

Deacons and Diakonia in Early Christianity

Edited by
BART J. KOET,
EDWINA MURPHY,
and ESKO RYÖKÄS

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The First Two Centuries

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and Esko Ryökäs

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*To His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew
for being a special Διάκονος, connecting Christian wisdom
with the needs of the suffering earth.*

Foreword

Munib Younan

On 31 October 2016 in Lund, Sweden, Pope Francis, General Secretary of Lutheran World Federation, Rev. Dr. Martin Junge, and myself as LWF President co-hosted a common prayer service and arena event at the start of the 500th anniversary year of the Reformation. This historic event was planned in conjunction with the local congregations of the Lutheran Church of Sweden and the Catholic Diocese of Stockholm, and is just one example of the ways churches are seeking a better shared understanding of each other and of the mysteries of the faith.

One significant area of recent ecumenical discussions is the interpretation of the ministry – what it is and how it should be exercised. Even so, the role of a deacon has not been the subject of much debate, although on this point a number of different opinions are apparent: some churches have a more liturgical, some a more musical, some a more service-oriented understanding of the role of deacon. In fact, much of the debate around the role of deacon is based on recent national and denominational traditions rather than being rooted in the earliest sources. Now is the time for exegetical and theological analysis of these texts, part of our joint faith heritage, for what they can contribute to our modern practice. Investigating the ministry of the diaconate can also provide a useful beginning to joint ecumenical ministry endeavors.

In Jerusalem, we recently ordained an American woman, Ms. Adrainne Gray, to the office of deacon. In my sermon for her ordination service, I noted that when we read about the commissioning of the first deacons in the sixth chapter of Acts, we notice that the office of deacon was not meant to be a position less than the ministry of the Word, but a complementary one. The ministry of service was vital to the ongoing mission of the early church. The twelve could not accomplish their calling without the deacons, and vice versa. It was only through their equal partnership that the church could feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, and care for the widows and orphans, and at the same time teach and preach. As a result of their faithful accompaniment in mission, we read in Acts 6 verse 7: “The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.”

It is clear that the role of deacon has been vital to the ministry of the church from the earliest days. Therefore, it must be considered thoughtfully and seriously in our ongoing ecumenical discussions. It is worth noting that in 2009 the Lutheran World Federation published a document called “Diakonia in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment.” This is a valuable Lutheran contribution to the ongoing ecumenical discussion regarding the understanding of diakonia and diaconal structures and practices in churches and congregations.

My hope is that this interdisciplinary book, including articles from scholars with different backgrounds and denominations, can help to stimulate dialogue and increase unity between Christians. Ultimately, my hope is that this deeper understanding will increase our ability to engage in mutual prophetic diakonia, for the sake of our neighbours, in the name of Jesus Christ.

Signed,

Bishop Dr. Munib Younan

Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land

President Emeritus, Lutheran World Federation

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Introduction

Assessing the Role and Function of an Assistant The Deacon in the First Two Centuries of Christianity

Bart J. Koet, Edwina Murphy and Esko Ryökäs

1. How Important is the Second Leader?

Nobel prizewinner Bob Dylan famously sang “the times, they are a-changin.” Those were the days of the sixties, the days of the Cold War. The Iron Curtain was a symbol of that war. But the Wall fell, and Communist parties disappeared as snow under the sun. However, it was not the end of disturbing relations within countries and between nations. Neither did it put an end to severe conflicts. The Arabian spring evolved into a hell of fire, and tensions around the world grew instead of declined. In Europe, there emerged a resentment towards established leaders; in the States, the dissatisfaction with political elites resulted in the election of Trump.

One of the common denominators of these changes is that there is a crisis in leadership. Not unexpectedly, there is a lot of attention in the scholarly and business literature on that theme,¹ not to mention blogs. There is less attention, however, given to the phenomenon of assistant leadership. What are the roles and responsibilities of the vice-president? How powerful is the vice-dean? Is the civil servant not sometimes more powerful than the chosen leaders? Could it be that this aversion to the power of some civil servants is one of the reasons for the resentment against Brussels (i. e. the EU)?

