

The Paradigm Challenged A New Analysis of the Origin of *Diakonia*¹

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The classical paradigm saw the apostolic and biblical age as a special moment for the diaconal ministry. The important role of the diaconal ministry continued for just a few centuries and finally withered. According to this study, the traditional outline is not historically true, or at least we need new evidence in order to argue for the biblical origin of a social-caritative diaconal ministry. Following the interpretation of New Testament texts by Luther and Calvin, the 19th century diaconia movement projected its own life setting into 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 *diakonos* in the early church was not invented by the modern movement, but it gave a totally new meaning to the ancient Greek concept and also launched a new way to use *diakonia*-derivative vocabulary.

The quest of modern diaconia

Diaconia has been on the agenda of all churches during 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 fore as a reaction to hard changes in society. Due to industrialisation and urbanisation, large groups were pushed into poverty and were in need of special help and care. Rapid changes in society made some rich and pushed many into poverty.² As one result of these changes, a diaconia foundation called Kaiserswerth Diakonia Institution was established and expanded rapidly around the world.³

One of the leading figures in the 19th century diaconia movement was Theodor Fliedner (1800–1864). He was also one of first to articulate the need to re-establish the ministry of diaconia. During his visit to England and especially to the Netherlands, he was impressed by the practice of
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the Mennonite church. 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.”⁴ 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 to respond to the needs of different threatened 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 city centres turned into areas of the fourth world. British Urban Theology is a good example of this, even though the expression “diaconia” is not used in the British context.⁵ 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.

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 question of the ministry of diaconia has also given rise to an ongoing discussion. One landmark was the ecumenical document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* from the year 1982.⁶ It expressed the growing need to interpret also the diaconia in connection with the threefold ministry of the church.

The development and flourishing of diaconia and the diaconal ministry has not, however, been clear and logical. On the contrary, it is better to speak of a “new quest for the diaconate, because clarity on the matter is still a considerable distance away.”⁷ These words written by Elsie Anne McKee were prophetic indeed. Just one year later Australian theologian John N. Collins published his radical thesis

which argued that the whole modern concept of *diaconia* was a misinterpretation. Collins' doctoral thesis *Diakonia. Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources*⁸ wanted to prove that 20th century German biblical studies had given a misleading interpretation of the Greek concept of *diakonia*. The major sinners were H. W. Beyer and Wilhelm Brandt. Beyer wrote an article in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* about *diaconia* and the study used there was written by Brandt.⁹ Both described the *diaconia* as a humble service. "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."¹⁰ According to Collins, the German context and especially the tradition of deaconesses has strongly affected the understanding of *diaconia*. Thus the modern context has been projected into the biblical texts against the original usage of the concept.

In his analysis, Collins rejected the idea that the Greek expression *diaconia* means humble service or table service and offered a new explanation. According to Collins, the principle meaning of the concept is connected to the role of messenger. A *diakonos* is a "go-between", an authorised figure that acts under the service of a higher power. Thus to identify the current social-caritative deacon with the *diakonos* in the early church is a misinterpretation. Recently Collins has sharpened 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*."¹¹

The thesis of Collins was first mainly ignored among scholars and also by the churches. A major difficulty for many in the field of *diaconia* was to find the needed expertise to evaluate both the exegetical dimension of the study and also to place the findings into the overall frame. More recently there has been a growing discussion about his conclusions.¹²

Recently a new dimension to the discussion was given by Anni Hentschel. Her study *Diakonia im Neuen Testament* gives a careful and detailed analysis of the terminology related to the Greek word *diakonia* and its derivatives. The results of the study are in line with Collins' in going against the traditional view that *diakonia* means humble service, but they also modify the thesis proposed by him. Hentschel argues that the occurrences of the word *diakonia* must always be read in context. Obviously there are variations in the meaning of the word depending on the connection. One of the most common ways of understanding *diakonia* is as authorised and honourable acts or work. On many occasions this means proclaiming of the gospel authorised by God or by the church.¹³

In the following part of this article I will analyse some key texts in the New Testament.¹⁴ Conventional exegetical methods are used in this part. In the last section of this paper, I also hope to clarify the tradition-historical development of the ministry of diakonia in relation to its biblical background. The basic research question to be answered is the following: If the major biblical texts related to *diakonia* are in need of reinterpretation, and especially if the Greek word *diakonos* does not refer to social-caritative work, then what actually happened in the rise of modern diakonia 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 could be compared in importance and clarity 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 the others as you would have them to do you” (Luke 6:31) does not leave much room for speculation. To love and to care for the other 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 whom one lived among 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 diakonia,¹⁵ also belongs to this category. In its historical context it probably was not referring to all the needy poor, but described relations to other Christians, who were called “brothers”.¹⁶

