

# DIAKONIA IN THE ANCIENT CHURCH

A Reply to Kari Latvus

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Kari Latvus tried to demonstrate in his lecture that the modern social-caritative ministry in the church does not have any reference point in the bible. For him this kind of ministry had not been developed in the Ancient Church, but only became so in the times of John Calvin.<sup>1</sup> Latvus presented his theses by studying three examples of studies on history of the so called *Diakonia* by modern scholars.

On the following pages I will present a new view on the historical sources. I will explain that in Acts 6 we can already observe some aspects of social-caritative work. In the following history of Christianity this kind of work was always an important part of the ministry of deacons. In the first six centuries of Christianity the social-caritative work became increasingly institutionalized. This development led to a form of diaconal institutions where charity was conducted in a highly organized way. Looking at the history of the ministry of deacons in the Ancient Church we will establish that there never existed an exclusively social-caritative ministry, but a ministry to which this kind of work inextricably belonged. Looking at the history I have to emphasize that it is not possible to reconstruct a clear line of development. Unfortunately the historian has at his disposal only very few source-texts from very different regions. So it is particularly dangerous to synthesize the historical impressions to one irrevocable outline. I would like to emphasize twelve points in the evolution of the early diaconal ministry.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. i.a. K. 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?*, in: *Diaconia* 1 (2010), 82-102, 85.

**I. IN THE NEW TESTAMENT DIAKONIA GENERALLY  
MEANS ‘EXECUTION OF A MISSION’**

Following the research results of modern historians from John N. Collins to Anni Hentschel it is clear that one cannot interpret *diakonein* in the New Testament only as an act of charity.<sup>2</sup> *Diakonia* connotes the execution of a mission from God or from the congregation.<sup>3</sup> Such a *diakonia* compasses many aspects. It includes not only the service at the tables, but also preaching and other apostolic demands, for example the task of mediating.<sup>4</sup> The term *diakonia* is particularly characterized by a diversity of meanings in the New Testament. It is inappropriate to identify the term *diakonia* here with the term used by the Protestant Church in the Nineteenth Century.

**2. THE BROADLY CONCEIVED TERM DIAKONIA INCLUDES INTER ALIA  
IN ACTS 6 SOCIAL-CARITATIVE ENGAGEMENT**

It is impossible to use Acts 6 to establish an exclusively social-caritative understanding of the term *diakonia* and of the ministry of deacons.<sup>5</sup> The circle of the Twelve retains prayer and *diakonia* of the Word (Acts 6:4). However

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. i.a. J.N. Collins, *Diakonia. Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources*, New York u.a. 1990; A. Hentschel, *Diakonia im Neuen Testament. Studien zur Semantik unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Rolle von Frauen*, Tübingen 2007 (= WUNT 2nd ser. 226). W. Stegemann, *Diakonie als ‘Kommunikation des Evangeliums’*. Neutestamentliche Argumente für einen Paradigmenwechsel im Diakoniebegriff, in: T. von Tomis/H. Schoenauer/J. Henkel, ‘Alle Diakonie geht vom Altar aus’. *Theologie und Praxis der Diakonie im ökumenischen Dialog*, Hermannstadt/Bonn 2008, 79–96, 93, refers to the example of Christ as servant in Mk 10:45 and consequently states that the term also includes a critical aspect towards authority and hierarchy.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Stegemann, *Diakonie*, 89; Hentschel, *Diakonia*, 432 f.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Hentschel, *Diakonia*, 434, even proceeding Stegemann, *Diakonie*, 89: ‘Ich vermute, dass es überhaupt ein Fehler ist, nach einer einzigen zugrunde liegenden Bedeutung des Wortfeldes zu suchen.’ Stegemann explains op. cit., 91: ‘So kann der griechische Wortstamm *diakonein* usw. im Neuen Testament den apostolischen Auftrag meinen (cf. Acts 1:17; 20:24; Rom 11:13 [Hentschel, *Diakonia*, 437 states 1:25; 20:24; 21:19]), aber auch die Vermittlung göttlicher Offenbarung (cf. Acts 6:4; 21:19; 2 Cor 4:1; 5:18; 6:3) und die Delegation zwischen Gemeinden (Acts 11:29; 12:25; Rom 15:31; 2 Cor 8:4; 9:1.13).’