This book focuses on the role and functions of such an assistant leader. However, it is a study of such a figure in the past: the deacon.² Like assistant leaders of this century, deacons and their roles are often neglected in the scholarly liter-

¹ See, for example, *The SAGE Handbook of Leadership* (eds. Alan Bryman et al.; London: Sage, 2011).

² We realise that this concept will be understood in a variety of ways, in the context of different countries, languages, and social structures. Instead of beginning with a definition of the role of a deacon, then, we will examine what deacons actually did, which we hope will allow a picture of their ministry to emerge.

ature, for example, in the assessment of leadership in early Christianity.³ There is a lot of discussion about the first leaders of the church,⁴ an area of study quite influenced by ecclesiastical presuppositions.⁵ In quite a few Protestant circles, there is a tendency to reject the Catholic, Orthodox, and even Anglican practice of rooting ecclesiastical offices like deacon and bishop in Scripture and early tradition as *Frühkatholicismus*.⁶ An example of this is what happened in a meeting of the *Society of New Testament Studies*. It was a seminar about *1 Clement*. Even before the presenter started to talk about *1 Clem.* 44, a passage where Clement compares leadership functions with those of Israel, the chairman declared that it, of course, was NOT about ministry and thus the discussion was closed even before it had begun.⁷

Catholic and Orthodox churches seem to follow Irenaeus of Lyon, who, in a very short reference, appears to refer to Stephen as a deacon.⁸ However, even in these churches, the diaconate as such is quite often neglected in studies about ministry in the church.⁹ In the Orthodox churches, deacons remained an inde-

³ Just one example: the important church historian Peter Brown mistakenly transforms a deacon into a priest. See Bart J. Koet, *The Go-Between: Augustine on Deacons* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 1.

⁴ See, for example, Alexandre Faivre, “La question des ministères à l’époque paléochrétienne. Problématique et enjeux d’une périodisation,” in id., *Chrétiens et Églises : des identités en construction : Acteurs, structures, frontières du champ religieux chrétien* (Paris: Cerf, 2011), 117–50 and the literature mentioned there.

⁵ Sven-Erik Brodd (“The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity: Historical Ecclesiological Layers in Understanding the Diaconate,” *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 13/4 [2014]: 270–85, 278) argues that, while both Lutherans and Anglicans during the Reformations of the sixteenth century understood *antiquitas* as normative for other historical ages, awareness of this does not seem obvious in the respective traditions: the dominant ideas are inherited from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The lack of critical historical ecclesiological readings of the traditions involved might underlie this.

⁶ Leander E. Keck, “Faith Seeking Canonical Understanding: Childs’s Guide to the Pauline Letters” in *The Bible as Christian Scripture: The Work of Brevard S. Childs* (eds. Christopher R. Seitz, and Kent Harold Richards; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 103–17, 112.

⁷ A common argument is that in Acts 6, the narrative about the Seven, the word *diakonos* is not used. Even Benedict XVI in the context of his reflection on *caritas* (for the English translation, see Benedict XVI, Pope, *Deus caritas est* [2005]; http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html [29.6.2017]) seems to be cautious about typifying the Seven as deacons (he describes them as “a group of seven persons”; see *Deus caritas est*, 21). In his first encyclical, he seems to understand the office of the deacon in the early Church as a concrete expression of love. Using Acts 6:5–6, he points out that it was seen as a service to the community and as a religious function. See *Deus caritas est*, 21–23.

⁸ He refers to the seven in Acts 6 as deacons. *Haer.* 3.12.10: “And still further, Stephen who was chosen the first deacon by the apostles.”