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 was the epidemics. These disasters in the middle of the second and third centuries killed a large part 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. Also, the burial of corpses was known as a Christian practise. These acts had several effects. Even the simple care of sick people saved many, because they got water to drink and something to eat which helped their recovery. Thus it was possible to cut the average mortality rate by two-thirds or more even without any medication.¹⁷

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

In this connection we have 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 epidemics? In the early church there was a ministry which in Greek was called *diakonos* and is translated as "a deacon". They are mentioned often and in particular in a text that describes the 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 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)¹⁸

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 as among others, not as the 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 those who were in a critical situation. The deacons alone were not responsible for caritative acts.

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

The Greek expressions *diakonia* and *diakonos* are common in Paul's letters.¹⁹ 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 Paul²⁰ 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.²¹ 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 *prostatis*. The expression means that she was a leading figure, a *patrona* or benefactor who financially supported others.²² The traditional misinterpretation of imagining Phoebe as a deaconess is based on the assumption that *diakonos* is a social-caritative worker in the early church. On this occasion, 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 diakonia movement, we should be careful and not project ideas from our own context into 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 this is based on speculation.

The next key text is in Acts 6. The episode, 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.²³ There are, however, good grounds for other opinions.²⁴ 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 work 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.²⁵

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 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. Recently, Hentschel has also argued on good grounds that 1:25 ought to be seen as an authorisation to proclaim the gospel.²⁶

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 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.”’²⁷ This traditional view cannot, however, stand up to critical analysis, and even the plain reading of the text is quite illuminating. What information can we find about *diakonoi* 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 a good knowledge of the Christian faith. Finally, their most important activity is to declare²⁸ the faith in Christ with great boldness. Does this last one actually mean public presentations and preaching?²⁹ Although there is a long tradition of reading 1 Tim 3:18–25 as a description of social-caritative deacons,³⁰ 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.³¹ Actually, the burden of proof belongs to those who claim that *diakonoi* 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 be appropriate to interpret it as an authorised person in a local church. Against the thesis by John N. Collins that their specific task was to be a messenger or “go-between”, there are passages which do not fit this theory, such as Mark 1:31, Luke 10:38–42 and Matt 25:31–46. In some instances, like Phoebe (Rom 16), this messenger aspect is possible but not the most prominent, and in most of the cases Collins’ view pushes the interpretation too much and is too mechanical.³² Although it is not possible to 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*.

The detailed study of Hentschel also makes it clear that only one particular meaning can hardly describe the content of the word *diakonia* and its derivatives in the New Testament. On quite a few occasions the appearances 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, church) and a person who is authorised.³³ This view also has its limitations. When Hentschel interprets texts like Luke 10:38–42 as a metaphor of unsuccessful mission and criticism of the active role of women in the church, she treads upon hypothetical soil.³⁴ In that 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 demonstrate clearly that the thesis of Collins is too narrow and mechanical. This does not mean that the traditional interpretation of the word *diakonia* primarily as a lowly and humble service or 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 a local church did not 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 double-checked 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 a presupposition or expectation of detailed descriptions of how *diakonoi* were helping the financially poor and giving special care to the sick, it will be disappointing to study these texts. The only recurring theme in these texts about *diakonoi* is the general notion that they had a remarkable role in local churches.³⁵ The main interest otherwise in the letters is 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)³⁶ 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 about the relation 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 of the poor, without explicit reference to *diakonoi* (50:8; 56:7).

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.'³⁷ 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 of those centuries connect *diakonoi* to worship and the sacraments.³⁸ The well known legend of Lawrence, dated about 250 AD, and first documented in a short form more than a century later,³⁹ underlines only that the church has 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 like 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.'⁴⁰ This model of the caritative origin of the diaconal ministry seems to be a myth. In the early church there is a special concern for the poor and needy, but ministers called *diakonoi* do 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

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, the monasteries and hospitals had played an important role, but they were weakened by the social, 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 the 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.⁴¹

Martin Luther saw the importance of the ministry of the Word, but was also ready to change the traditional position of deacons in a caritative direction based on his interpretation of Acts 6 in the year

