in the entire history of the church to connect the deacon's permanent office to the local church and, more specifically, to work with the poor. "Calvin concludes that the Lukan narrative is more than a story; it is prescriptive for the church order for all time. The office of deacon – the deacon who cares for the poor – is a permanent and necessary part of organized Christian ministry as love, *caritas*, is an expression of Christian faith."[113]

The following small detail is an important indicator of the development. In the middle of his text, John Calvin used a Greek word διακονία to describe the office and the work of the church amongst the poor. The concept 'diaconia' refers to the collecting of alms and the care of the poor. This use is not common in texts written by Calvin and seems to be unique even during the entire Reformation. The common protestant way is to speak about the chest of the poor, or relief of the poor and also to use the word 'deacon'. Furthermore, it is worth noticing that the early versions of *Institutes* did not yet include the word διακονία. This is probably one more example of the development process.

At this point, it is not possible to offer a proper analysis of the origin, development and reception of this concept during the 16th century and after. Based on the evidence analysed in this chapter, it appears very probable that Calvin had an important, if not a decisive role in this process, yet the word διακονία did not become a standard concept before the 19th century. This question will be discussed more deeply in the next chapter.

Reformed practice: deacons

However, the reality is that Geneva did not follow the plans of Calvin. The social reform of the city was already at least partly fixed, and Calvin was forced to apply his theological programme to fit in with the reality of Geneva. When Calvin returned to Geneva in 1541, there were already (reformed) deacons. Obviously,

112 Hammann 2003, 296–297; Olson 2003, 123–129.

113 McKee 1984, 156–157.

the city and its leaders were reluctant to follow Calvin's ideas as a whole. Especially the ordination ceremony, female deacons and also the liturgical function of the deacons came under strong criticism.[114]

The work of the deacons was clearly focused on social services and welfare. The study *Calvin and Social Welfare* written by Jeannine E. Olson (1989) offers a well-documented analysis of a specifically reformed social action in Geneva during the Reformation. *Bourse française* was a welfare fund established to support especially the French (religious) refugees in Geneva, but it also sponsored the missionary actions of the Reformed church and distributed Bibles and religious books. The church fund was administered by the reformed deacons, and its archives gives a nuanced, albeit selective view, of the life of deacons, the poor in Geneva and also of reformed theology. An interesting detail is that the fund (which was controlled by the church) functioned both within the church and in society, and the local city paid the salaries of the pastors and the maintenance of church buildings in Geneva. Charity as an act of love was motivated as a response to God's love – unlike the earlier catholic view, which considered the giving of alms as a merit for eternal life.[115]

Documentation in the account book started in 1550, but the origin of the fund probably dates back to the year 1545. The last meeting of the deacons of the *Bourse* was held on the 14th of September, 1849. The early years of the long history of the *Bourse* illustrate the existence of the deacons in Geneva. They were elected by the local church and their number varied. Among the best known deacons is Jean Budé, a businessman, leader of the immigrant French community, and a deacon. He kept the account books of the fund for more than two decades and offered plenty of valuable information about donors, deacons and recipients. Financial support of the *Bourse* was aimed at helping the refugees who were not able to work, were sick, lacked food or clothes, were handicapped, orphaned or had been widowed. The fund also gave loans and supported school education. In addition, there were paid part-time workers in the fund – like apothecaries, barber-surgeons and doctors.[116]

The poor who received help were expected to behave properly, and if possible, integrate into society and, above all, be good believers. A person who received help was thus expected to be worth the aid: to act morally in the right way, fear God and generally succeed in life and in helping others. In Geneva, other ethnic groups also had their own funds -- the English, Italian and German-speakers were each expected to be supported by their own respective funds.[117]

114 Hammann 2003, 277–289.

115 Olson 1989, 168–170, 176.

116 Olson 1989, 173–176.

117 Olson 1989, 177, 183.

The study of the practice of the reformed church in Geneva illustrates the existence and reality of the deacons. They had a prominent and effective position in Geneva as the pioneers of social work and welfare. They had a clear connection to the reformed church, but only partial ordination and liturgical function – diverging from the plans of Calvin.

Summary and conclusions

This survey was based on the analysis of selected writings from different periods of time. Many other texts could also have been included, but these examples illustrate well the main lines of the reception history of Acts 6. As a summary of the analysis, the following steps or stages can be noted. The first stage was the identification of the seven men as deacons. This was done already in the second century by Irenaeus and probably the majority agreed with this during the first centuries. At that time, there was no connection to caritative duties but, on the contrary, διάκονος was a liturgical figure. An exception to the agreement was presented by John Chrysostom who recognised the caritative dimensions of Acts 6, and due to these observations, *did not* call the seven men deacons. The second stage of development involved the identification of deacons as caritative functionaries. This took place partly already in Trullo at the end of the seventh century, and somehow also in the texts of Martin Luther in 1520. These ideas were not, however, realised but were left as theoretical speculations. Finally, the third stage of development saw the establishment of the permanent caritative ministry of deacons. This was reached in the writing of John Calvin in 1536/1559, but the realisation of this new model took place only partially in 16th century Geneva.

The whole reception process is cumulative and, thus, it is not possible to understand the stages without a conception of the previous steps. During the process, the understanding of Acts 6 changed in a remarkable way and showed how deeply interpretation was affected within each historical context.

The social reality during the Reformation required new solutions because the earlier welfare structures did not function anymore and, on the other hand, new ideas related to adopting the models of the apostolic church offered attractive tools for planning. In Acts 6, the social problems were reflected in the daily needs, and a conflict between the ethnic groups, and the same questions were dealt with in Geneva as well. This was an ideal background for the new plans: a connection to the biblical text, the cumulative history of the interpretation in the church, and the contemporary social needs in Geneva made the new interpretation of Acts 6 both trustworthy and needed.

Without the role of Calvin, it would be difficult to understand the later development of the reception history of Acts 6. At this time, it is not possible to

provide an analysis of the further development. Major trajectories are described in the introductory chapter.[118]

The 19th century slogans, which demanded a return to the biblical ministry of the deacon, cannot be explained without the impact of John Calvin and development within the reformed churches. The study of the reception history underscores the great impact of the Reformation and explains the tension between the results of current biblical scholarship and the traditional paradigm about the social-caritative ministry of deacons. For the time before the Reformation, we do not have adequate evidence on the existence of the specific social-caritative ministry of diaconia. This does not mean that the deacons never did anything caritative, but that the focus of their ministry was not caritative. Obviously, this dimension has been strongly overestimated in the traditional view. Certainly, Luther, Bucer and Calvin affected the development, but if we are to make a decision based on the existing evidence, most probably the real fatherhood belongs to John Calvin.

Often the diaconia and diaconal ministry have been understood to be more ecumenical and less confessional. Clarifying the differences between the Lutheran and Reformed concepts and practices of diaconal ministry will be one of the future tasks. According to this analysis, the origin of the diaconal ministry is strongly interwoven in the history and the theology of the Reformed Church, whereas the Lutheran Church did not create the office of deacon in the Reformation, but gave authority over welfare chests to the magistrate, the representatives of the city. Further studies are required to clarify how deeply these different welfare strategies reflect the differences of theology between the Reformed and Lutheran churches.

This analysis also explains how it was possible to introduce the new concept of the ministry of diaconia in the 19th century. Following the interpretation of the New Testament texts by Luther and Calvin, the 19th century diaconia movement projected the life situation of its time onto the ancient texts. Thus, the return to the biblical ministry of diaconia actually turned out to be a reinterpretation of biblical and early church writings. The ministry of the deacon in the early church was not invented by the modern movement, but this movement gave a totally new meaning to the ancient Greek concept and additionally launched a new way to use the *diakonia*-derivative vocabulary. When we use the words 'diaconia' or 'deacon' in the modern context, we should remember that they contain several layers of meanings that also contradict each other.[119] An awareness of this hopefully helps us not to assimilate these meanings with each other, but instead leads us to be more precise in our articulations about the diaconate.

118 For further development, see also Olson 2003, 151–248.

119 Regarding the variety of contemporary concepts existing among the diaconia workers in Nordic context see Ryökäs 1990 and Bäckström & Bromander & Carlwe & Forsberg 1994.

5 THE CONVENTIONAL THEORY ON THE ORIGIN OF DIACONIA. AN ANALYSIS OF TRADITIONAL ARGUMENTS

Introduction

This study has analysed the debated theme from several viewpoints thus far. Earlier chapters have given arguments for a major transformation of the paradigm. At this point, one relevant piece of information is needed in order to offer a more balanced study: an opportunity for the classical paradigm to defend arguments for a conventional view. This chapter aims to do just that.

The task and method of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, the analysis will describe how the three major studies written by J.M. Barnett (1995), Gottfried Hammann (2003), and Jeannine Olson (2003) argue for the social-caritative origin of diaconate and diaconia in the early church. Secondly, the analysis will evaluate the historical arguments used in their presentation. In particular, the analysis will focus on primary sources from pre-Nicene Christianity (before 325 CE). This chapter continues the discussion opened in earlier sections of this work and complements these with a detailed and critical argumentative analysis of the traditional theory.

J.M. Barnett, The Diaconate. A Full and Equal Order

The New Testament

The work of J.M. Barnett was originally published in 1981 and was followed by four reprints. In the preface of the 1995 revised edition, the writer notes that the book has become "a standard text and reference work in many seminaries and diaconal training programs" and is "the most thorough, accurate, and complete work that has been done." Although the approach aims to be ecumenical, the writer does not hide his Anglican background: J.M. Barnett was rector of Trinity Episcopal Church (and by 1995, already former rector).

Barnett offers a detailed analysis of the early church with a large number of written sources, partly quoted and mostly with given references. The aim of the work is to give access to all relevant ancient documents connected to the academic discussion. In the revised edition, Barnett makes clear that he is also aware of Collins' study *Diakonia. Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources.* This book is briefly mentioned on one occasion in relation to New Testament themes. At this point, Barnett speaks on central themes such as deacons being "sent" to "serve." Barnett seems to agree with Collins, saying that "Collins is correct in his observation that

diakonia has been narrowly defined as charitable works, the modern conceptualization of *diakonia* is inadequate. – – The deficiency in this narrow conceptualization is apparent from the use of the word with widely varied meanings in the New Testament and the writings of the fathers and the history of diaconal functions in the early Church."[120]

After this rather positive recognition, Barnett does *not,* however, refer to Collins again in the actual analysis of primary sources, which gives the impression that the new results, after all, did not have an influence in reality, and that he was only paying Collins' study common academic lip service. This seems obvious, because in the same connection, Barnett simply follows the unquestioned traditional line by saying that "the word *diakonos* (deacon) literally means a servant and in particular, a waiter."[121]

Barnett divides his presentation into three chapters: The Diaconate in the New Testament, Age of the Apostolic Fathers and From the Post-Apostolic Age to the Constantine Era. In general terms, the pre-Nicene period in Barnett's analysis was "a golden age" of diaconate. [122] This refers to the great importance of deacons in the church, as well as the large number of deacons that existed before the decline of the post-Nicene period.