⁹ However, in 2002 Cardinal Ratzinger authorised a text on the diaconate by the International Theological Commission: “Commissione teologica internazionale, Il diaconato. Evoluzione e prospettive,” *La civiltà cattolica* 154 (2003): 253–336. An English translation can be found in International Theological Commission (= ITC), *From the Diakonia of Christ to the Diakonia of the Apostles* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2003). This document is a

pendent ministry, often in relation to the bishop, but later also attached to the presbyter or the parish.¹⁰ However, even in the Roman Catholic Church, deacons who were not later ordained into the priesthood existed for much longer than is often assumed.¹¹

For this volume, we asked scholars from different backgrounds to return to the sources with the idea that a fresh look can help to overcome old presuppositions. We think, for example, that it can help our understanding to describe how the different literary sources use the different leadership terms. Thus the question is not whether in a given source, for example, *diakonos* is an office or not, but rather what the text tells us about what deacons do. In this context, it is possible to observe that often in the early church there is a two-fold leadership structure (for example, 1 Tim 3:1–13).¹²

However, in order to assess *διακονία* (*diakonia*)¹³ and deacons in the early church and in our times, it is necessary to give some attention to the fact that current ideas about the tasks and function of the diaconate in the Western world are quite strongly influenced by ideas about *diakonia* as merely service towards the poor. These grew out of impressive and important initiatives in German-speaking countries in the nineteenth century: an attempt to revitalise Christian

presentation of historical and theological views on the diaconate. In the conclusion, it is mentioned that the diaconate in the Roman Catholic Church has different forms in different parts of the world and it is stressed that more research is needed.

¹⁰ In orthodox traditions, the liturgical function of the deacon gradually became more and more important. Lemma “Deacon” (John Chryssavgis), in *The Concise Encyclopedia of Orthodox Christianity* (ed. John Anthony McGuckin; Chichester: John Wiley & Blackwell, 2014), 141–42. See also John Chryssavgis, *Remembering and Reclaiming Diakonia: The Diaconate Yesterday and Today* (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross, 2009), 85–89.

¹¹ For example, Alcuin of York (c. 735–804), the minister of Charlemagne, St Francis (1181/1182–1227) and Geert de Grote (1340–1384), a famous Dutch spiritual leader. Right up until the nineteenth century, one can find quite a few cardinal-deacons as members of the papal administration. The last cardinal-deacon who was not a priest, Teodolfo Mertel, died on the 11th of July in 1899 at the age of 93. See Bart J. Koet, “Diakon: Adjutant des Bischofs oder Sprungbrett zur Priesterschaft. Randbemerkungen zur jüngsten Studie über *Cursus Honorum*,” *Diakonia Christi* 41 (2006): 41–46.

¹² A desideratum is to contextualise assistant leadership in the cultural context of early Christianity. A question could be whether the relationship between the *episkopos* as responsible for teaching in relation to the *diakonos* is comparable to the Jewish rabbi and his disciple/assistant. An indication that such a comparison could be worthwhile is the fact that the semantic field of serving is also present in the relation between a rabbi and his disciples. For discussion, see Günther Stemberger, “‘Schaff die einen Lehrer, erwirb dir einen Kollegen’ (mAv 1,6) – Lernen als Tradition und Gemeinschaft,” in Beate Ego & Helmut Merkel, *Religiöses Lernen in der biblischen frühjüdischen und frühchristlichen Überlieferung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 141–55, especially 144–52 (“Einem Meister dienen”).

¹³ In some of the articles the word “*diaconia*” is used. Sven-Erik Brodd describes the use of the word “*diakonia*” in English as influenced by German-speaking tradition, not as a common word. Sven-Erik Brodd, “Caritas and Diakonia as perspectives on the Diaconate,” in *The Ministry of the Deacon: 2 Ecclesiological Explorations* (eds. Gunnel Borgegård et al.; Uppsala: Nordic Ecumenical Council, 2000), 26–27.

social and caritative works, using an interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles as an inspiration and a model. This background will be sketched in the next section.