1522.⁴² On the other hand, Luther was not clear in his use of terminology and also spoke about deacons as liturgical figures.⁴³ Luther's proposal to reformulate the function of the ministry of 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 the money. Practical issues, inability to create functioning formats and finally growing emphasis on doctrinal issues led, however, 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.⁴⁴

The solution to the dilemma mentioned earlier in this article can in the end be solved by analysing the Calvinist stream of the Reformation. While Lutherans gave more responsibilities to the civil government, Calvin turned in a different direction. 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.⁴⁵

This paradigmatic change in the theology of the ministry was based on interpretation of the Bible. In the early 1540s, Calvin interpreted Acts 6 on the example of Luther. Luther's views were transmitted by Martin Bucer.⁴⁶

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 the light of a passage like 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.⁴⁷

The rise of the social-caritative ministry of *diaconia* in the Reformed Church and the opposite development in the Lutheran Church may not

be only 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. And still, if there were differences in the ministry of diaconia between 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.⁴⁸

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 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)⁴⁹

Other evidence of the interconfessional interaction 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 article, Fliedner wanted to establish a biblical ministry of diaconia as a result of his experiences during this journey. Although Fliedner does not refer directly to the writings of Calvin, his attitude towards interconfessional co-operation is obvious in his book *Collektenreise nach Holland und England* as pointed out earlier.

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 age. 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.

Based on the misinterpretation of New Testament texts by Luther and especially by Calvin, the diaconia movement of the 19th century projected its own life setting 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 *diakonoi* in the early church was naturally not a complete novelty, but the modern movement did give a totally new meaning to the ancient Greek concept and also 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, the love of the neighbour, was the essential characteristic of the early church and this view still stands firm. Also, 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 article, the social-caritative responsibility belongs first and foremost to the whole Christian community. On 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.

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Notes

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2. On the situation in the 19th century, see Arndt Götzelmann, "Diakonische Antworten und Soziale Frage: Die historischen Wurzeln der Diakonie im ausgehenden 18. und im 19. Jahrhundert," in *Zur Diakonie im 19. Jahrhundert. Überblick – Durchblicke – Einblicke* (DWI-Info Sonderausgabe 6; ed. Volker Hermann; Heidelberg: Diakoniewissenschaftliches Institut, 2005), 63–64.
3. On the current movement, see <http://www.kaiserswerther-diakonie.de> (cited 28 Sept 2007).
4. Theodor Fliedner, *Kollektreise nach Holland und England, nebst einer ausführlichen Darstellung des Kirchen-, Schul-, Armen- und Gefängniswesens beider Länder, mit vergleichender Hinweisung auf Deutschland, vorzüglich Preussen* (Essen: Bädecker, 1831), 134–152. See especially page 151: Diese lobenswerthe, urchristliche Einrichtung sollte von den anderen evangelischen confessionen billig nachgeahmt werden. Die apostolische Kirche führte schon das Amt der Diakonissen ein (Röm. 16,1). – – Warum hat die spätere Kirche diese apostolische Einrichtung nicht beibehalten?
5. See *Faith in the City: A call for Action by Church and Nation. A Report of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas* (London: Christian Action, 1985); P. H. Sedgwick, ed., *God in the City: Essays and Reflections from the Archbishop's Urban Theology Group* (London: Mowbray, 1995).
6. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Faith and Order Paper no. 111; Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982).
7. Elsie Anne McKee, *Diakonia in the Classical Reformed Tradition and Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 94.
8. John N. Collins, *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
9. Wilhelm Brandt, *Dienst und Dienen in Neuen Testament* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1931).
10. John N. Collins, "Ordained and Other Ministries: making a Difference," *Ecclesiology* 3/1 (2006): 15.
11. John N. Collins, *Deacons and the Church: Making connections between old and new* (Leominster-Harrisburg: Gracewing-Morehouse, 2002), 121.
12. Paula Gooder, "Diakonia in the New Testament: A Dialogue with John N. Collins," *Ecclesiology* 3/1 (2006): 33–56, gives a good survey of the discussion. See also Hans-Jürgen Benedict, "Beruht der Anspruch der evangelischen Diakonie auf einer Misinterpretation der antiken Quellen? John N. Collins Untersuchung 'Diakonia'" in *Studienbuch Diakonik. Band 1: Biblische, historische und theologische Zugänge zur Diakonie* (ed. V. Hermann and M. Horstman; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2006), 117–133.
13. Anni Hentschel, *Diakonia im Neuen Testament* (WUNT 226; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).
14. This analysis is an abbreviated version of the recent article in Finnish by Kari Latvus, "Auttajan viran alkuperän uusi tulkinta" in *Auttamisen teologia* (ed. K. Latvus and A. Elenius; Helsinki: Kirjapaja, 2007), 52–83.
15. Theodor Strohm, "Diakonie – biblisch-theologische Grundlagen und Orientierungen: Problemhorizonte" in *Studienbuch Diakonik. Band 1* (ed. V. Hermann and M. Horstman), 15. Strohm refers to Matt 25:31–46 and Luke 10:25–37 as the "Magna Charta of