The major texts in the New Testament are: Acts 6:1–6, Phil. 1:1 and 1 Tim. 3:8–13. What is Barnett's conclusion based on these texts? The seven men in Acts 6 "were not deacons"[123] and verse Phil. 1:1 is the first reference to the deacons in the New Testament, but "we cannot know the exact nature of their offices at this date, c. 60."[124] The passage in 1 Tim. 3, a text from "the later strata of the New Testament," already presupposes the office of deacon without question and recognizes one bishop and several deacons in one local church. The passage uses requirements borrowed from the (non-Christian) Hellenistic world.[125]

It is interesting that although 1 Tim. 3. does not refer to the poor, Barnett argues that there existed "the special responsibility of deacons in connection with the poor and other pastoral concerns of the Church." Moreover, the deacons were "not assistants of the bishops" but "rather 'dispensers of the Church's charities: they served the poor and sick.'"[126] There is practically no evidence in the New Testament texts for this assumed profile of deacons; it probably originates from a traditional pre-understanding.

120 Barnett 1995, 21.

121 Barnett 1995, 19.

122 Barnett 1995, 43.

123 Barnett 1995, 33.

124 Barnett 1995, 36.

125 Barnett 1995, 36–38.

126 Barnett 1995, 40–41. Barnett quotes Burton Scott Easton, The Pastoral Epistles, 1947.

Early Patristic period

Barnett concludes that during the following centuries, that is: during "the golden age of diaconate, the diaconate developed – – [and] deacons flourished in numbers and in importance. They oversaw the pastoral care of the Church. They were administrators of the Church's charities. They were assistants of its bishops, often succeeding them in office. They had a major role in the Church's liturgies. They were a great symbol of the servant ministry to which the Church has been called by Christ."[127]

What are the essential ancient documents Barnett uses in his analysis? The following texts provide crucial evidence in this case.

The first major text is 1 Clement 42; 44, which confirms the existence of deacons besides bishops but does not reveal much more. Barnett also noticed that: "As valuable as 1 Clement is, it does not shed any light upon the function of the deacon at that time."[128]

The second major text is found in the Shepherd of Hermas: Vision 3.5.1; Parable 9.26.2. The Shepherd of Hermas complains about the bad behavior of deacons and accuses them of misusing the church funds instead of taking care of the poor. This indirect link between deacons and the poor is the first connection so far. However, what the text actually tells us is not so clear.

> *They that have the spots are deacons that exercised their office ill, and plundered the livelihood of widows and orphans, and made gain for themselves from the ministrations which they had received to perform* (Sim. 9.26.2 [103]).[129]

On the other hand, the same ancient document, Shepherd of Hermas, reminds us in the next passage that actually *the bishops* had a responsibility to help the poor. This is left unnoticed by Barnett when he concludes that "the care of the poor and especially of widows and orphans was a special and major concern of the Church in the ancient world, and here as elsewhere the evidence shows that the deacons had direct responsibility in this work."[130] It is very difficult to estimate how direct the responsibility of the deacons actually was. This cannot be clarified solely on the basis of the Shepherd of Hermes because of the narrow textual evidence. This question is also important because on two clearly articulated occasions, the Shepherd of Hermas speaks about care of the poor as a basic calling for every believer, without any link to deacons (Sim. 1 [50:8]; Sim. 5:3 [56:7]).

127 Barnett 1995, 43.

128 Barnett 1995, 46.

129 Shepherd of Hermas, trans. J.B. Lightfoot (http://www.earlychristianwritings.com).

130 Barnett: 1995, 47.

A short passage in Didache 15 includes a reference that bishops and deacons are expected to "perform the service of the prophets and teachers." In Barnett's view, the text mainly speaks about their catechetical role.[131] In the letters of Ignatius some passages are related to the deacons. Good examples are found in the letters to the Trallians 2 and to the Philadephians 10. According to Barnett, these two references are examples showing that deacons exercised liturgical practices, and also preached.[132]

Barnett quotes Polycarp (Phil. 5:2) on the requirement that deacons be blameless servants of the church. All qualifications are related to character and follow the guidelines found in 1 Timothy 3.[133] For some reason, Barnett does not refer to another passage in Polycarp (Phil. 6:1), which speaks about the presbyters and their duties to take care of orphans and the poor.

> *And the presbyters also must be compassionate, merciful towards all men,* ***turning back the sheep that are gone astray, visiting all the infirm, not neglecting a widow or an orphan or a poor man: but providing always for that which is honorable in the sight of God and of men****, abstaining from all anger, respect of persons, unrighteous judgment, being far from all love of money, not quick to believe anything against any man, not hasty in judgment, knowing that we all are debtors of sin.*[134]

In his summary of the apostolic fathers, Barnett however, concludes:

> *[D]eacons served charitable and other needs of the Church and participated liturgically at the Eucharist. The deacons had liturgical and administrative functions of their own. They were a full order with leiturgia and diakonia, which were distinctive. These functions were firmly bound together and were increasingly not to be interchanged with those of other orders.*[135]

In the critical analysis, we can confirm the liturgical part of the summary. However, to say that (caritative) *diakonia* was a distinctive function of deacons goes far beyond the primary sources. Actually, we have to ask whether the Greek term "diakonia" in the meaning of caritative function is appropriate at all, since it does not appear in the texts as a fixed concept referring to the church's social-caritative responsibility for the poor, the sick and others in a vulnerable position.

131 Barnett: 1995, 48.

132 Barnett: 1995, 48–52.

133 Barnett: 1995, 53.

134 The Epistle of Polycarp, trans. J.B. Lightfoot (http://www.earlychristianwritings.com).

135 Barnett 1995, 54.

The second major collection of early church documents in Barnett's work is that of the post-apostolic writers, among whom Barnett has chosen half a dozen early Christian writers. The most important text is *Didascalia Apostolorum*, a guidebook for local church leaders in Syria (c. 220–250). The other six texts are: Justin Martyr (Apol. 67), who includes the information that the Eucharist [the consecrated elements] was "sent to the absent by deacons;"[136] Irene of Lyons, who refers to the seven in Acts 6 as deacons (Against Heresies 3.12.10);[137] the writing of Pseudo-Clementines (Epistle of Clement to James), which makes deacons the "eyes of the bishop," peacemakers in meetings and informants about all those who are sick and absent;[138] Tertullian who gives instructions on how deacons can baptize under the bishop's authority (On Baptism 17);[139] Hippolytus who refers to deacon ordination in Apostolic Tradition 9.1, 2–4, and includes some other liturgical tasks;[140] and the Apocalypse of Paul (36), which has a passage about the people who will be damned, among them also deacons who "committed fornications and did not do right in the sight of God." According to Barnett's interpretation: "The deacons took for themselves offerings intended for the poor, especially widows and orphans."[141]

Based on all earlier texts, we can easily agree with the following: there were deacons in the early church, they probably had an important role along with the bishop, and their major tasks were connected to the liturgy. There is only one indirect reference to social and caritative tasks (Shepherd of Hermas). However, Barnett's conclusion is totally different. According to him: "The poor and needy had always been a major concern of the Church and were a special responsibility of the deacons. Although this ministry of service, by the middle of the third century, was probably not emphasized as much as previously, it was and remained one of the Church's great concerns."[142] In Barnett's work there seems to be an obvious contradiction between primary sources and implications made.

The ancient documents analysed above were letters, visions or examples of Christian teaching. The following document in Barnett's work differs from the previous ones: *Didascalia Apostolorum*[143] is a kind of handbook for the local church and its functionaries. Thus, it probably covers the central tasks performed by deacons, and raises expectations of a specific description regarding how deacons served the poor and needy in the early church.

136 Barnett 1995, 55.

137 Barnett 1995, 56–57.

138 Barnett 1995, 57–58.

139 Barnett 1995, 58–60.

140 Barnett 1995, 60–62.

141 Barnett 1995, 65.

142 Barnett 1995, 66.

143 Barnett refers to the edition of Connelly (Didascalia Apostolorum: The Syriac Version. Translated by R.Hugh Connelly. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929).

According to Barnett, *Didascalia Apostolorum* allows local churches to appoint an adequate number of deacons, unlike in "Rome and some other places where it was fixed at seven."[144] Barnett refers to several passages in *Didascalia Apostolorum* (2.26, 28, 54; 4.5; 3.6, 10, 12–13). Some passages speak about deacons as well as a group of deaconesses who have their own profiled tasks. Deaconesses were needed in cases where male deacons were not able to act and participate (anointing women, baptism of women and visiting female Christians).[145]

The tasks mentioned in *Didascalia Apostolorum* as those performed by deacons included duties in the liturgy, aiding the bishop during baptisms, assisting the bishop in all possible ways in administration, almsgiving, and visitation. "The deacons should be like the bishops in their actions, working yet harder than he" (*Didascalia Apostolorum* 16:9).[146]

The rather surprising result is that passages regarding the deacons mostly focus on liturgical instructions. Even in cases where widows and the poor are mentioned, the responsible actors may include the bishops, the presbyters, the widows or the deacons – not exclusively deacons. For some unknown reason, Barnett does not note this fact but underscores that "[t]he third century was a period in which the dignity and importance of the deacon increased at the expense of the presbyter."[147] Such a conclusion is possible because *Didascalia Apostolorum* describes a variety of tasks performed by the deacons, including an active role in the Eucharist and baptism as well as during the liturgy. One problematic aspect is that Barnett did not reflect in any way on why the deacons were busy with the sacraments but inactive or without any specific assignment in regards to the poor. This result is contrary to his grand theory.

Moreover, Barnett points out that the deacons played an important role during the fourth century, and did this in full accordance with the lines of *Didascalia Apostolorum*. This is evident in the texts of the Council of Elvira (c. 306), where Canon 77 gives the right to baptize to deacons,[148] and also in the texts of the Council of Ancyra (c. 314), which can be understood as a reference to deacons' preaching.[149]

144 Barnett 1995, 67.

145 The reference to women deaconesses is not a sign of rising early feminism but an ascetic way of living which also included strict attitudes towards the opposite sex. Thus the interaction between men and women was interpreted as negative and unwanted.

146 Translation Stewart-Sykes 2009, 194.

147 Barnett 1995, 71.

148 Barnett 1995, 74.

149 Barnett 1995, 80–81.

Intermediate summary

In the first third of his work, Barnett mentions a large number of documents which can be used as evidence of the active role of deacons in the Pre-Nicene church. Their activity in the liturgy and delivery of the sacraments cannot be denied. However, Barnett fails to offer more than indirect hints when connecting deacons with the poor or to prove that care of the poor was the deacons' special duty. The traditional theory is so influential that Barnett does not even raise this question, although evidence based on ancient documents is available.