2. Deacons and Deaconesses in the Twenty-First Century: Differences and Common Roots?

Even the reintroduction of the diaconate as an independent ministry in the Roman Catholic Church did not result in a scrupulous and intensive study of this ancient function in the community of Jesus' disciples.¹⁴ Referring to sources from the early Church, the Second Vatican Council reopened the possibility of a permanent diaconate in the Catholic Church. After fifty years of reinstatement, there exist tens of thousands of permanent deacons in many local churches, but there are also quite a few variations between the vision of the diaconate in Roman Catholic dioceses and the view of the tasks of a deacon in a given community.¹⁵

While in the orthodox churches a deacon, albeit with different accents, remained a visible figure and within the Roman Catholic Church he reappeared, the diaconate is also considered as part of ecumenical dialogues. One of the most important ecumenical documents, the so-called Lima Report, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM) explicitly mentions the deacon as one of the ministries of the churches.¹⁶ It even suggests that the threefold ministry of

¹⁴ It is remarkable that historical surveys in earlier literature are more complete than current studies on the diaconate, despite some limitations of sources and method. See, for example, Johann Nepomuk Seidl, *Der Diakonat in der katholischen Kirche, dessen hieratische Würde und geschichtliche Entwicklung: eine kirchenrechts-geschichtliche Abhandlung* (Regensburg, 1884). A first attempt in the last century to assess the figure of the deacon in several contexts is *Diaconia in Christo: Über die Erneuerung des Diakonates* (eds. Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler; Freiburg: Herder, 1962). Although this publication was primarily intended to stimulate the debate in the Roman Catholic Church, it was heavily influenced by German Evangelical and Lutheran ideas about *diakonia* as service to the poor.

¹⁵ Gregory R. Ollick, "A Ministry in Search of a Mission," *National Catholic Reporter* (January 29, 2016). According to an analysis by Montserrat Martinez Deschamps, a board member of the organization of permanent deacons, *International Diaconate Centre (IDC)*: "Even today, 50 years after the Council and the reinstatement of the diaconate of the permanent rank, there is a huge lack of information in many communities regarding the nature of the diaconate." "Marriage and Diaconate, a Unique and Enriching Relationship," *Diaconia Christi* 51 (2016): 168–76, here 171–72.

¹⁶ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Faith and Order Paper No. 111; Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982): "Chapter III. The Forms of the Ordained Ministry. A. Bishops, Presbyters and Deacons", 19. The New Testament does not describe a single pattern of ministry which might serve as a blueprint or continuing norm for all future ministry in the Church. In the New Testament there appears rather a variety of forms which existed at different places and times. As the Holy Spirit continued to lead the Church in life, worship and mission, certain elements from this early variety were further developed and became settled into a more

bishop, presbyter, and deacon may serve today as an expression of the unity which the churches seek.¹⁷ In several churches there has been an attempt to follow that advice.

One example is the Lutheran Church of Sweden where, since 2000, the church ordinal sees three orders on the same level in the ministry (bishop, priest, deacon),¹⁸ even if the ministry is seldom characterised as a threefold ministry.¹⁹ This kind of understanding of the church ministry is recommended for all of the churches in ecumenical documents.²⁰ Regardless, progress has not been easy. This is exemplified by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland: the role of a deacon has been present in church legislation since 1913, but since 1959 there has been a vigorous but incomplete discussion to change the understanding of the ministry from a lay function to an ordained one.²¹

An essential background to the discussion of deacons and deaconesses is the revolutionary change in the evangelical tradition over time. In the middle of the 19th century, a lay ministry of helping the poor, widows, orphans, sick, disabled, and others in need was combined with diaconal language.²² This method of

universal pattern of ministry. During the second and third centuries, a threefold pattern of bishop, presbyter and deacon became established as the pattern of ordained ministry throughout the Church. In succeeding centuries, the ministry by bishop, presbyter and deacon underwent considerable changes in its practical exercise. At some points of crisis in the history of the Church, the continuing functions of ministry were in some places and communities distributed according to structures other than the predominant threefold pattern. Sometimes appeal was made to the New Testament in justification of these other patterns. In other cases, the restructuring of ministry was held to lie within the competence of the Church as it adapted to changed circumstances.”

¹⁷ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, §22: “Although there is no single New Testament pattern, although the Spirit has many times led the Church to adapt its ministries to contextual needs, and although other forms of the ordained ministry have been blessed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, nevertheless the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon may serve today as an expression of the unity we seek and also as a means for achieving it.”