- diaconia". See also Ulrich Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Mattäus* (EKK I/3; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1997), 522.
16. Luz, *Das Evangelium*, 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).
 17. Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997), 89.
 18. Documented in Eusebius, *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine* (trans. G. A. Williamson; Penguin: Suffolk, 1967), 305–306.
 19. The verb *diakonein* appears 14 times and the substantives *diakonia* and *diakonos* 18 times and 11 times respectively.
 20. 1 Cor 3:5; 2 Cor 3:6; 6:4.
 21. See commentaries like Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an der Römer* (EKK VI/3; 2d ed; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1989), 131. Wilckens speaks of Phoebe as a "Diakonisse".
 22. Antti Marjanen, "Phoebe: A Letter Courier" in *Lux Humana, Lux Aeterna: Essays on Biblical and Related Themes in Honour of Lars Aejmelaes* (ed. A. Mustakallio; Helsinki: SES, 2005), 494–508; Hentschel, *Diakonia*, 168–172. – Cf. Collins, *Deacons*, 73–74, who builds his analysis on the idea that Phoebe was a *delegate* of Cenchreae. There is limited evidence to support the view.
 23. Recently this opinion was expressed by Benedictus XVI in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (section 21).
 24. See the history of interpretations in James Barnett, *The Diaconate: A Full and Equal Order* (Rev. ed.; Harrisburg: Trinity, 1995), 28–33.
 25. Rudolf Pesch, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (EKK V/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Benziger & Neukirchener, 1986), 231; Gerd Lüdemann, *Das frühe Christentum nach den Traditionen der Apostelgeschichte: Ein Kommentar* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987), 81–91. Hentschel, *Diakonia*, 319–346.
 26. Hentschel, *Diakonia*, 298–318.
 27. Barnett, *The Diaconate*, 36, 40–41.
 28. There is no verb for "declare" in the text but the intention is clear. It is also possible to translate "achieve great freedom of speech/action in the faith in Jesus."
 29. NRSV: "and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus."
 30. See, for example, Barnett, *The Diaconate*, 36–41; Jürgen Roloff, *Der Erste Brief an Timotheus* (EKK XV; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Benziger & Neukirchener, 1988), 148–168.
 31. Hentschel, *Diakonia*, 396–406 underlines the task of *diakonoi* to proclaim the gospel without any articulated caritative dimensions in their duty.
 32. Cf. Gooder, "Diakonia," 56.
 33. Hentschel, *Diakonia*, 433–444.
 34. Hentschel, *Diakonia*, 185–297.
 35. See *Did.* 15:1; *Herm.* 13:1; *Ign. Magn.* 6:1; *Ign. Trall.* 2:3; *Ign. Phld.* 4:1.
 36. Translanton of J. B. Lightfoot (<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com>).
 37. Barnett, *The diaconate*, 43.
 38. See for example *Didascalia* 16; *1 Apol.* 65, 67.
 39. In the writing of Ambrose (died 397) *Off.* II, 28, 140–141.
 40. McKee, *Diakonia*, 34.
 41. Elsie Anne McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1984), 129; McKee, *Diakonia*, 62–64; Kaarlo Arffman, *Auttamisen*

- vallankumous* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen kirjallisuuden seura/Suomen kirkkohistoriallinen Seura, 2008).
42. Martin Luther WA 6, 566, 26–567 (in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*).
 43. Martin Luther WA 6, 440, 30–441, 2 (in *To the German nobility*).
 44. Arffman, *Auttamisen*.
 45. McKee, *John Calvin*, 38, 40.
 46. Arffman, *Auttamisen*.
 47. McKee, *John Calvin*, 265–268; McKee, *Diakonia*, 64–77.
 48. The general deaconhood of all believers is promoted in the LWF document *The Diaconal Ministry in the Lutheran Churches* (http://www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/Dts/Programs/DTS_Statement_Diakonia-2005.pdf).
 49. McKee, *Diakonia*, 85.

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