Gottfried Hammann, Die Geschichte der christlichen Diakonie. Praktizierte Nächstenliebe von der Antike bis zur Reformationszeit

The original version of Hamman's study was published in France in 1994. The German translation in 2003 included a revision by the author in co-operation with Gerhard Philipp Wolf. Nearly half of the work is dedicated to a study of the Reformation and particularly the early development of the Reformed Church. The life and work of Martin Bucer and John Calvin play a central role in the analysis. Dr. Gottfried Hammann is a professor of Church History at the University of Neuchâtel in Switzerland. Connections to the Reformed Church can also be noted in the structure of the work: the story of diaconia begins with early Christianity and the goal of the work is the restoration of diaconia in the Reformed Church.[150]

Unlike Barnett, Hammann focuses not only on the diaconate, but aims to describe broader streams of Christianity, speaking about "Christian diaconia" (christliche Diakonie) as a collective act of the whole church, which also includes the work of the ministry. "Love of neighbour" (Nächstenliebe) in the subtitle indicates that the phenomenon is broad and difficult to precisely determine. Actually, Hammann gives a definition of diaconia only in a footnote: "The term diaconia is used in this work to refer to the collective responsibility of the church in relation to church activities [Offering], social support and the acts of love of neighbour, which have been realised in different ways throughout history." In the same manner, Hammann clarifies that in his work "deacon" (Diakon) refers to a

150 Hammann 2003, 13. The first lines of the book make this aim clear: "Wo liegen die besonderen Grundlagen der christlichen Diakonie und deren historischer Ausübung? Welche Bedeutung hatte Jenes Amt in der Geschichte und in gemeinsamen Tradition der abendländischen Kirchen, bevor die Reformatoren des 16. Jahrhunderts den Stellenwert der Diakonie neu definierten und die ursprüngliche Ausübung wiederherzustellen versuchten?"

(clerical or lay) functionary of diaconia and in a similar way "diaconal ministry" (Diakoneamt) refers to the ordained diaconal ministry of the church. [151]

Like Barnett, Hammann refers[152] to Collins' study (1990), but neither an analysis of the results, nor a discussion about it is included. The new challenge against the traditional paradigm is simply ignored.

In the analyses, Hammann more or less follows the list of texts which are mentioned by Barnett. For Hammann, the crucial text is Acts 6:1–6 because it gives him guidelines for the entire interpretation. Hammann dates Acts to c. 90 CE and interprets the text as the key story of early Christianity. He argues that the growing needs of caritative service led to the dual task of ministry: "service (*diakonia*) of the word and service (*diakonia*) at the table." Hammann concludes that although the word deacon was not mentioned, it was somehow in the mind of the writer of Acts, who simply avoided an anachronistic expression.[153]

Hammann does not give further attention to the later activity of the seven in Acts. This is regrettable, because the assumed ministerial distinction between that of missionary and caritative, has no actual support in Acts. On the contrary, the seven men in Acts 6 proclaim the gospel, interpret Scriptures and baptize. To be precise, even in Acts 6, where the text mentions the daily needs of widows (διακονία) and the service at the table (διακονεῖν τραπέζαις; sic! uses a verb, not a noun), there is no explicit description of the nature of the task. The Greek word has no specific caritative meaning, but refers to different kinds of actions: it can be related to work at the table (connected to the seven men) or the proclamation of the word (connected to the twelve). The division between the groups of twelve and seven men refers more probably to the existence of two (probably independent) traditions concerning leading figures of the early church, which were united by the author of Acts.

The meaning of the seven men has been widely discussed and largely agreed upon within exegetical studies, but these voices are practically ignored by Hammann.[154] Even more obscure is the further conclusion of Hammann when he, on the basis of the New Testament texts, argues that at the end of the first century or beginning of the second century, the diaconal ministry was institutionalized and possessed a meaning related to "material support" (diakonisches Amt im Sinn materieller Unterstützung). [155]

Hammann has two basic assumptions: the caritative nature of the task of the seven men in Acts 6 *and* the identification of the seven men as deacons during

151 Hammann 2003, 13 note 1.

152 Hammann 2003, 21 note 4.

153 Hammann 2003, 25. Translation by present author.

154 Overview of the present discussion is offered above in the chapter 3. See also Hentschel 2008, 318–346 and Pervo 2009, 151–153.

155 Hammann 2003, 27.

the second century Christianity. Because of these assumptions, Hammann reads practically all the texts from the second century through these interpretive lenses. Every time a deacon is mentioned, this person can be seen as a caritative functionary, even when the text does not contain any explicit reference to caritative actions. However, explicit references to liturgical responsibilities cannot be left unnoticed. Thus, Hammann's conclusion regarding the development of deacons up to the second century is as follows:

> *We now know that deacons were established to take care of liturgical and caritative tasks. Their special working field were the material and social problems from which members of the congregation suffered.*[156] (emphasis added)

In the following section, Hammann aims to describe the practical work of deacons in the social field, but is forced to admit that the primary sources are limited and fragmentary, which makes it difficult to provide a list of tasks performed by the deacons. Furthermore, the private character of local churches and their hidden lifestyle (due to persecutions) could be one explanation for the lack of written material. Hammann is certain about two major tasks of deacons: *caritas* and *liturgy*. Unfortunately, he does give any primary sources to confirm this view.[157]

In the early church, common meals held an important role, and all members were involved in contributing to the meals. According to Hammann, deacons were responsible for delivering meals to "the sick, the aged and prisoners" not only as part of the Eucharist, but also as material support. Unfortunately, he does not quote the primary sources for this crucial information.[158]

Hammann's conclusion is as follows. During the second century, common meals in the local churches were transformed into symbolic meals, which also reflected the changed roles of the deacons. Thus, no more "meals on wheels," as well as less responsibility in the liturgy, created a situation in which the deacons were devalued, at a moment where Christianity became a more important player in the society.[159]

On the other hand, two documents point out how important Christian love and responsibility were as social factors. Here Hammann refers to "the diaconal praxis of the church" (die diakonische Praxis der Kirche), described by Tertullian in the Apology (ch. XXXIX), as well as in the Letter to Diognetus (5). In these documents, diaconal practice -- the love of fellow Christians -- is clearly visible, but no signs of the deacons exist. In cases which describe the shared responsibility of all Christians, however, the actions are not articulated as "diaconia."

156 Hammann 2003, 39.
157 Hammann 2003, 39–40.
158 Hammann 2003, 41.
159 Hammann 2003, 43–44.

Finally, Hammann observes the two-dimensional development during the third and fourth centuries. The third century brought more stability and power to the diaconal ministry: the position of the deacon was confirmed and strengthened. The number of deacons grew and they belonged to the ranks of ordained ministers. On the other hand, they were hierarchically under the authority of the bishop. The main caritative task of deacons was connected to the distribution of goods collected in the local churches. Deacons were authorized by the local churches in relation to that specific community. According to Hammann, the deacons were responsible, for example in Rome, for the large group of poor (1500). Hammann, however, does not cite primary sources for this data.[160]

According to Hammann, the caritative diaconate declined for several reasons. The main reason was because liturgical elements "pushed social elements to the background" and clerical hierarchy was increased.[161] Hammann's conclusion about the development during the first centuries is crystallized in three points: 1) The working field of deacons was essentially caritative, 2) their caritative and social tasks influenced church life, especially during Sunday services and in the liturgy and 3) the importance of diaconal ministry was confirmed at ordination. Hammann claims that "all these three criteria were based on primary sources," but this assumption is incorrect according to the given evidence. Further on, Hammann presumes that the early and caritative character was lost because of increased hierarchy and the changed profile of the deacons.[162]

The study of Gottfried Hammann suffers severe shortcomings. First of all, his whole approach is built on a questionable exegetical analysis of Acts 6. Secondly, Hammann reads the primary sources through interpretive lenses and he ignores the fact that there is next to nothing written on caritative diaconate during the first centuries in the ancient sources. Thirdly, instead of using primary sources, Hammann uses secondary, and at least partly non-academic literature, to support his theories. Fourthly, Hammann quite rightly recognizes the larger trend among early Christians to share care and love with each other, and to some degree, with non-Christians as well. However, Hammann ignores the fact that these actions are described *without* using the word "diaconia."

160 Hammann 2003, 65–67. Hamman refers to the non-academic article written by Adalbert Hamman, 1990, 5–21.

161 Hammann 2003, 79.

162 Hammann 2003, 85–87.

Jeannine Olson, Deacons and Deaconesses Through the Centuries

The work of Jeannine Olson was first published in 1992 as *One Ministry, Many Roles: Deacons and Deaconesses through the Centuries*, and received several rewards. The writer is a church historian and professor of history at Rhode Island College. The wide historical span in Olson's book covers the history of deacons and deaconesses but she does not limit her perspective only to ministerial issues. Instead, Olson writes about development in the church at large: "In a sense the history of the diaconate can be viewed as the history of social welfare in the church."[163]

According to Olson

> *[t]he deacon over the centuries has had many roles and functions that have varied with time and place. These can be considered under two broad categories: liturgy and charity. Deacons also have engaged in teaching, preaching, and administrative tasks. There is* ***more information readily available in the sources on the liturgical roles of the deacons than on their charitable functions****. [Emphasis added] – – Although not neglecting the liturgical roles of deacons, this study will attempt to redress the imbalance as far as the sources allow, covering charity, philanthropy, and the deacons' role as teachers. – – Without departing entirely from the office of deacon, this book covers charitable functions that deacons once had. It considers the social welfare stance of the church in any given epoch, on the premise that the functions of deacons were at least as important as the office. The book covers, then, both deacons and* ***diakonia****.*[164]

Like Barnett and Hammann, Olson is aware of the results of John N. Collins, including the study *Deacons and the Church* (2002). Like Barnett and Hammann, she also ignores the new challenge, except for short comments.

Olson works very carefully with historical documents with the aim of documenting the results as reliably as possible. Most of the sources are the same as those used by Barnett and Hammann – and she uncovers mostly similar results. For example, based on 1 Clements, Olson says: "He mentioned deacons but did not describe what they did,"[165] and after a detailed analysis of Apostolic Fathers, Olson gives her verdict. The deacons had several liturgical roles in worship, including preaching, preparation of baptism, participation in the Eucharist, hearing

163 Olson 2003, 17.
164 Olson 2003, 19.
165 Olson 2003, 28.

confessions, and keeping order. The same is confirmed in the analyses of Didascalia Apostolorum.[166]

Olson underscores common Christian responsibility. According to her, the central text of communal sharing is Justin Martyr's *First Apology*, where the sharing of goods is described:

> *Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succours the orphans and widows and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need* (Justin Martyr, 1 Apology, 67; this text is also partially quoted by Olson).[167]

Although deacons seem to have a role in bringing part of the Eucharist to the absent, the role of the president (bishop) is more central in the distribution of collected goods. Moreover, the function of the deacons is left open in the distribution of surplus.