<sup>5</sup> Cf. already G. Schille, *Konfliktlösung durch Zuordnung. Der Tischdienst der Sieben nach Apg 6*, in: G.K. Schäfer/T. Strohm, *Diakonie – biblische Grundlagen und Orientierungen. Ein Arbeitsbuch* (Veröffentlichungen des Diakoniewissenschaftlichen Institut an der Universität Heidelberg 2), Heidelberg 1990, 243–259, 243 i.a.: ‘Allerdings wird beim etwas genaueren Nachlesen klar, daß sich weder die Diakonie im ganzen noch ein spezifisches Diakonat auf diesen Text stützen können. ... Trotzdem bleibt Apg 6,1 ff. für die

diakonia is furthermore explicitly referred to a caritative daily service<sup>6</sup> and as service at the table for which the leader of the community is responsible.<sup>7</sup> Thus the semantics of Diakonia is very broad in Acts 6, too. Diakonia concerns preaching as well as service at the table.<sup>8</sup> The Seven, who had to organize the service at the table<sup>9</sup> are not referred to as deacons. Such an identification is first to be found in Irenaios.<sup>10</sup> In other parts of the Acts some of the Seven evangelized.<sup>11</sup> The author of the Acts wanted to subordinate the Seven – very unhistorical indeed – to the circle of the Twelve.<sup>12</sup> That does not imply an understanding of diakonia as a new, subordinate, caritative ministry. On the other hand the service at the table and welfare were part of the leadership

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Diskussion um Wesen und kirchliche Zuordnung der Diakonie grundlegend, allerdings in einem tieferen und nicht ohne weiteres ablesbaren Sinne.' Schille detects this sense especially in the way of conflict resolution between individual parochial groups (cf. i.a. 247; 250; 252), he even declares Acts 6 as a 'Modell zur Behandlung von Mitarbeiterkonflikten' (254). In a different way: G. Hammann, *Geschichte der christlichen Diakonie. Praktizierte Nächstenliebe von der Antike bis zur Reformationszeit*, Göttingen 2003, 62.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. to the daily service in Acts 6:1 Schille, *Konfliktlösung*, 255. According to that the formulation reminds of Jewish practice, namely the institution of poor relief: 'Die als Arme Registrierten und Fremde erhielten im Auftrag der Gemeinschaft durch drei Armenpfleger freitags für die nächste Woche zwei tägliche Mahlzeiten. Die dazu notwendigen Materialien pflegte man wöchentlich einmal zu sammeln. Vielleicht hatte man in den christlichen Gemeinden diesen Brauch beibehalten. Dem Schriftsteller genügt eine Anspielung.'

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Hentschel, *Diakonie*, 321.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Stegemann, *Diakonie*, 93: 'Die Differenz zwischen Verkündigung und Diakonie, wie wir sie gewohnt sind, hat an diesem Text ... keinen Anhalt.'

<sup>9</sup> The social-caritative variant of *διακονία* also represents an official mission in the community, cf. Hentschel, *Diakonia*, 322. She specifies indeed this social-caritative variant op. cit., 323: 'Die Versorgung der Witwen wird in dem vorliegenden Kontext in erster Linie als ein organisatorisches, nicht primär als ein sozial-karitatives Problem dargestellt.' Latvus, *Ministry*, 84, is wrong in emphasizing that accordingly to most of the exegetes 'the Seven' are not to be considered as deacons, but only leaders of the Hellenistic Christianity. Here exists no real alternative: As leadership personalities of the Hellenistic group they were also responsible for the social-caritative service.

<sup>10</sup> In Irenaios haer. 1,26,3 you can find the note on Nikolaos, teacher of the Nikolaitans, who should have pertained to the circle of the Seven in Acts 6:1-5 which also is received in Euseb. Irenaios is the first one who verifiably interprets this circle as deacons. In haer. 3,12,10 and 4,15,1 Irenaios designates Stephanos as the first deacon and martyr. Cf. Latvus, *Ministry*, 86.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Hentschel, *Diakonia*, 328; 336; 339.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Hentschel, *Diakonia*, 329; 335.

in the early Christian community.<sup>13</sup> The multiple semantic use of the term diakonia in Acts 6 was formative for the latter shaping of the ministry of a deacon in the Ancient Church.<sup>14</sup>

### 3. AROUND 100 AD THE DEACON WAS CONSIDERED A LEADER OF THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY EQUAL TO THE EPISKOPOS