¹⁸ The Church Ordinal (1999) “defines that ordination to all three orders, bishop, priest and deacon are not hierarchically ordered, but are charges emerging from the gospels with equal value.” Tiit Pädam, *Ordination of Deacons in the Churches of the Porvoo Communion: A Comparative Investigation in Ecclesiology* (Uppsala/Tallinn: Kirjastus TP, 2011), 59. In the church’s legislation, those three orders are described as on the same level: “Vingningarna till biskop, präst och diakon är likvärdiga uttryck för evangeliets fullhet och kyrkans sändning utifrån evangeliet.” *Kyrkoordning* 2017-01-01, 25 kap., Inledning.

¹⁹ Annette Leis (*Den kyrkliga diakonins roll inom ramen för två välfärdssystem*. [Uppsala: Diakonivetenskapliga institutet, 2004], 19), sees the ministry as threefold. See also *Biskop, präst och diakon i svenska kyrkan. Ett biskopsbrev om kyrkans ämbete*. (Biskopsmötet; Uppsala: Ärkebiskopsämbetet, 1990).

²⁰ Annette Noller, *Diakonat und Kirchenreform: Empirische, historische und ekklesiologische Dimensionen einer diakonischen Kirche* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2016), 391–93.

²¹ Terttu Pohjolainen, “The Deacon in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland,” in *The Ministry of the Deacon: 1 Anglican-Lutheran perspectives* (eds. Gunnel Borgegård and Christine Hall; Uppsala: Nordic Ecumenical Council, 1999), 141–80. More specifically: Mikko Malkavaara, *Diakonia ja diakonivirka* (Helsinki: Kirkkohallitus, 2015), 132.

²² For an overview of the discussion in light of the important Lutheran tradition of the

caritative helping spread primarily from the Kaiserswerth diaconal community inspired by Theodor Fliedner. It was particularly successful among women, quite a few of whom became deaconesses and were active, for example, in deaconesses' hospitals.²³

This caritative way of understanding the duties of a deacon was largely based on John Calvin's discussion of the New Testament,²⁴ which Fliedner was trying to combine with patristic examples. Some prominent developers of the diaconal movement, like Johan Hinrich Wichern, and Wilhelm Löhe, did not identify this caritative role of a deacon²⁵ with the New Testament era.²⁶ Despite that, the lay function of deacons and deaconesses in the evangelical churches was commonly understood in the late 19th and 20th centuries as following the model of the early Church. Later, towards the end of the 20th century this understanding also influenced the Catholic understanding of the ministry in a more caritative direction.²⁷ Those German Catholic theologians who promoted the diaconate and, to a certain extent, also presented themselves as founding fathers of the re-emerged diaconate like Karl Rahner and his assistant Herbert Vorgrimler,²⁸

priesthood of all believers, see Eberhard Hausschildt, "Allgemeines Priestertum und ordiniertes Amt, Ehrenamtliche und Berufstätige. Ein Vorschlag zur Strukturierung verwickelter Debatten," *Pastoraltheologie* 102 (2013): 388–407. For discussion about the positions of deacons and deaconesses in the Diakonie-movements, see 390–91 (19th century) and 400–402. Further: Sven-Erik Brodd, "An Escalating Phenomenon. The Diaconate from an Ecumenical perspective," in Borgegård and Hall, *The Ministry of the Deacon: 1*, 11–50. For the fact that deacons in most ecclesiastical traditions were not responsible for caritative work, see Esko Ryökäs, "'Diakonia' ennen diakoniaa. Diakoniakäsité eurooppalaisissa yleistietosanakirjoissa," *Diakonian tutkimus* 1 (2014): 32–49.

²³ See for example Noller, *Diakonat und Kirchenreform*.

²⁴ "[...] duo erunt genera Diaconorum: quorum alteri in rebus pauperum administrandis, alteri in pauperibus ipsis curandis Ecclesiae feruient." Jean Calvin, *Institutio christianae religionis* (Genevae 1559), 439; Kari Latvus, "Diaconal Ministry in the Light of the Reception and Re-Interpretation of Acts 6, Did John Calvin Create the Social-Caritative Ministry of Diaconia?," *Diaconia: Journal for the Study of Christian Social Practice* 1 (2010): 82–102.