Olson also quotes a Tertullian text (*Apology 39:5–6*) for a description of Christian love and care.[168]

> *There is no buying and selling of any sort in the things of God. Though we have our treasure-chest, it is not made up of purchase-money, as of a religion that has its price. On the monthly day, if he likes, each puts in a small donation; but only if it be his pleasure, and only if he be able: for there is no compulsion; all is voluntary. These gifts are, as it were, piety's deposit fund. For they are not taken thence and spent on feasts, and drinking-bouts, and eating-houses, but to support and bury poor people, to supply the wants of boys and girls destitute of means and parents, and of old persons confined now to the house; such, too, as have suffered shipwreck; and if there happen to be any in the mines, or banished to the islands, or shut up in the prisons, for nothing but their fidelity to the cause of God's Church, they become the nurslings of their confession. But it is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. See, they say, how they love one another, for themselves are animated by mutual*

166 Olson 2003, 34–35.

167 Justin Martyr, 1 Apology, 67 (http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/justinmartyr-firstapology.html).

168 Tertullian, Apology 39:5–6 (http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/tertullian01.html). See Olson 2003, 36.

> *hatred; how they are ready even to die for one another, for they themselves will sooner put to death* (Apology 39:5–6).

The important question ignored by Olson is: where are the deacons? What does Tertullian say about their role? The answer is simple: nothing. The deacons are not mentioned in the entire book.

Olson, however, goes in the other direction and concludes that deacons had a role: "Regardless of other functions, deacons were charged with ongoing responsibility for the poor beyond the private almsgiving of individual Christians." On the other hand, "the bishops had become responsible for charity in the church, and deacons had become their assistants."[169]

In the following chapter, Olson describes various examples of how the poor and sick were cared for by Christians around the Mediterranean area: there is evidence of the rise of hospitals and monasteries, as well different organizations which gave food and shelter to the poor. The deacons are rarely mentioned in this connection.[170]

After an analysis of the ancient sources, Olson summarizes the pre-reformation period as follows:

> *Deacons evolved considerably since New Testament times, a time when they were key figures in charitable work. They began in the first century with little, if any, obvious place in the liturgy and a large role providing for the poor. Gradually, as assistants to the bishops, deacons and widows assumed some importance in the liturgy alongside their role in social welfare. – – Deacons retained a role in social welfare and property management at least into the fourth and fifth centuries. They lost this role by the time of the Council in Trullo (A.D. 692). – – As deacons lost their social welfare functions, the church increasingly emphasized their liturgical roles. – – The reformers of the sixteenth century would find the diaconate ripe for reform on the model of the early church.*[171]

Olson uses the sources carefully and generally draws moderate, well-argued conclusions. However, when she is preparing the reader in the introduction, or when she writes her own final summary, she obviously takes a large leap from sources to the drawing of conclusions. In this leap, the traditional view or paradigm simply takes over the mind of the researcher, causing her to misinterpret the data. Still – and remembering the shortcomings – her presentation is avaluable analysis of the story of Christian care and love. Only the first section of the book on the development of the diaconal ministry, does not reach this same level.

169 Olson 2003, 37.

170 Olson 2003, 51–105.

171 Olson 2003, 91–92.

Summary, assessment and implications

All three studies serve their purpose in operating based on primary sources, this is also expressed explicitly by Hammann and Olson. All three authors also refer to recent research literature, but ignore the real discussion raised by John N. Collins. This can be partially explained by the simple fact that in Collins' first study (1990) the detailed analysis ends without a conclusion or summary. This means that readers have to read the whole book and form the summary themselves. For a non-biblical scholar, that task may be difficult, and an assessment of the results may be even more challenging. The later study by Collins (2002) is more focused and informative in this respect, but it was still practically ignored by Hamman and Olson (Collins 2002 is mentioned in Olson's bibliography).

How do these three studies use the primary sources, and what is their value in the debate about paradigm transformation? The following summary sums up the central results.

1. The existence of the office of deacon (διάκονος) in the early church is agreed upon by all. Deacons are already mentioned in the New Testament writings, and more often among other pre-Nicene writings. There is no doubt at all about their existence and active role in the early church; the textual evidence is clear and strong. A very good example of this is the above-mentioned *Didascalia Apostolorum*, which widely describes the tasks of deacons.[172]
2. The word "diaconia" (διακονία) does not yet, however, have a specific meaning in the early Christian texts referring to "social-caritative acts" or "charity." Only Hammann refers to the term in the analysis of Acts 6:1–6, but he also admits that the word is used in two different contexts: in connection with the work at the table, and work related to preaching. As noted above, Hammann fails to note that the expression in Acts 6:2 does not include a noun, but is in fact a verb. In addition, the usage of the word διακονία in the New Testament on various occasions implies that the semantic field is wide and is not limited to the field of charity.[173] Although all three authors aim to analyse the historical roots of diaconia, none of them concentrate on the origin and development of the (caritative) diaconia concept. Instead, they more or less ignore the question of the diaconia concept and either speak about deacons or the diaconal role of the church. Where modern writers might speak about (caritative)

172 An updated edition is Alistair Stewart-Sykes 2009. Stewart-Sykes argues that Didascalia Apostolorum is a redactional and multilayer document which wanted to underscore the episcopal-diaconal ministerial system. See especially pages 56–69.

173 BDAG 2000, 230.

diaconal motives or diaconal acts (as social caritative motives or acts), the phenomenon is described in early church texts with different expressions.

3. All three authors agree that several texts describe the care and love of Christians. The poor and the sick are remembered, food is shared at meals, the absent members are visited, and dead bodies are buried –to mention but a few examples. The characteristic role of early Christianity in the Roman context is connected to charity, love and care for the poor. This profile was distinctive in the Roman culture and society. The caritative nature of early Christianity has been generally agreed upon by historians and theologians.[174]
4. One of the most serious shortcomings of the three studies is the presentation of the deacons as officials of charity. Despite their obvious intention, the authors are not able to offer explicit textual evidence to support the assumption that deacons in the early church were social-caritative functionaries, and that the deacons had a special and exclusive caritative role. Deacons shared these tasks equally with other ministers and Christians, but they did not have special authorization, responsibility or jurisdiction. The tasks of the deacons were much more focused on general church actions including liturgy and sacraments.
5. How can these results be understood and, especially, how can we understand the strong misinterpretation of ancient sources? The social-caritative ideal has been projected onto the early Church and onto the deacons at least since the Reformation, and this conventional understanding is still so powerful that these three studies read the New Testament and the early church texts through the lense of this paradigm. Thus, whenever the word "deacon" (διάκονος) appears in ancient sources, it has been primarily connected to social-caritative motivations and acts – also on those occasions where the text does not explicitly say so.[175]

The scholarly work of the earlier theory contains such obvious weaknesses in the use of ancient sources that a re-evaluation of the concept and paradigm is needed. When new models and concepts of diaconia are formulated, special attention should be given to careful argumentation. It is not enough to explain what we mean with the present word diaconia; we also need to be explicit and articulate the reasons and arguments behind the ideas. *How we define* the new theory of diaconia may be as valuable as the content itself.

174 Stark 1997, 73–94; Longenecker 2010, 60–131.

175 Latvus 2008, 151–153; Collins 2009, 133–147; Latvus 2010, 96–101.

6 THE ORIGIN OF THE CARITATIVE CONCEPT OF DIACONIA

Introduction and Task

This chapter focuses on one aspect of diaconia vocabulary -- namely, it explores the origin of the caritative use of the diaconia concept. The limitation of the "caritative" diaconia concept implies that other historical and semantic explorations of the word diaconia (διακονία) do not belong within the centre of the study. Instead, this study will focus on situations where the usage of the word diaconia is connected with caritative motives, acts or responsibilities.

Common usage of the diaconia concept seems to embody the idea that diaconia has a caritative meaning, and that its origin is found in the New Testament. In this chapter, I will however, argue that the current convention is a result of a long process and development. The aim of this chapter is to clarify both the origin of the caritative usage of the concept, and also to explain central historical turns within its development.

The word diaconia (written also with a k: diakonia), is a common loan word: in German, Diakonie, in Swedish, diakoni and in Finnish, diakonia. The word diaconia is in common use within Germany and the Nordic countries, but current English theological dictionaries have also included the term. Recently The *Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity* describes the concept as follows:

> *Diakonia (Gk. 'service'), a frequently used term in the NT designating the major characteristics of all ministries, including liturgical ministries – that of preaching and serving others (including the poor and the needy) as Christ did. Today the term* ***diakonia*** *most commonly refers to the shared ministry whose purpose is to serve God among the suffering people, among the poorest, among those who suffer, among those most in need. Thus* ***diakonia*** *is not simply the ministry of deacons and deaconesses, although through their services they often epitomize* ***diakonia****.*[176]

In a similar way, Jochen-Christoph Kaiser in the article of *Religion, Past and Present*[177] directly refers to the biblical roots of the word.

176 The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity 2010, 321.

177 Kaiser 2008.

The term diakonia (Greek διακονία/diakonia) stems from the NT and refers to the act of serving or helping (Diaconate) as well as associated office.

These definitions create a clear, but demanding question that needs to be re-examined. What is the origin of the concept, and how did the caritative dimension develop? This question will be answered in the following pages by giving a historical, longitudinal analysis, which starts from the New Testament texts, and continues through to the early church, the Reformation and finally arrives in the 19th century. The specific question regarding the ministry of deacons will be dealt with only sporadically in this analysis, as it has been analysed in earlier chapters.

Analysis of historical sources

New Testament

The Greek word διακονία (*diakonia*) appears in the NT 34 times. The conventional study of diaconia has interpreted most of these cases as service, more specifically table service. This approach represented the mainstream opinion in dictionaries and encyclopaedias at the end of the 20th century. This kind of interpretation was not based on adequate and careful study of the texts, but required strong presupposition and selective reading strategy. Although the idea of some kind of service is obviously included, we need to be more specific in order to discover whether there appears to be a *caritative* dimension.

A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature[178] divides the meaning of the word into five semantic categories. The first of them refers to service or assignment, which happens in "an intermediary capacity:" 2Cor. 9:12, 13; Rom. 15:31; 2Cor. 8:4; 9:1; Heb. 1:14. Secondly, the word can be used more generally in reference to performance of a service: Ef. 4:12; Acts 6:4; 2Cor 11:8; 1Cor 16:15; 2Tim. 4:11; Rev. 2:19. Furthermore, social actions, such as preparation of a meal, are included in these texts: Luke 10:40. Thirdly, the word can be used in order to refer to a service for the society at large, for example, acting as a minister: 1Tim. 1:12; Acts 1:17, 25; 20:24; 1Cor. 12:5; 2Cor. 3:7, 8, 9, 9; Acts 21:19; Rom. 11:13; 2Cor. 4:1; 6:3; Col. 4:17; 2Tim. 4:5; 2Cor. 5:18. Fourthly, it can mean assistance or help given to some one: Acts 6:1; 11:29; 12:25. Fifthly, it may refer to administrative tasks: Rom. 12:7,7.

The following short survey of central New Testament passages can, on many occasions, lean towards the exegetical analysis of John N. Collins (1990) and Anni

178 BDAG 2000, 230.

Henstchel (2007). Although I do not fully follow their solutions, they represent a solid ground for this survey, which has a wide historical arch.