The first letter of Clemens, which was written 96 AD (1 Clem 42,4), and the *Didache* from the same period (Did 15,1 s.) suggest the installation of *episkopoi* and *diakonoï* by the apostles or by the congregations. This suggestion didn't include either the subordination of the deacons to the bishops or a caritative ministry of the former. There existed in fact a kind of collegial leadership.<sup>15</sup> The connection of the ministries to the eucharist can only be conjectured.<sup>16</sup> On the contrary, the ministries of the bishops and the deacons are – following the *Didache* – the continuation of the service of the teachers and the prophets in the early Christian communities. In any case the ministries were probably associated with the control of money. Both were advised to avoid avarice (cf. later concerning the deacons Polyk. 2 Phil 5,2; PH sim IX,26; Cypr. ep. 52,1). Although the term *diakonos* is lacking in Acts 6,1-5 the connection between the Seven and the *diakonoï* seems to be an early fact. Both groups were performing a kind of leadership in the Christian community which was called *diakonia*.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Hentschel, *Diakonia*, 335 f.: 'Die Frage, ob der vorliegende Text die Einführung eines Amtes im Sinne einer dauerhaft mit einem festen Personenkreis besetzten offiziellen Aufgabe mit einem klar umrissenen Aufgabengebiet beschreibt, ist angesichts der erzählerischen Darstellung in 6,1-7 in der Forschung zu Recht umstritten.'

<sup>14</sup> However Hentschel, *Diakonia*, 441, simply detects a turning away from the lukanian use of the term in the ministry of a deacon. Luke or the author of Acts might understand *diakonia* as mission of the first witnesses. The item 'ministry' arised from the use of this term by Paul. At one point Hentschel even strictly claims that the Seven 'nicht als Armenpfleger oder Tischdiener auftreten' (op. cit., 341; however hold back, 343). Such an intensification of this thesis would go too far. In Luke's opinion the leadership of a community can also include the table service and the poor relief. According to this Hentschel's distinction, op. cit., 344, between an official mission for a caritative sector and a caritative ministry is helpful.

<sup>15</sup> In my opinion in this text there is no submission of deacons under bishops detectable, versus Schille, *Konfliktlösung*, 258 n. 47. Cf. already to collegial cooperation of bishops and deacons Phil 1:1.

<sup>16</sup> Versus Hammann, *Geschichte*, 34; οὐν, in Did. 14 and 15 could not unconditionally be understood as textual connection between Eucharist and the establishment of bishops and deacons, cf. the commentary by G. Schöllgen (Ed.), *Didache* (FChr 1), Freiburg i.B. i.a. 1991, 135 n. 155.

**4. FOR IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH DEACONS MINISTER IN THE 'SERVICE OF CHRIST', WHICH ALSO HAS A CARITATIVE CONNOTATION, AND ARE CONSIDERED EQUAL TO THE BISHOP IN THE LEADERSHIP OF THE CONGREGATION**

Even Ignatius of Antioch (ca. 110–115) did not understand *diakonia* as a subordinated caritative ministry to the bishop. On the contrary, deacons were sharing the leadership in the Christian communities with the bishop and the presbyters. Their office was first of all the 'service of Christ' (Magn. VI 1; see also Trall III 1).<sup>17</sup> This ministry didn't focus only on food and drink, but generally on the church of God.<sup>18</sup> The deacons had to organize their lives as appropriate (cf. Trall II 3). That means that the deacons should not only serve at the table. On the contrary, they were seen as general authorities in the leadership of the Christian communities. The deacon as ambassador of a local community was elected by this community itself (cf. Phil. X 1).<sup>19</sup> It had to be obedient to the bishop as Jesus Christ was obedient to his father. At the same time it had to consider the remarks of the deacons as commands of God himself (Sm. VIII 1s.).

**5. IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SECOND CENTURY AD THE LEADERSHIP OF THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES BECAME DIFFERENTIATED – THE SOCIAL-CARITATIVE ASPECT WAS EMPHASIZED FOR THE MINISTRY OF THE DEACONS**

In the Second Century AD the leadership of Christian communities became more and more differentiated. Now deacons seem to be responsible mainly for several caritative ministries in the community. As testified by the Pastor of Hermas in the middle of the Second Century.<sup>20</sup> For him the ministry of the deacons involved caring for the widows and the orphans (Sim IX 26,2). For this purpose they were specifically funded. Perhaps they were responsible

<sup>17</sup> Similar in Syriac Didaskalia 9,11 (tr. Achelis, 59). Cf. to the ministry of deacons in Ignatius: R. Staats, Die katholische Kirche des Ignatius von Antiochien und das Problem ihrer Normativität im zweiten Jahrhundert, in: ZNW 78 (1986), 126–145; 242–254; 133.