²⁵ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, 24 (31) states: Deacons "exercise a ministry of love within the community."

²⁶ Wilhelm Löhe, *Gesammelte Werke: Vierter Band* (Neuendettelsau: Freimund-Verlag, 1962), 519: II Für die Diakonissen, Von der Barmherzigkeit, Siebentes Kapitel: "Wir reden hier [...] nicht von der Diakonissin überhaupt, sondern von der des 19. Jahrhunderts. [...] so müssen wir doch auch andererseits bekennen, dass die Diakonissin des 19. Jahrhunderts eine andere ist als die der alten Kirche."; Johann Hinrich Wichern, "Diakonen- und Diakonissenhäuser," in *Real-Encyclopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche: Dritter Band, Comenius bis Eucyklische Briefe* (ed. Dr. Herzog; Stuttgart: Rudolf Besser, 1855), 369–84. 370: "Es mag dabei nicht verhehlt werden, dass die Berechtigung des Namens [Diakon, Diakonisse] mit Grund zu bezweifeln ist [...]" "Der Name Brüderhäuser statt der Diakonenanstalten ist übrigens wirklich der gebräuchlichere [...]"

²⁷ John N. Collins, *Diakonia Studies: Critical Issues in Ministry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 52–53.

²⁸ Another advocate of restoring the diaconate as an independent ministry was the Dutch missionary and bishop, Willem van Bekkum (1910–1998; bishop of Ruteng, Indonesia). He spoke at the First International Conference on Pastoral Liturgy (1956; Assisi, Italy). This is

promoted the idea that the deacon should be the social face of the church.²⁹ Vorgrimler was so disappointed about the fact that Catholic deacons were often also attuned to liturgical services that in his older age he wrote in a sour – and even unfair – way about them.³⁰

While Karl Marx responded to the poverty accompanying the industrial revolution by writing *Das Kapital*, Fliedner responded by creating the movement for deaconesses. This brought many blessings in Germany and elsewhere in Europe. However, the founder of the evangelical *Mutterhaus* (Motherhouse) system and the father of the deaconess movement based his ideas about *diakonia* on a particular interpretation of Acts 6 and the patristic material. It must be noted, however, that a rigorous examination of these source references has shown that only a minority of them are correct and that the literary basis of his ideas is therefore small. Most caritative tasks don't have any references at all.³¹

This reading back into the patristic material of *diakonia* as an especially caritative task is still quite common, as is clear from the extensive article of Paul Philippi in the *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*.³² What he writes about the bishops and widows is very precise, but the tasks of a deacon are described as more caritative than the sources support.³³ In an analysis of three modern presentations³⁴ of the history of *diakonia*, Kari Latvus shows results like those described above.³⁵ In these studies, charity, love, and care for the poor in the early church are well documented. On the other hand, evidence for the caritative role of

summarised in William T. Ditewig, "The Dachau Experience and Postwar developments," in *The Deacon Reader* (ed. James Keating; Mahwah: Paulist, 2006), 31–55, esp. 32–33.

²⁹ We cannot discuss these views here, except to say that in the early Church, the bishop, as *pater pauperum*, was responsible for the social activities of the community.

³⁰ See Herbert Vorgrimler, "Liturgie, Diakonie und Diakone," in Benedikt Kranemann et al., *Die diakonale Dimension der Liturgie* (QD 218; Freiburg: Herder, 2006), 236–45, esp. 237; but see Bart J. Koet, "Diakonie ist nicht nur Armenfürsorge. Neuere exegetische Erkenntnisse zum Verständnis von Diakonie," in *Lernen wäre eine schöne Alternative. Religionsunterricht in theologischer und erziehungswissenschaftlicher Verantwortung* (eds. Christoph Gramzow, Heide Liebold and Martin Sander-Gaiser; FS Helmut Hanisch: Leipzig: Evangelische Verlag-Anstalt, 2008), 303–18.