The following examples illustrate how recent translations have faced the question.

2Cor. 9:1
Now it is not necessary for me to write to you about ***the ministry*** *to the saints* (NRSV1989)
Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about ***the ministry*** *for the saints* (ESV 2007)
There is no need for me to write to you about this ***service*** *to the Lord's people* (NIV 2011)

2Tim. 4:5
As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ***ministry*** *fully* (NRSV)
As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ***ministry*** (ESV)
But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ***ministry*** (NIV)

Rom. 11:13
Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I glorify my ***ministry*** (NRSV)
Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ***ministry*** (ESV)
I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ***ministry*** (NIV)

These examples illustrate different contexts and settings where the word διακονία is used in the NT. Its wide semantic field includes not only different kinds of authorised duties, but also smaller tasks. Paul uses the word when he speaks about his apostolic call (e.g. Rom 11:13; cf. also Acts 1:17, 25), but also projects such as helping the Jerusalem community, can be described using the same word. In English translations, the most popular word is "ministry," which reflects Latin translation "ministerium."

In Paul's text, the most common meaning is mission, apostolic call or authorisation of his work. There is no evidence of a social or caritative dimension.[179] Only one text is somehow related to a helping context (2Cor. 9:1), but also there, it is more appropriate to speak about ministry or service in general sense. It is also

179 Hentschel 2007, 435.

certainly worth noticing that in the gospels, the word διακονία appears only once, in Luke 10:40, and is translated as *task* (NRSV), *serving* (ESV) or *preparation* (NIV).

In the NT, more than two thirds of the appearances are in Pauline texts (18) or deutero-Pauline texts (5). The gospel of Luke and Acts use the word διακονία ten times, about one third of all appearances. There seems to be no real difference between the authors regarding the meaning of the word.

Among all the cases, one of the most important is found in Acts 6. The term διακονία appears in verses 6:1, 4. Besides these cases, in verse 6:2 the cognate verb occurs. Translations illustrate the issue well.

> *in the daily **distribution** of food – – to **wait** at tables – – to **serving** the word* (NRSV)
> *in the daily **distribution** – – to **serve** tables – – the **ministry** of the word* (ESV)
> *in the daily **distribution** of food – – in order **to wait** on tables – – the **ministry** of the word* (NIV)

The Greek text does not include any separate designation of *food.* This additional word in some translations, like the NRSV and NIV, is an interpretation. Moreover, it is possible to say that the expression describes activity offered to the widows and is done on a daily basis. Nothing more is explicitly stated, although some scholars before the 1990s were ready to think about food or financial support.[180] Recently, Richard Pervo has proposed that the expression refers to "the common sacred meal."[181] O.F. Cummings interpreted the same expression as "ministering the word."[182] This is grammatically possible, but the proposal remains hypothetical. However, these cases illustrate that the noun διακονία in Acts is not *explicitly* connected to social-caritative acts, but can refer to various acts, authorisations or missions. The same word διακονία is the appropriate word to use when speaking about daily actions with the widows, the apostolic mission of Paul or the task of the community leader, Timothy.

The context of the Acts chapter 6 is also important to remember. Based on accounts in Acts following the depiction of their selection (6:1–6), the seven chosen men were not chosen for caritative activity, but moreover the accounts focus on duties such as preaching, baptizing and being evangelists – even more than the twelve. In fact, this comparison between the twelve and the seven makes clear that the author of Acts was aware of these different traditions and wanted to connect the traditions together. The author who penned verses 6:1–6 wanted to remind readers that the twelve apostles were the actual leaders and the seven men

180 Among others Pesch 1986, 225–228; Haenchen1982, 260–264.

181 Pervo 2009, 159.

182 Cummings 2005, 10–11.

were not only subordinated to twelve, but also authorised by the twelve. For the author of Acts, it was important to give an impression that Christians were a well-organised network of local groups and to avoid competition between each other.

Finally, it is worth remembering the context of the writing process of Acts. Acts is not a historical document written during the 30s, but a text written at the end of the first century. The text reflects both symbolic and realistic worlds at the end of the first century, and creates also anachronistic images. The widows are a good example of this. It is hard to understand how the newly established community could already have fixed groups of widows, but this fits in well with later situations. Acts 6:1–6 is not a historical documentation of what happened, but more a theological and ideological creation of the author.[183] See the detailed analysis on Acts 6 in chapter 3.

After the analysis of the diakonia vocabulary, a second analysis can be done. A complementary test focuses on the question "how does the NT speak about the poor?" A good example of this is Paul. For him, the poor, weak and vulnerable among the local churches, earned special attention. In his letters, Paul exhorts socially mixed and economically varying communities to take care of the poor ones, and warned rich ones not to abuse their position (1Cor. 11:17–34). Paul makes his position especially clear when he refers to the agreement with Peter, James and John: a central guideline for Paul's mission is "to remember the poor" (Gal. 2:10). Recently among biblical scholars, there has been a growing interest in Paul's theology of poverty.[184]

When Paul speaks about the poor he does not use the diakon-words but speaks about the poor using words such as πτωχός or πένης. A similar observation can be made also in the other central NT texts related to caritative actions (Luke 6:20–26; 10:25–37; 16:19–31; the letter of James). Only in one central NT passage, Matt. 25:31–46 does the expected διακονέω verb appear: even in this passage it probably refers to an authorised royal task and not caritative duties.[185] The New English translation actually offers a translation following this view:

> *Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?'* (ESV 25:44).

Even if the verse in Matt. 25:44 is still debated and Acts 6:1 is somehow obscure, the overall picture is very clear. The noun διακονία in the NT does not have any explicit and fixed usage related to poverty, care of the poor and vulnerable, but

183 Hentschel 2007, 318–346; Pervo 2009, 151–153.

184 Longenecker 2010, 298–301.

185 Collins 1990, 64–65.

the word is mostly used regarding the apostles and other authorised persons.[186] The word διακονία does not yet designate caritative activities in these texts. If someone wanted to speak about caritative actions, other words and expression were used, such as πτωχός or πένης.

The Early Church

Now we turn to the early church texts. Conventional theory has widely accepted the view that the early church was "diaconal" in nature. James Monroe Barnett speaks about "diaconal functions"[187] and Gottfried Hammann about "diakonische praxis" (diaconal practice)[188]. Besides these general descriptions, researchers do not offer the kinds of texts which would illustrate how the Greek word διακονία had been used as a fixed concept.[189]

In this case, a helpful tool is *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* by G.W.H. Lampe.[190] It shows that the word διακονία refers in general to the service of deacons, as well as more specifically to their work, the service of God and tasks connected to church ministry. Only rarely is it possible to find connections to any caritative functions such as the collecting of funds or serving the poor. In these cases, the basic semantic root of the expression is the ministry of the deacon. Examples of these are Herm. Mand. 2.6 and Apostolic Constitutions 3.13.2; 4.1.1.

The semantics of the patristic era are essential also because they illustrate how the adjective διακονικός was used. When used as an adjective, the word refers to the activities connected to the ministry of deacons. The word is also used as a noun in neutral form (διακονικόν, in some English texts: *diakonikon*) referring to church buildings. *Diakonikon* is a church, a space in the church or sacristy, where ministerial clothes and other items were kept.

Especially in the eastern church architecture, *diakonikon* is a space next to the altar where all ministers kept their liturgical clothes and other items needed during the liturgy and in the administration of sacraments.[191]

Based on the information given by Lampe's lexicon, it seems that the caritative concept of diaconia was not used in the early church. This can be easily tested by reading the texts of a major early church theologian, John Chrysostom. He is a valuable source of information, because his interest in the poor and poverty is widely known. John Chrysostom was born in about 349 and achieved a remarkable position in the church as deacon and presbyter. Later on, he became

186 Henstchel 2007, 432–444; Hausschildt 2008, 305–310.

187 Barnett 1995,124.

188 Hammann 2003, 54.

189 Hammann 2003, 32–87; Olson 2005, 17–92.

190 Lampe 1961, 351.

191 Murray 1996, 137; Matthews 2003, 720.

archbishop of Constantinople in 398, but was expelled to the Caucasus because of his political opinions.[192]

The literary productivity of John Chrysostom was remarkable. As a test case for this study I have chosen two texts -- commentaries on Matthew and Acts.[193] These texts are excellent test cases because poverty is a central issue and related expressions, such as πτωχός or πένης, often occur. However, the word διακονία does not appear even once in these texts and only five times in the whole literary collection of John Chrysostom (*Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*).

Based on this evidence, it seems very probable that in the early church, the word διακονία was known and used, but not in the caritative sense. The expressions used refer to acts of deacons, special ministerial locations and buildings.

The Reformation

The reformation was a period of multidimensional re-evaluation of existing structures. Not only religious, but also political, financial, cultural, and social systems were strongly shaken and transformed. According to the current standard, it is an anachronism to speak about hospitals, nursing the sick and social care. These did not yet exist, but their early roots appeared. The reformation can be seen also as a social revolution.[194] The early forms of this development grew from the medieval period.[195] This is well summarised by J. Olson:

> *The sixteenth century brought to a head reforming tendencies in social welfare. Some feel that the century was the beginning of a new era in poor relief. Others feel the reforms were a product of cumulative changes in the medieval period. Still others thank the Renaissance, with its humanists and new business practices, for welfare reform. Some attribute changes in welfare administration to the Protestant Reformation, but research in social reform in Catholic areas has rendered denominational theories less tenable.*[196]

One particular characteristic marked the protestant reformation. Reformers wanted "to restore deacons to the functions and roles they had held in Scripture and the early church: helping the poor. This meant giving deacons a role in social welfare."[197] In this case, the real acts of Martin Luther were modest, but the process

192 Mayer & Allen 2003, 3–11.

193 *NPNF* 1–10. St. Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew; *NPNF* 1–11. Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles.

194 Hammann 2003, 171–304; Arffman 2008, 309–320.

195 Mäkinen 2009, 41–64.

196 Olson 2005, 139.

197 Olson 2005, 133.

was enhanced by Martin Bucer and even more so by John Calvin: he was probably the first one to modify and establish caritative diaconal ministry. According to his plan, a congregation ought to choose both men and women and they should be ordained by the laying on of hands. In Geneva, the liturgical elements were, however, finally ignored. In a general sense, the reformers assumed that they had simply returned to biblical practices and this view has been adopted by most of researchers. In reality, the Reformation projected its own social world onto biblical texts and created a caritative diaconal ministry – as argued also in earlier chapters.

We still need to focus on one special question: how was the concept of diaconia used during the Reformation? The answer is actually astonishing: the concept of caritative diaconia does not actually appear at all during the period, although anachronistically researchers, such as G. Hammann,[198] often speak about diaconia, diaconal practice, diaconal function etc.

Within the writings of Martin Luther, the word appears to be absent, but a couple of cases appear. In these cases, there are no caritative connections and moreover, recent study shows that the word had a fixed meaning in Latin to refer to buildings where priests, especially lower rank priests, worked.[199] This result is in line with the byzantine semantics.