<sup>18</sup> In contrast to the ministry of bishops, the ministry of deacons and also the ministry of presbyterians seemed to be undisputed in the age of Ignatius, cf. Staats, Die katholische Kirche, 136.

<sup>19</sup> Different interpretation of this point by Hammann, Geschichte, 38 – he already detects a submission.

<sup>20</sup> The Pastor of Hermas refers to apostles, bishops, teachers and deacons. The last three ministries still seemed to exist in that time, cf. mand. IV 3,1; Sim IX 19,2; 26,2; 27,2.

for the common fund of the community. On occasion they stole resources designated for the widows and orphans (Sim IX 26). It is not sure if – as assumed by Adolf von Harnack based on vis II 4,3 (Grapte shall teach widows and orphans) – the welfare of the Christian community is to be considered a separate organization.<sup>21</sup> The deacons anyhow served the widows and orphans as assistants of the bishops (cf. concerning the assistance of the deacons for the bishops the Acts of Peter II,67),<sup>22</sup> who particularly had to look after the widows and the needful (cf. Sim IX 27,2; further ApkPl 35).<sup>23</sup> In this context the *διακονία* of the bishops is also mentioned. We have to emphasize that the care for the widows and orphans according to the Pastor of Hermas is generally a task for all Christians. In any case it is delegated to the bishops, respectively to the leadership of the Christian community (cf. Mand VIII 19; Sim I 8; V 3,7).<sup>24</sup>

Justin gives in his Apology a description of the task sharing during the Holy Communion: The deacons had to distribute the consecrated bread, wine and water during the service and to deliver it to the absentees (Apol. I 65;67). There still didn't exist any real subordination of the deacons – they undertook the tasks of distributing, which the head of the community (who isn't designated a bishop!) wasn't able to undertake himself alone.<sup>25</sup> The remaining gifts collected were given to the head that is to the bishop, who had to dispense them later on. Presumably he also delegated this task to the deacons.

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. A. von Harnack, *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, Leipzig 1924, 841. Grapte according to Harnack is explicitly different from presbyterians and bishops. That does not mean Grapte represents a separate organization in the community. N. Brox (tr.), *Der Hirt des Hermas (Kommentar zu den Apostolischen Vätern 7)*, Göttingen 1991, 109, emphasizes that Grapte had no special position.

<sup>22</sup> Pseudo-Clement Hom. 67,2: *Διάκονοι ἐκπεριερχόμενοι τῶν ἀδελφῶν τὰ σώματα καὶ τὰς ψυχὰς ἐπισκεπτέσθωσαν καὶ τῷ ἐπισκόπῳ ἀντιβαλλέτωσαν*. Perhaps a similar delegation of assignments reflects the presentation in the Acts of Thomas 59, 65. Thus the apostle sent clothing and food to the deacons for the supply of the widows.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Brox, Hermas, 535.

<sup>24</sup> Outside the New Testament the care for people in need is already proposed to all Christians in the *Didache*, cf. Did IV, 5-8. Also particularly clear: Arist., *Apol.* (syr.) XV 7. Dionysius of Alexandria († 265) even described the service for the plague sufferers as a way of replacement of martyrdom. Presbyterians, deacons and amateurs shouldered it the same way cf. Eusebius h.e. VII 22, 7-10.

<sup>25</sup> Hammann, *Geschichte*, 42, mentioned the submission of *diakonia* under the liturgical leadership at Justin. It is possible to assume a division of functions in the service as well.

Deacons like Callistus had a similar task to look after the Christian graveyards in Rome (cf. Hippolyte, ref. IX 12,14). This assignment constituted a central aspect of charity in the Ancient Church. However a similar ministry is not documented for all deacons known by name in the Second Century.<sup>26</sup>

In the acts of martyrs we also read about the deacons caring for the prisoners before their martyrdom.<sup>27</sup>

## **6. STILL IN THE MIDDLE OF THE THIRD CENTURY AD SEVEN DEACONS OFFICIATED AS EXECUTIVE BOARD IN THE CHURCH OF ROME BESIDE THE BISHOP**