³¹ Esko Ryökäs, "Zur Begründung der Diakonie bei Theodor Fliedner, Anmerkungen zum ‚Gutachten, die Diakonie und den Diakonat betreffend,‘" in *Diakonische Einblicke: DWI-Jahrbuch Bd. 41* (ed. Christian Oelschlägel; Heidelberg: Diakoniewissenschaftliches Institut, 2011), 49–71.

³² Paul Philippi, "Diakonie I," *TRE* 8:621–44.

³³ For this, see Esko Ryökäs, "Diaconia – A Make-Believe Which Continues?" *Diaconia: Journal for the Study of Christian Social Practice* 6 (2015): 61–74.

³⁴ Gottfried Hammann, *Die Geschichte der christlichen Diakonie: Praktizierte Nächstenliebe von der Antike bis zur Reformationszeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003); James Monroe Barnett, *The Diaconate: A Full and Equal Order* (rev. ed.; Harrisburg: The Trinity Press, 1995); and Jeannine E. Olson, *Deacons and Deaconesses through the Centuries* (rev. ed.; Saint Louis: Concordia, 2003).

³⁵ Kari Latvus, "The Conventional Theory about the Origin of Diaconia, An Analysis of Arguments," *Diaconia: Journal for the Study of Christian Social Practice* 2 (2011): 194–209.

deacons is lacking in the primary sources, but still supported by the authors. The contemporary theory has obviously resulted in a misinterpretation of the sources. And thus a question emerges: what did deacons do? To find an answer to this question it is worthwhile to step back and assess possible biblical backgrounds to *diakonia*.

3. The Need for Further Research Due to New Philological Ideas

In recent years, some scholars have focused on particular aspects of the diaconate. Thus studies have appeared on the position of the diaconate in the *cursus honorum* as well as quite a few on issues relating to deaconesses.³⁶ Philological research has also taken place on the importance of the word *diakonia* and related expressions in classical Greek and New Testament Greek, such as in Luke-Acts and Paul's letters. One of the first scholars who noted difficulties in the translation of the Greek "*diakonia*" words with "serving" words was the German New Testament scholar and classicist Dieter Georgi.³⁷ More or less in line with his critical remarks, but dealing with the word *diakonia* in the broader context, the Australian John Collins showed that understanding *diakonia* as referring only to lowly service is not compatible with the Greek of Hellenistic and Christian sources.³⁸ Collins thereby challenged the consensus, demonstrating that the Greek word *diakonia* originally had nothing to do with charitable work. *Diakonia* instead refers to an activity carried out by order or on behalf of another person that can often describe a work of mediation. A deacon was not a humble servant or assistant but rather something like a messenger or intermediary. According to him, a deacon was one of the leaders of the local community, working in his or her ministry as a go-between, communicating both between individual members and other ministers, and between separate communities. Deacons had significant roles in the liturgy and could also have had special responsibility for money. In her 2007 German dissertation, Anni Hentschel large-

³⁶ See, for example, John St. H. Gibaut, *The Cursus Honorum: A Study of Origins and Evolution of Sequential Ordination* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000) and *Ordained Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History* (eds. Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

³⁷ For the assessment of 2 Cor 2:14–7:4 and 10–13, see Dieter Georgi, *The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians: A Study on Religious Propaganda in Late Antiquity* (English translation and greatly expanded edition of the German original 1964; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986). See Stefan Dietzel, "Zur Entstehung des Diakonats im Urchristentum, Eine Auseinandersetzung mit den Positionen von Wilhelm Brandt, Hermann Wolfgang Beyer und John N. Collins," *Diakonische Konturen: Theologie im Kontext sozialer Arbeit* (eds. Volker Herrmann, Rainer Merz and Heinz Schmidt; Heidelberg: Winter, 2003), 136–70, 154.

³⁸ John N. Collins, *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). For a summary of his thesis, see the article by Bart J. Koet regarding Acts 6 in this volume.

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(made by Alette Warringa, MA)

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