One really interesting detail is found in the writing of John Calvin. He wrote his central work *Institutio Christianae Religionis* in Latin in 1526, and later also in French. The final edition appeared in 1559. One section (*Inst.* 4.3.9 in 1559) describes the deacons as follows:

> *[T]here will be two classes of deacons, the one serving the Church by administering the affairs of the poor; the other, by taking care of the poor themselves. For although the term* διακονία *has a more extensive meaning, Scripture specially gives the name of deacons to those whom the Church appoints to dispense alms, and take care of the poor; constituting them as it were stewards of the public treasury of the poor. Their origin, institution, and office, is described by Luke, (Acts 6:3.)*

In the English translation, as well as in Latin, the word διακονία is used, that is to say, in the Greek form. This text may be among the first ones connecting the noun diaconia with caritative activities. Calvin himself was perhaps not fully convinced about the new concept, because he never used it on other occasions. Perhaps this rare occasion was a kind of test case, which did not lead to a breakthrough. The concept did not yet become a fixed term in the caritative sense, even though there are several texts about caritative deacons.

198 Hammann 2003, 190–304.

199 Ryökäs&Tahvanainen 2011.

19th century

> *Those who first spoke of 'diakonia' were not the linguists or theologians of our day but Lutheran churchmen of nineteenth-century Germany. They were seeking to establish a form of Christian ministry among the displaced, the delinquent, the sick, the illiterate, and all those adversely affected in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars and by the onset of industrialisation.*[200]

How did the 19th century protestant social-caritative movement end up using "diaconia" as a fixed concept? During the first decades of the 19th century, the term was still absent. For example, Theodor Fliedner in his travel document *Collektenreise nach Holland und England* describes innovative observations in a Mennonite church in Amsterdam.[201] At this point, Fliender speaks about deaconesses, but not about diaconia. Based on his travel experiences, Fliedner established a deaconess institute in Kaiserswerth, not a diaconia institute. In a similar manner, Johan Hinrich Wichern established Rauhes Haus in 1832, a shelter and educational centre following the social-caritative ethos of inner mission without the diaconia concept.

Obviously we have to come to the latter part of 19th century before the word diaconia appears and becomes a fixed concept. A remarkable turn happened in a conference held in 1856 (2nd of November–5th of December). The king of Prussia, King Friedrich Wilhelm IV, organised a conference in Monbijou castle on the relations of church and state. Altogether 56 persons participated, the king included, and the conference focused on the diaconate for three days (12th–14th of November). Among the speakers were professor Jacobi (Halle), pastor Theodor Fliedner, and theologian and inner mission leader Johan Hinrich Wichern. Fliedner was not able to be present at the meeting because of his travel commitments; however, his paper was read to the audience.[202] On the question of the church's social responsibility, the conference was divided into two camps, which made it impossible to come to an agreement. Furthermore, the section supporting church activities in the social caritative field was not unanimous in its approach.[203]

Interestingly, the speakers at the conference fluently used the word diaconia (Diakonie) as a basic concept to describe caritative actions of the church and church related societies. Jacobi, Fliedner and Wichern spoke about the care of the poor, and work among sick and deprived people as diaconia. These speeches had a remarkable influence in Germany. The conference was a milestone for developing ideas, promoting social-caritative work, and also for confirming the word diaconia as a fixed concept for referring to ideas, theology and practical

200 Collins 1990, 8.

201 Fliedner 1831, 150–152.

202 Philippi 1981, 639; Friedrich 2007, 167–180; Hauschildt 2008, 308–310.

203 Nöller 2011, 31–34.

work among the poor. The conference aimed to solve the question regarding the diaconate, but in practical terms it introduced the caritative concept of diaconia.

Fliedner argued at the conference that the diaconate (Diakonat) "as an organic part of Christian understanding about the church," was based on [NT] "writings and apostolic work in an undeniable way." For Fliedner, the description in Acts 6 was also a description of the origin of the ministry (Amt) of the caritative diaconate. He argued that, although the very first occurrence of the ministry of deaconesses (when, where and by whom) is not known, in any case it was "most probably proposed by the apostles and anyhow it was authorised by them."[204] In a similar way, Wichern expressed his view: "The condition for a true and full awakening of church diaconia is the renewal of the apostolic diaconate."[205]

The word diaconia may have been used sporadically in the German context even before 1856. For example, two years earlier a society for female diaconia had been established: Vereins für weibliche Diakonie in Bayern (1854). However, the major national conference made the concept well known.

Later on, the new concept appeared in 1869 in the text of William Löhe. According to him, diaconia and deacon (Diakonia und Diakonos) were committed to charity in the early church in Jerusalem. "Since then, diaconia has meant nothing but the sacred care of the poor and deacons nothing but those seven who were first authorised; and since then, their followers." "The holy ministry of diaconia is a spiritual ministry" and diaconia itself possesses a Christian nature. Thus "the ministry of deaconess, like the whole diaconia, is a plant, which is growing from Christian ground. It can be and it should be a friendly sign of the presence of the Lord in his congregation."[206]

The above analysis is based on a collection of sources edited by Herbert Krimm, *Quellen zur Geschichte der Diakonie. 2. Reformation und Neuzeit.* This large collection of primary sources, including important letters, offers a trustworthy image of the 19th century development in Germany, but many details still require more specific study. Based on these documents, the origin of the caritative diaconia concept can be dated to the year 1856: before this year, social caritative actions in the church or among Christians were not considered as "diaconia," but after that year, the new concept spread around the globe, especially in the Lutheran context.

This section of analysis, originally published in Finnish in 2011[207], was supported indirectly by Esko Ryökäs. His analysis proved that European dictionaries and encyclopaedias did not use the noun diaconia (or German of French variants) before the 19th century.[208]

204 Krimm 1936, 365–369; translations by present author.

205 Krimm 1963, 370–373.

206 Krimm 1963, 380–383.

207 Latvus 2011a.

208 Ryökäs 2012.

Results and consequences

This survey of the origin of the concept of caritative diaconia illustrates the demands of continuing and multidisciplinary study. The growth of the current awareness of diaconia among the churches requires a new analysis of the roots and theology of the subject. This process also raises critical questions; however, critical solidarity is still the best companion in the new quest of diaconia.

As a short summary of the survey, the following results can be outlined:

- in the NT and the early church, the word διακονία existed, but did not yet become a fixed concept referring to social caritative work. Most often it refers to the call and service of apostles and to tasks related to their work. Only seldom and accidentally do we find some connections to caritative issues
- the reformation introduced the caritative ministry of the deacon, but still did not use the concept of diaconia more than once in the text of John Calvin
- it was only after the rise of the so called "modern diaconate" in Germany in the mid-19th century that the word diaconia appears as the concept we know and use today.

The making of the new concept required a long history of development and in addition, a kind of semi-professional background. In 19th century Germany, two or three decades of practical work confirmed the new meaning of the words deacon, deaconess and diaconate. Based on these fixed words, it was possible to take one more step and speak about diaconia.

These words were old, but their meaning was new. The re-interpretation of the Bible played a major role in the process and gave divine legitimation. It meant that contemporary social reality was projected onto the biblical text, which helped to promote and give apostolic acceptance for the innovations. Without recycling the biblical concepts, the whole development may not have been as successful as it has been.

Strictly speaking, the development of the terminology has been historically questionable, but we should remember that this happened in the period before the rise of historical-critical exegetical methods.

These results create some new challenges for scholars and professionals working in the field as well.

- we should be aware of the misinterpretations of earlier generations and try to avoid them now
- we should be careful with semantics and avoid anachronistic rhetoric: for example, if the NT does not speak about diaconia in the sense we currently use, it is better to use other words in translations

- there are also growing needs for creating new biblical and theological grounds of diaconia. The theology of poverty is especially helpful as this theme is widely used in the Bible and gives good and logical grounds for further work
- even if the usage of the word diaconia seems to be based on misinterpretation, the phenomenon beyond the words is deeply Christian and is one of the true signs of the church.

7 ADVOCACY AND CARE OF THE POOR: A SURVEY OF THE HISTORICAL PROCESS

Introduction

In the previous chapters, several conventional views on diaconia have been analysed and critically examined, because of both a long term and large-scale series of misinterpretations. That part of the study aims only to offer a critical analysis in order to deconstruct those assumptions which possess weak or even imagined historical and biblical foundations. Based on those results, it seems obvious that the traditional paradigm regarding the origin, development and arguments of diaconia requires reformulation. Especially the assumed connection between the present concept "diaconia" and the ancient Greek *diakonia* vocabulary seems to be based on a large-scale misinterpretation, which was introduced during the Reformation and widely followed until the end of the 20th century. Thus, the earlier chapters have been labelled with a critical approach in order to prove the weak and even non-historical parts of the development.

This chapter will partially turn the approach from critical to constructive. Methodologically, this means that the following section of the study will not focus so much on detailed study of certain individual passages, but instead offers a survey and a larger historical and theological frame in order to understand the context from which care of the poor arises in the biblical world.

Moreover, the approach aims to offer a heuristic story to aid in understanding the relationship between the poor and how to care for them, as well as advocacy and solidarity towards them. Few references to the research literature are cited, and historical sources are given sporadically. Thus, a fully documented analysis, including adequately addressed discussion with specialised studies of various historical periods is beyond realistic expectations at this point. Diaconia can be studied in a similar way in relation to health, community, liturgy and many other ways. Thus, the chosen approach offers more of a case study than an all-inclusive history of diaconia.

The major questions in this chapter are: what was the role of the poor in the Judeo-Christian history? How were they treated in general, and more specifically, what was the function of care and advocacy in this long historical process?

The time span from early Judaism, to early Christianity, to the Reformation and the 19th century is huge, and it becomes even greater in light of the current issues. Due to this gigantic task, this chapter offers only a thin outline of the process, and reflection of the motives related to it. Actually, the history of the poor and care of vulnerable groups is a theme requiring its own study.

I have chosen key moments from history because they have so greatly influenced sacred writings and practices. Such an approach is vulnerable because it may ignore some other important aspects and turns of history. However, this working model seems to be a reasonable one in reaching the overall picture of the process. The following texts and related points of view are perhaps the most relevant: texts of the early prophets in seventh century BCE, Deuteronomy during the late pre-exilic/exilic period, the period of austerity during the second temple period, the Jesus-movement: from historical Jesus to the poor in the gospels, Early Christianity with inclusive communities, care of poor and sick in small communities, the Reformation as an attempt towards social reformation and growth of inequality and care during the 19th century.

Eighth century BCE as a period of material success and its critique

The texts in the books of Amos and Micah, as well as the first part of Isaiah (chapters 1–12), contain several texts which deal with social conflicts within society. The following are among the key texts: Amos 2:6–8; 3:9–4:3; 5:21–24; 6:1–7; 8:4–8; Isaiah 1:10–17, 21–23; 3:13–15; 5:1–8; Micah 2:1–5, 8–9; 3:1–4, 11; 6:8–12.