We probably have to understand the organizational structure of the Church of Rome as described in the letter of Cornelius in the middle of the 3rd century as a structure of delegation of leadership-competence.<sup>28</sup> Cornelius mentioned inter alia 46 presbyters, 7 deacons and 7 subdeacons beside the bishop, whereby he does not explain their exact fields of activities.<sup>29</sup> Considering the relative numbers it's not conceivable that the deacons were appointed by the presbyters. On the contrary, the number seven, which existed since the times of Fabian (236-250 AD) in the Church of Rome, could indicate a special kind of leadership-competence.<sup>30</sup> In the Jewish environment the 'Seven of a city' constituted the executive board of the community.<sup>31</sup> The outstanding position of

<sup>26</sup> E.g. Eleutherus is known by name, who was deacon in the age of Anicet (~160), cf. Hegesipp at Euseb, h.e. IV 22,3. Indeed, one man called Eleutherus appears as second successor of Anicet. Probably it is the same person, who took over leading missions as a deacon in the church.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. the diary of Perpetua, in the beginning of the 3rd century, cit. at Hammann, *Geschichte*, 51.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Euseb, h.e. VI 43,11 f. Following P. Lampe, *Die Stadtrömischen Christen in den ersten beiden Jahrhunderten*, Tübingen 1987 (WUNT 2nd ser. 18), 311, first of all the division offered the possibility to handle the cooperative real estate in a better way.

<sup>29</sup> Therefore, it is not understandable, why Lampe, *Stadtrömische Christen*, 104, as a matter of course, states that the deacons and subdeacons cared for the 1500 widows and people in need.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Liber pontificalis* ed. Duchesne I, 4-5; 148; 123 n. 6. Therefore Fabian divided the 14 Augustan regions of the city for the seven deacons. Cf. the Synod of Neokaisareia can. 15. The number of seven here clearly is reducible to Acts 6. According to that in every city should have been seven or less deacons.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. H.L. Strack/P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch II*, München 1978, 641; P. Philippi, *Art. Diakonie I.*, in: *TRE VIII*, 621-644, here 621, mentions the Presbyterian leading committee of the seven of the Hellenistic Diaspora synagogues or the committees of the seven of the Parnasim, who at the time managed

the seven deacons, which was closely combined with tasks of administration, is illustrated either by archeological remains or by the legendary tradition for example about S. Lawrence.<sup>32</sup>

## 7. AT LEAST SINCE JUSTIN THE MARTYR DEACONS UNDERTOOK TASKS IN THE EUCHARIST MASS

In the writings of Justin we hear for the first time explicitly about the active participation of the deacons in the Eucharist mass. Possibly Ignatius of Antioch already spoke about a liturgical task of the deacons, mentioning them as deacons 'of the mysteries of Jesus Christ'.<sup>33</sup> In Cyprian from Carthago they are serving the chalice during the *communio* (de lapsis 25). Following the *traditio apostolica* as cited in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, the deacon has to declaim the intercessions.<sup>34</sup> In other passages of the *traditio apostolica* the deacons are also assisting the bishop during the sacraments.<sup>35</sup>

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the smaller cities in Palestine. Ester 1,10; 2,2; 6,3.5 LXX mentions a committee of seven deacons, which permanently advises the king and executes his orders, cf. Hentschel, *Diakonia*, 332.

<sup>32</sup> For the special meaning of the deacons in the social system of the community it is leading that two of them are named by graffiti and a prominent grave is preserved in the Spelunca Magna of the Praetextat-catacomb (therefore as a martyr during the Valerian Persecution in 257 AD). The grave even had been equipped with an inscription by Damasus on the deacons (*ministri*; inscription 25) Felicissimus und Agapitus, cf. Lampe, *Stadtrömische Christen*, 20 n. 36. Cyprian also speaks of four deacons who died as martyrs in Rome during the Valerian Persecution alongside episcopo Sixtus II. (ep. LXXX, 1). Remarkably the text does not mention Presbyterians in the same manner. According to the *Depositio martyrum* in 354 AD Lawrence also pertained to the victims of the Valerian Persecution. Concerning Lawrence cf. Damasus, Inscription 33 (ed. Ursula Reutter, *Damasus, Bischof von Rom (366–384)* (STAC IV), Tübingen 2009, 82); Ambrosius, *De officiis*, I, 41, 205 s. (according to that deacons were entrusted with the administration of the blood of the lord by Sixtus II.) i.a.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Ignatius Trall II 3.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Metzger, *Apostolic Constitutions* II, 68. Cf. the function of the deacon to request the peace salute, *Apost. Const.* II 54 (ed. Metzger I 304).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. the administration of sacrificial offering after the establishment of an episcopo TA 4; the selection for this service in TA 8; the administration of exorcism oil and thanksgiving oil in baptism TA 21; the descending into the Piscina with the candidates of baptism *ibidem*; the administration of sacrificial offering and the holding of the cups during the Eucharist of baptism TA 21; the breaking of bread and the transmission of Eucharist TA 22; the representation of Presbyterians at the communion for the sick TA 24; the carrying of the light in common vespertine meals TA 25; the holding of the cup and the expressing of Hallelujah-psalms in Eucharist TA 25; the representation of the episcopo during the



**8. SEVERAL TASKS LIKE CHARITY WERE NOT CONCENTRATED DURING ALL THE TIME OF THE ANCIENT CHURCH ON ONE SPECIAL MINISTRY**

In spite of the progressing differentiation of the ministries in the Ancient Church there did not exist a concentration in these ministries on only one of the central Christian tasks *leiturgia* - *martyria* - *koinonia* and *diakonia*. The bishop as custodian of the ecclesiastical *deposita pietatis* always had a task in the field of *diakonia*.<sup>36</sup> The administration of the poor fund was a strong factor in the development of the monarchic episcopate.<sup>37</sup> According to the Syriac *Didaskalia* from the beginning of the 3rd century the bishop was looking for assistants for the social tasks, whom he employed as male and female deacons (Syr. Didask. XVI). Equally the deacon was always responsible for liturgical tasks in the community. In addition, by the end of the 3rd century the demand for caritative engagement, as found in the *Apostolic Church Order*, was still there: 'The deacons ... shall look after the poor and give them of the plenty. They shall oblige the rich men to take care of good deeds and to think about the dictum of the Lord: "You saw me hungry and you didn't feed me" and "whoever is performing his ministry without objection and impeccably shall be accepted as pastor."<sup>38</sup>

**9. THE DEACON DID NOT BECOME A SERVANT OF THE BISHOP UNTIL THE TIME OF THE TRADITIO APOSTOLICA (FIRST HALF OF THE 3RD CENTURY)**

It is possible to verify a superordination of the bishop over all the other ecclesiastical ministries in the *traditio apostolica*.<sup>39</sup> In the liturgy of his ordination the deacon is appointed to serve the bishop and to perform his demands

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meals in private houses TA 28. Cyprian assumes that a deacon can confess somebody in danger of one's life, cf. ep. 18,1.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Syriac *Didaskalia* VIII; Reinhart Staats, *Deposita pietatis - Die Alte Kirche und ihr Geld*, in: *ZThK* 76 (1979), 1-26.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. i.a. R. Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire. Christian Promotion and Practice* (313-450), Oxford 2006, 34-89.

<sup>38</sup> *Apostolic Church Order* XXII (ed. T. Schermann, 30s.). Referring to the care of the deacons for the sick and weak see also *Apostolic Constitutions* III 19 (ed. M. Metzger II, 160-163). In this text the need of this kind of care is especially emphasized and established - probably deacons questioned it. The Constitutions especially wanted to testify the Gospel not with words.

<sup>39</sup> Hammann, *Geschichte*, 67, correctly assumes: 'Die horizontale Zuordnung des Tandems ‚Bischof-Diakon‘ verlagerte sich in die Vertikale.'

(TA 8).<sup>40</sup> Again his ministry is identified with the ‘service of Christ’, who was obedient to his father (TA 8). The independent leadership-competence is now vigorously restricted. The deacon is together with the subdeacons obedient to the bishop. He undertakes tasks and calls the bishop’s attention to several indispensable projects standing under his authority (TA 8; 34<sup>41</sup>; 39 [about daily congregations at the bishopric]; further Syr. Didask. 16).<sup>42</sup> His tasks in liturgical realms are broadly described in the *traditio apostolica*: He brings the offerings in the assemblies, he descends with the candidates for baptism into the baptismal font,<sup>43</sup> he carries the light over the course of the *agape* in private houses, he is the gate keeper and the steward during the congregations, he collects the offerings and distributes them, but all in the name of the bishop.<sup>44</sup> The control over the goods for the poor is centralized by the bishop (cf. TA 23), which is also a way of stabilization of the monarchic episcopate.<sup>45</sup> The right to lay hands on and to bless the dishes was exclusively the right of the bishop and the presbyters (cf. later Apost. Const. VIII,28,4/6; ed. Metzger III 230s.). A comparable subordination is mentioned by Cyprian of Carthago<sup>46</sup> and in the *Syriac Didaskalia*. In the latter text it appears for female (cf. Syr. Didask. 14s.) and male deacons, who have to act in absolute obedience towards the bishop (Syr. didask. 16).<sup>47</sup> In the *Apostolic Constitution* at the end of the

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<sup>40</sup> In TA 8 however contradictory statements can be found. According to that just the episcopo should have the permission for laying on his hands on the deacon, because the deacon is established for the service of the episcopo. On the other hand in this text the Presbyterians are deprived of the power to mediate the Holy Spirit. Therefore they also would not ordinate the deacon. In this position different layers of text have to be assumed.