The above-mentioned texts show how those who represented wealth, administrative and juridical power, and religious authority have abused the poor. The writers seem to confront the elite in power and send constant reminders that vulnerable parts of the society are mistreated and need special protection.

A major difficulty in the interpretation is that we have a collection of texts from three different writings, and perhaps the only real historical fixing points can be found in the opening verses: Amos 1:1–2; Micah 1:1 and Isaiah 1:1. These explanatory verses are most probably secondary and at the very least, they leave us uncertain as to whether the entire text goes back to the mentioned prophet or only to a core of the book. According to the large scholarly consensus, the final forms of the texts return to the Persian period, 6th–5th century BCE.

Another major difficulty stems from the fact that the historical books in 1–2 Sam and 1–2 Kings ignore the confrontation mentioned above. At this point it is not possible to solve whether the dilemma is due to the historical questions (did the seventh century prophets really exist and did they represent such a social-critical position?) or if the diverse approach to the poor is based on different social and theological messages of the books in Deuteronomistic History and early prophets (and why the Deuteronomistic History ignores care of the poor, unlike that of Deuteronomy?).

There are, however, some indications also from archaeological studies, which support the basic understanding of the seventh century prophetic texts as advocates of the poor. The 7th century in northern Israel and perhaps also in southern

Judah brought prosperity to the whole population, but especially increased the wealth of kings and administration. The latter was probably based on the surplus of agriculture, which was collected as taxation and other fees. Such a situation may also have increased inequality in the society while prosperity was cumulatively collected by the elite over the years and decades.

In the present stage of academic research, it is not possible to describe the seventh century BCE social-historical situation in detail; in addition, developments in the field of archaeology may change the situation in the future.

According to biblical scholars, such as Rainer Kessler, David Pleins (2001) and William Dever, the reality of seventh century BCE is reflected in the texts of Amos, Isaiah and Micah, and these texts are examples of how the poor were mistreated. Moreover, these texts are reminders of how vulnerable parts of the community should be protected against the legal use of the power.

Most of the texts are rather general and specific acts are not described. Thus, the reality behind well-known sayings such as, "let justice roll down like waters" (Am. 5:24) may be interpreted in various ways, as Marvin Chaney has illustrated.[209] Although the ideological motives seem to be clear, it is extremely hard to identify what justice actually meant and especially who the oppressors and the poor were.

The protection of the poor in a community: Deuteronomy as late pre-exilic-exilic collection

Deuteronomy and Deuteronomistic History (DH) contain one of the most important keys to understanding the role and social location of the poor in the Israelite society. In the early form of Deuteronomy (chapters 12–26*) the indebted, slaves and poor are mentioned often and their wellbeing in society is on the agenda of the writers. These texts belong to the most important texts for advocating and caring for the poor in the entire Ancient Near East – not to ignore the parallels in Egyptian or Mesopotamian documents.

However, the historical texts from Joshua to 2 Kings follow a different track: the poor are mentioned seldom and without any specific concern for their treatment. David Pleins has summed up that "the poor are not on the agenda in DH."[210] The rare findings in DH contain just the following short passages: 1 Sam. 22:1–2 and 2 Kings 4:1–7 (cf. 1Kings 17:1–16) and 2 Kings 24:14; 25:12. The general attitude of the passages follows a similar pattern focusing on the leaders of society. The poor and those on the margins of society are seldom mentioned and when they ae, no special support or advocacy is directed toward these people.

209 Chaney 1993, 251.

210 Pleins 1992, 408.

The current research situation on the origin, growth and dating of Deuteronomy contains several open questions. According to Martin Noth, the early part of Deuteronomy (chs. 12–26*) was produced during the late monarchy and the entire DH was compiled by one deuteronomistic redactor in the middle of a national catastrophe or shortly after it in the 6th century. The redactor collected earlier historical documents on the kingdom and offered an explanation for the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple as well as the deportation of large amounts of the population of Judah. However, the present discussion has targeted severe criticism against the literary and thematic unity of DH. It also seems likely that the growing process of Deuteronomy and DH was hardly simple and based not on the achievement of only one person, but was rather the product of several successive compilers and redactors. The making of Deuteronomy and DH is very difficult to date, but it seems probable that the early parts of Deuteronomy, chs. 12–26 in their early version, belong to the monarchical period while large amounts of the texts reflect the situation after 586 BC.

The characteristics of this period culminate in the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, lost independence and severe decline of the population. During the late monarchical period, Judah may have had a population of about 120,000 inhabitants, but during the exile period this shrank to 20,000. Even after that time, only about 20,000–30,000 inhabitants remained. A shrinking population also meant shrinking economy and the limited wellbeing of society and individuals.[211] This historical and social reality is probably the background under which the deuteronomic/deuteronomistic texts were written, developed and interpreted.

Based on this information, the central message of Deuteronomy relating to the poor and those on the margins of society is relatively easy to formulate. The early version of Deuteronomium, so called *Ur-Deuteronomium*, very probably contained core sections of such texts as Deut. 15:1–11, 12–18; 23:20–26; 24:6–22: 26:12–15. Very probably, the final versions of these texts were modified during the decades following the 586 BC catastrophe. This means that the texts reflected very hard social realities.

If the dating is correct, we can confirm that during the late monarchical period there was a special concern for the poor. These ideas have been incorporated into a major legislative corpus which continued and developed the tradition already existing in an earlier legal corpus, the Book of Covenant (Ex 21–23), which exhorted the Israelites to pay special attention to those who lived on the outskirts of the patriarchal society: widows, orphans and strangers (refers probably to Israelites from other clans). Following this track, early deuteronomic instructions advised limiting the power of debt and (debt) slavery (Deut. 15), forbade the collecting of interests (Deut. 23:20) encouraged people to show respect to the indebted

211 Valkama 2012, 205–221.

person (Deut. 24:10–11), exhorted people to pay for daily work before sunset (Deut. 24:14–15), respected the legal rights of the vulnerable groups (Deut. 24: 17–18) and encouraged the leaving of leftover field product to the poor in harvesting (Deut. 24:19–22).

Were these social guidelines adequate enough to protect the poor, give first aid, or even to help to empower them? It is difficult to say if the deuteronomic texts represent a real legal text which was put into practice and confirmed with sanctions against the transgressors – or if the texts express only ideal behaviour. It is very possible, even probable, that the deuteronomic/deuteronomistic laws were promoted by a certain sector of society. They represented one of the most powerful religious streams in 6th century Judah, but not the only one (cf. P-texts including the Holiness code, Eze).

The importance of Deuteronomy inside of the Hebrew Bible in the Jewish reception is worth noticing. Even when obvious differences between Deuteronomy and the rest of DH may reflect varying theological positions about poverty between the redactors/writers, Deuteronomy has left an observable mark into the theology of the Hebrew Bible. Thus, the poor in society yearn to be seen and noticed, are worth being taken care of by others, and protected from abuse of financial and political power play. The poor are still not yet addressed directly. The poor are still the third partner or "the other" beside the writer and addressed group of brothers, the owning and deciding group of adult males. Men without property, disabled persons, women in general, and widows especially, as well as many other groups in the society belonged on the political, social and financial margin without any real means to change their situation in the sense of social empowerment.

The second temple period: Psalms and the book of Job

According to archaeological evidence, the social struggle of exile may not have disappeared when Neo-Babylonian dominance changed over to Persian power over the province of Yehud. It is more likely that slow economic growth and the limited population prevented a full-scale recovery of society until the late Persian period. During the Persian period, Yehud could be seen as a post-collapsed society.[212]

The social and historical development of the second temple period is still largely unknown. Some cautious lines can nevertheless be mentioned. One of the general trajectories is the development of financial infrastructure. During the early Persian period, coins were introduced, which created new tools for markets.

212 Faust 2012, 109–113; Valkama 2013, 255–271.

The Hellenistic period, starting in the latter part of the fourth century, intensified financial development and money economy.

Lack of a king in the temple society offered natural soil for the development of temple-oriented leadership, not to mention the role of the high priest. This does not mean that all persons belonging to the sphere of the temple were doing well. One important group during the second temple period may be the scribes and lower level priests who may have been in an important role for collecting and editing psalms, which focus on poverty and even identified prayer with the poor.

References during the post-exilic period clarify the needs of the poor people. Passages such as Eze.18:7–18 and Isa. 58:6–7 do not leave any room for doubt: at least some of the people lived on the ultimate limits which endangered the entire existence of life.

> *Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?* (Isa. 58:6–7)

In a similar way, a passage like Neh. 5:1–13 serves as a reminder that a lack of basic things such as grain, olive oil and wine and lack of nutrition also impoverished people because they had to borrow money to buy food in order to survive. Extreme measures of the impoverished led them to sell both land and house, and even to sell their children as slaves.

Intensified references to almsgiving during the Hellenistic period in Sirach (7:10, 32–33; 16:14; 17:22) and Tobias (1:17; 4:7–8, 15) confirm that almsgiving became institutionalised. Probably the amount of the poor increased. In addition, the inequality between the elite and the poor without the patriarchal clan support network became observable.

The third section of the Hebrew Bible, *Writings*, contains texts written during the late second temple period. Among these texts are two most prominent ones, Psalms and Job, which reflect questions related to poverty and care in many ways. These texts are hard to date and locate firmly, but the texts in general reflect the reality of the late Persian and Hellenistic periods. Even if the early sections of individual psalms have roots in the pre-exilic period, the final form of the text must be dated to the Hellenistic period – and some individual psalms probably are written even later.

The book of Job is widely known as skilful poetry, which aims to process and solve the dilemma of innocent suffering in the hands of a powerful God. However, very often interpretations ignore the fact that one of the central issues on the agenda of the book is Job's relation to the poor. In the dialogues, when Job is accused of doing something wrong or when he is defending his innocence, the

major issue is how Job has treated the poor. The possibility of ignoring the poor or abusing the vulnerable situation of the people living on the margin seems to be the major question for proving someone of being innocent or guilty. Prime examples of this are found in the following passages: 22:5–11; 24:1–12; 29:11–17; 31:13–23.

Throughout the book, the poor are seen as the goal of a potential helping act. The poor are never addressed nor do they speak on behalf of themselves. Even when the main figure, a powerful patriarch who has lost his children, fortune and finally also his health, speaks about those on the margin, he never counts himself as one of the group. Poor and sick Job does not belong to this margin but speaks about "them," about the other.

Such an approach is not exceptional in the Hebrew Bible, but rather the norm. The texts are not written by the poor. Such an idea could hardly be entertained, because writing was the highly valued, special skill of scribes. People who were able to read or write were probably somehow connected to one of several power centres: the elite, the temple or the court.

In this social context, the Psalms represent a radical variation to the rule. Psalm 40 ends with the words: "As for me, I am poor and needy? but the Lord takes thought for me. You are my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O my God." (40:9) Two most characteristic and often used words in conjunction with a poor person are used in the psalm as a self-image of prayer. The rest of the psalm does not use any other semantics about financial deprivation, but focuses on religious and liturgical vocabulary.