<sup>41</sup> Following TA 34 the episcopo visits the sick informed by the deacon.

<sup>42</sup> In the *Apostolic Constitutions* II 44 this statement is modified a little. The episcopo is still understood as the principal of the deacon, but the deacon should also manage unimportant things for the episcopo on his own, with his permission. However the episcopo should be informed about it. Cf. *ibidem* II 32.

<sup>43</sup> Following Tertullian, *De bapt.* 17, the deacon, like the Presbyterian, was even allowed to baptize on his own if it was ordered by the episcopo.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. TA 8; 21; 25.

<sup>45</sup> Lampe, *Stadtrömische Christen*, 344.

<sup>46</sup> Cyprian – perhaps on the basis of Acts 6:1–5 – assumes that the deacons are established by the apostles, whom he equates with the episcopos as superior. After Ascension Day the deacons would be the servants of the Christian ministry, cf. *Cypr. Ep.* 3,3. According to this letter deacons have to accept both the dignity of the priest and to show humility towards the episcopo.

<sup>47</sup> Similar can be assumed for the *Apostolic Constitutions*, which demand obedience

4th century the deacon is ordained by the bishop in order to assist him. He is not allowed to undertake liturgical services himself.<sup>48</sup>

**IO. AT THE BEGINNING OF THE FOURTH CENTURY AD EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA INTERPRETED DIAKONIA AS A MINISTRY FOR THE POOR INTRODUCED BY THE APOSTLES**

Eusebius mentioned in his *Church History* that deacons, who were delegated by the apostles to the ministry for the poor, aligned themselves with Stephanos. It is particularly risky to interpret the poor with Gal 2,10 generally as the Church of Jerusalem.<sup>49</sup> More likely Eusebius alluded to the care for the poor and the widows. This link is also to be found in our other sources. Eusebius obviously connected *diakonia* with social-caritative work. He didn't mention church-leadership or liturgical ministry in this context. He didn't exclude deacons from other activities, but for him clearly they weren't significant for the circle of Stephanos. One can conclude from Eusebius' statement at the beginning of the 4th century that *diakonia* and charity were still closely connected. Certainly *diakonia* wasn't understood only as liturgical task. In the light of the other sources it seems to be highly implausible that *diakonia* means here only the preaching to the poor.<sup>50</sup>

**II. A COMPARTMENTATION OF SOCIAL-CARITATIVE DIAKONIA AND CHRISTIAN WORSHIP DIDN'T EXIST IN THE ANCIENT CHURCH**

The moment when the ministry of a deacon became primarily or absolutely a liturgical one has not yet been determined – as far as I know. Even in the Trullanum one can observe a contradiction against the definition of *diakonia* as service in the sacraments.<sup>51</sup> There are indeed many hypotheses in modern science concerning a cultic one-sidedness in the Christian service and a progressive additive relationship between the cultic and social-caritative as-

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and subordination to the episcopo. Accordingly the deacons should definitely not act unauthorized, cf. Apost. Const. II 30 f. (ed. Metzger I 248 f.).

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Apost. Const. III 20 (ed. Metzger II 164). In the Apostolic Canons 32 it is even defined that the deacon could not do anything without permission of the episcopo, because the people are committed to his care.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Latvus, Ministry, 88.

<sup>50</sup> Assumed by Latvus, Ministry, 88.