Such cases and other similar ones have invited some scholars to emphasise that the psalms are religious texts, which do not have strong financial or social concern. However, many psalms, like 9–10, 72, 82 and 146 are very concrete and focus on the hungry, oppressed and indebted, and there is no other choice than to notice that the psalms in a unique way use language related to finance and poverty. Probably some of the texts had their origin in a cultural context connected to poverty. This may have happened among the lower level priests or it may have had its origin in family piety among the poor.

The Jesus-movement and Early Christianity

The social reality in Palestine during the early Jesus-movement and the following decades raises an interesting question: it is a well-known fact that the Roman imperium and imperial elite spent huge amounts of wealth in constructing the Syro-Palestine area in the eastern part of the imperium. Massive work was done in Jerusalem, Cesarea, Beit Jean, Sephoris, Gadara and in many other locations. These centres, and numerous new buildings, streets, statues and all kind of constructions offered work for many and may have spread some of the Roman wealth

among the people participating in the work. This may have had a further impact on the lives of peasants, who sold their products to the builders. Thus, first century Syro-Palestine can be understood as an area of growing prosperity.

However, this historical situation probably earns a totally different interpretation. For the imperial administration, the most important tool for obtaining funds during the long, peaceful period was taxation, and certainly there was a great need to find funding for the massive construction work. Thus, the Roman imperium and the elite used their power over people and created their wealth by taxing the people heavily. This meant that the elite used a large amount of the agricultural surplus which the peasants were able to produce. Consequently, the more money spent for construction work, the heavier the hand of the elite on the necks of peasants.

Currently, it is not possible to prove which of the points of view is more appropriate in describing the social context of the early Jesus movement. Both alternatives – the growing prosperity or the continuing lack of food due to heavy taxes, make sense and the final conclusion is hard to draw.

However, there are a lot of texts in the earliest layers of the New Testament text, which refer to the poor, and illustrate their existence among and in the Jesus movement. Important witnesses for this are the Q-gospel, Mark and the letters of Paul. Among the texts in the Q-gospel, the most interesting are as follows: macarism *Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God*. Luke 6:20/ Matt 5:3 and the Lord's prayer *Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us*. Luke 11:3–4/Matt 6:11–12. The gospel of Mark contains sharp criticism against the wealthy (rich man in Mark 10:17–27; the poor widow 12:41–44) and Paul gives priority to the poor in his mission strategy (Gal. 2:10).

These examples are just a tip of the iceberg: the poor belong obviously to the agenda of the early Jesus movement. Paul's letters include a vivid description on how the early Christian communities included remarkable amounts of people coming from the lower social strata and how the poor were socially integrated in the Pauline church.[213]

A similar megatrend is also continued later in the communities reflecting the gospels of Matthew and Luke, as well as the letter of James. Interestingly, the gospel of John, which belongs among the youngest NT texts shows only a little – if any – interest in the poor and poverty. Even the word poor (πτωχός) is mentioned (12:5) only once in the context where John follows the text of Mark/Luke.

Christianity lived more or less on the margin during the first and second centuries. During that period, only 1–2% of the urban population were Christians. According to sociologist Rodney Stark, social activity, sharing of wealth and care

213 Longenecker 2010, 220–258.

with the needy and sick, even the burying of corpses were decisive acts in the process when Christianity became widely known and accepted during the first centuries. Stark underscores activities of Christians, especially during the epidemics. Unlike other members of society, Christians did not automatically abandon the sick, but offered basic care such as the giving of bread to eat and water to drink. Such acts had a remarkable effect on the surviving numbers, but it also changed the image of Christianity, because from time-to-time help was extended beyond the inner circle and reached also non-Christians.

Other factors during the early church included inner Christian hospitality and solidarity, which reached also people belonging to the lower social strata in society. Common meals were concrete examples of this reality. Interestingly, the Christians were not motivated to change the social structure of the society, that is to say, to abandon slavery, but obviously wanted to change the attitudes inside of the society. On occasion, it is good to remember that the early Christians were only a very small minority which did not have any realistic tools to challenge existing social patterns beyond that of its own circles.

After the Constantine shift, local churches were also able to receive and collect financial funds which were partially used for helping the poor. However, much more studies on these activities is required to precisely identify the real actors in the church. Until now, all too often the deacons have been thought to be main functionaries in the caritative acts and this may be partially also true: they were involved, but were not the only, or exclusive functionaries. In the future, there is a need to clarify how the common call of all Christians was realised.

From the reformation to the 19th century "renewal of diaconia"

The sixteenth century meant social, political and religious upheaval. All these factors were also strongly intertwined: religious dimensions affected the social world and financial decision-making – and vice versa. The major challenges in the 16th century were very concrete and demanding: wars, epidemics, large groups begging, and visible poverty around the communities.

The traditional providers of welfare and care functionaries and monasteries were heavily criticised during the reformation because of their wealth and inability to share the collected goods with the needy ones. Also the medieval tradition of hospitals — kind of akin to inns, safety houses and refuge locations for the poor and sick – were not able to respond to the needs of larger groups of impoverished people.

During the reformation, two partially separate basic solutions were created in order to respond to the needs: collective poverty funds, and specialised caritative functionaries, the deacons. Luther was an active initiator of both solutions, but

focused in reality just on the poverty funds. These funds were, in the Luther's plans, originally the responsibility of the local church, but soon after problems appeared, they were given to city administration. The idea of a common chest was based on a joint responsibility.

Luther did not create any instructions for the office of deacons but gave some remarks on how deacons should be caritative instead of liturgical functionaries. However, the few isolated reflections on this theme were all too sporadic to be realised in the everyday life of the local churches or to be mentioned in the Lutheran confessions. Such a development happened, however, a couple of decades later, when John Calvin wrote the first instructions for the office of caritative deacons (*Institutes* 4.3.9.). Calvin was convinced that the original, that is to say, biblical office of deacons, was caritative in its nature and Acts 6 was the historical beginning of the office. First in Geneva and later also in other reformed congregations, caritative deacons worked among the poor, sick and other vulnerable groups.

The reformed model of the caritative deacons' office was probably not only a success story during the following three centuries. However, at least in some part of the reformed tradition, the caritative deacons survived through the Anabaptists: Theodor Fliedner's experience in the Mennonite church in Amsterdam in the early 19th century created a turning point in the story. After observing female deacons' working in a non-Lutheran environment, he was immediately ready, willing and able to introduce the model inside of his own church.

The development in Germany was not only based on Fliedner's travel experience, but required well-prepared soil: several other people were motivated to organise church social responsibility in the middle of great changes in society. Due to industrialisation and urbanisation, the social challenges were much greater than in earlier centuries. Deaconess institutions aimed to educated female functionaries, that is, deaconesses as caritative workers. Much like during the Reformation, the German innovators saw the development as a return to the biblical models, the female deaconesses were thought to represent the rebirth of the original deacons.

A parallel process to the development of the ministry of deacons is the development of the concept of diaconia. This noun was already known in Greek, but not used as a fixed concept for the meaning of caritative activities during the New Testament period or in early Christianity. John Calvin was the first to introduce the term, but only in the middle of the 19th century did the concept become a known and fixed term, first appearing in German and later in the Nordic languages.

The history during the Reformation and in 19th century is a very clear example of how one's own needs and wishes coming from social and cultural contexts were projected back on history. Thus, for example the small remark involving Phoebe in Romans 16:1–2, or the seven men in Acts 6:1–6, were used to authorise one's own plans. This was done *bona fide* without any sense of promoting forgery or untruthful acts. Actually the renewal of "original deacons/deaconesses" was understood as good guidance from God.

Further questions and consequences

Although such misinterpretation is no longer convincing, we have to remember that the main part of the process happened long before the rise of historical and critical reading of the Bible. This makes it possible to understand the process, but not to accept it. The remaining question is thus simple but difficult: if the 16th and 19th century innovation was true and needed on the level of everyday life, but the grounds for it were based on wrong biblical interpretation, what are the present consequences? Should churches abandon the wrong concepts, like diaconia, or the office of caritative deacons, which are based on an illusory biblical basis?

Whatever the response to these questions, it ought to be informed of new historical quests and be well argued. Ignoring the problems or silencing the questions is not a sustainable solution. Instead, awareness that the present notion of diaconia is a recycled word with a new meaning, helps one to see that the notion of diaconia is a social and contextual construct. This notion refers to the old and truly original task of the church, although the term is relatively new.

In the same way, it is possible to recognise that the biblical office of deacons is far from identical to the caritative diaconate introduced by Calvin. The office of caritative deacon is a late development based on a serious misinterpretation of biblical texts. Similar to the notion of diaconia, the caritative diaconate is also a social and contextual construct. If we are aware of this, we may still appreciate the valuable work of deacons done among the poor and needy. Future development of caritative diaconate is also possible, but not without first processing the past.

One of the constant threads throughout the Bible is care of the mistreated, exploited, slaves, widows, poor and hungry. There is no doubt that the poor and needy are on the biblical agenda. On the other hand, the combination of biblical voices is polyphonic because not all the writings represent the same tone. Even among the New Testament gospels, there are remarkable differences because John seems to more or less ignore the poor. The amount of biblical texts advocating the care of vulnerable groups is after all strong enough to carry this ambiguity and give a broad enough basis for the theology of diaconia.

The rise of Christianity was connected with the message of a merciful God, and love of one's neighbour. Furthermore, socially marginalised groups, such as the poor and slaves, were included in the community of the early Christians. Partially in a similar way, the rise of modern diaconia was a reaction against abused and mistreated groups and a desire to reach out to marginal groups of society. To be faithful to its own roots, Christianity must be committed to asking who are the poor, who is it who suffers most and, who are exploited locally, as well as globally.

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Diaconia is currently highly appreciated globally and is a necessary action of the churches. Awareness of the reality of the every day life of people living in poverty and their needs as well as the active response of churches underlines the social aspect of Christianity. However, there is also a growing need to clarify what the words diaconia and deacons actually meant in the early church and how those words can be used properly nowadays.

This study brings together important strands in the recent study of what have been called the 'diaconia words,' in the New Testament and the Christian tradition. Questions about diaconia words and terms are connected in this study with care of the poor. Also the story of deacons, their origin and the development of this office are analyzed.

Latvus points out that the reformation's 'return to the roots of diaconia' and the subsequent developments in the 19th century were marred by a misunderstanding. It seems that recent research findings threaten the carefully built up identity of modern diaconia and the role of the deacon in social engagement. The present study invites us to face up to this challenge squarely and looks for a positive understanding and development of diaconia.

The author of the work, Kari Latvus, is both a biblical scholar and a diaconia oriented Lutheran pastor. Dr. Latvus is a senior advisor in the Worship and Society Unit at the National Church Council, Helsinki, Finland, and he is also an adjunct professor at the University of Helsinki.

KIRKON TUTKIMUSKESKUS

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