<sup>51</sup> *Trullanum*, Canon XVI. Furthermore we need to discuss if Latvus, Ministry, 91 is right in expecting a correction of a too much liturgical fixed understanding of *diakonia*. Probably Latvus is right in assuming a conscious dissociation of the liturgical and the social-caritative diaconal ministry in *Trullanum* looking at the big city communities.

pects, 'which were formerly more or less combined in the liturgical-diaconal action of the assembly of Eucharist.'<sup>52</sup> This statement is deduced for example from the progressive development of minor orders in the diaconal ministry as observed in the enumeration of Cornelius.<sup>53</sup> Further on it is mentioned that the growth of the imperial church in the 4th century AD led to a social disintegration of the cult.<sup>54</sup> It is still necessary to consolidate this assertion first made by Gerhard Uhlhorn in the 19th century. In any case it is still possible to find evidence in later times for the close relationship between liturgical and social-caritative action in the church. The *Testamentum Domini*, a church constitution at the change of the 4th to the 5th century, impressively proves it.<sup>55</sup> An archeological witness is offered by the *diakonia* of Gerasa, which was founded around 565 AD. The epigraphy, which characterizes the institution as *diakonia*, interprets it indeed spiritually with verses of Psalm 64,5-6 (LXX) and Psalm 85,1-3 (LXX). Prayer and charity are closely connected in this way: 'Bow down thine ear, O LORD, hear me: for I am poor and needy. ...' The *diakonia* of Gerasa was also connected to a church - which managed to bring charity and liturgy closely together in this way. In the *diakonai* in the capital city of Rome, where supplying the poor with grain was the main task, there was also an *oratorium* affiliated.<sup>56</sup> With these establishments there existed at least since the 6th century AD an institution called *diakonia* beside the eponymous ministry.

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<sup>52</sup> Philippi, *Diakonie I*, 624. Hammann, *Geschichte*, 66, even speaks of the replacement of the social by the sacred or the cult tended to the replacement of caritative service.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Philippi, *Diakonie I*, 627.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Philippi, *Diakonie I*, 628, who at the same time speaks of a 'Koinonia-Verlust' for the deacons and op. cit., 629, concludes: 'So wird die diakonische Überlieferung aus einer gemeindlichen Praxis zur soziaethischen Forderung abgewandelt und findet schließlich in der staatlichen Gesetzgebung ihren Niederschlag ... Verloren geht dabei die Rolle der Gemeinde und ihrer Verantwortungsträger ...'. Hammann interprets the situation in a different way, *Geschichte*, 84. Following Hammann the diaconal responsibility was increasingly transferred to everybody. As witnesses next to Hieronymus (cf. i.a. ep. LXVI ad Paumarchium cap. 4-7; 14; LXXVII ad Oceanum de morte Fabiolae cap. 6; 10) especially Augustin is quoted. Therefore at the beginning of the 5th century the deacon was so strongly entrusted with other tasks that the obligation and the organizational implementation of the *caritas* was transferred to everybody.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. i.a. *Testamentum Domini* Lib. I 34.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. A. Müller, *Die Christianisierung staatlicher Wohlfahrtsinstitutionen im spätantiken Rom am Beispiel von S. Maria in Cosmedin*, in: ZKG 120 (2009), 160-186, 185 i.a.

**12. THE CONCEPT OF AN EXCLUSIVELY SOCIAL-CARITATIVE MINISTRY OF DEACONS DID NOT EXIST BEFORE THE TIME OF REFORMATION**

The concentration of the ministry of deacons on charity can indeed be observed at the earliest in the Reformation in Upper Germany and Switzerland – initiated by Martin Luther. The delegation of social-caritative tasks to only one ecclesiastical ministry didn't exist in the first centuries of church history.<sup>57</sup> In the time of the Reformation it is specific for the culture of the Reformed Calvinistic Church. Nevertheless we can already ascertain in the Ancient Church the taking-over of caritative tasks by the deacon, who bears this title since the *Didache*.<sup>58</sup> The caritative task was also closely connected with the leadership of the communities. There was no *diakonia* beside the congregations in the beginnings of church history and similarly there were no deacons without powers of leadership in the congregations. Although there did not exist a permanent exclusively caritative ministry in the Ancient Church, as Latvus stated, there did exist a caritative, not only social, but strongly ecclesiological shaped ministry. This ancient-church concept of diaconate might be more convenient than that of Calvin or that of the Nineteenth Century.

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<sup>57</sup> Cf. Latvus, *Ministry*, 99.

<sup>58</sup> Latvus, *Ministry*, 101, therefore assumes: 'At that time (scil. the age of Irenaios of Lyon), there was no connection to caritative duties but, on the contrary, the *diakonos* was a liturgical figure.' Latvus detects an identification of deacons with 'caritative actors' at first in the *Trullanum*. A position like that on the basis of our statements cannot be lasting. Deacons not only undertook caritative services (Latvus, *Ministry*, 102), but rather were entrusted substantially with it in the Ancient Church.