

DIAKONIA REMIXED

A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON DIAKONIA

DR. MARIANO AVILA

OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION: CHALLENGES FROM TODAY'S WORLD

IN THE CONTEXT OF OUR MISSION TO THE URGENT NEEDS OF THE WORLD

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

SERVICE
DIAKONIA
MINISTER/MINISTRY

I. CENTRAL THESES OF THE DOCUMENT

II. OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND: SERVICE

- A. CREATIONAL FOUNDATIONS
- B. THE FALL
- C. THE KINGDOM OF GOD: RELATIONSHIPS MADE RIGHT
- D. TRANSITIONAL REMARKS TO THE NT

III. NEW TESTAMENT TEACHINGS ON DIAKONIA IN THE HORIZON OF GOD'S KINGDOM

A. JESUS, THE DIAKONOS-KING

B. A NARRATIVE OF JESUS' DIAKONIA

1. DIAKONIA IN THE HORIZON OF GOD'S KINGDOM

2. JESUS, SON OF DAVID, AND HIS HEALING MINISTRY

3. JESUS' DIAKONIA: TO HEAL ALL FORMS OF SUFFERING
IN ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE

4. HUMILITY, THE OTHER SIDE OF DIAKONIA

C. THE EARLY CHURCH AND THE PRACTICE OF DIAKONIA

D. DIAKONIA IN PAUL'S MISSIONARY PRACTICE AND THEOLOGY

1. DIAKONIA IN PAUL'S MISSIONARY THIRD TRIP

2. THEOLOGICAL VISION: EPHESIANS

3. HUMILITY, THE OTHER SIDE OF DIAKONIA

Introduction

We live in a world with extreme and urgent needs and also in days in which a multitude of people have been developing a sensitive conscience about it, particularly young people. That conscience is also being transformed in concrete actions to alleviate human suffering. And yet, the Millennium goals seem to evade us.

Among the major issues we need to have in mind, at home and abroad, these are some:

- Worldwide food shortage.
- The AIDS pandemic
- Human trafficking
- Organ trafficking
- Growing Poverty in the majority world
- Ecological destruction
- Worldwide migration from poor countries in the South to the North
- Water shortage
- Nuclear pollution
- Displaced people as a result of civil and international wars
- People with physical and mental challenges
- Etc., etc., etc.

In a globalized world, those needs “are always close to us,” and we have the call and duty to respond to them in the name of Jesus our Lord. We could say that the biblical teaching leads to a simple but wide ranging fact: Our fundamental vocation is the "**Deaconship (diakonia) of all believers.**"

Diakonia is at the heart of the church' mission.

It is the duty and call of the diaconal arms and feet of the church to mobilize the whole people of God and to bring God's presence to a suffering humanity.

It is the diaconal sensitivity of the Church that has to lead her into the kind of ministry that Jesus described as a central mark of all his people:

A service of love to those who suffer in this world (Matt 25:31-46).

In the letter to the Ephesians *diakonia is a central teaching of the letter, and it summarizes the reason for being, the central mission, and the way the Church has to be present in the world.*

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service (Gk, Diakonia), so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Eph 4:11-13)

Such teaching on *diakonia/service*, far from being a novelty, it is well grounded in the OT; in the life, teachings, ministry and model of Jesus and the apostles; and thus it is natural that is presented in Ephesians as the center of what the church is called and equipped to do in the world. This is what this report demonstrates.

Before we review the biblical teachings, it is important to define some key terms that we will be using in this report. For the Old Testament we will explore the main word used to describe the centrality of service. Then we will explore the significance of *diakonia* and third we offer an important note to remind us of the etymology of the English work *ministry*. We offer first a brief definition and then we proceed to explore their use in the Bible.

Definition of Key Terms¹

Service. A word widely used in the OT to describe *service* to God, to other persons or to things. This term in its different forms underline many central teachings of the OT and provide the background for a proper understanding of *diakonia*.

Diakonia. “As distinct from other service terms, the verbal form *diakoneoo* has the special quality of indicating very personally the service rendered to another ... but in *diakoneoo* there is a stronger approximation to the concept of a service of love.”
(*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*)

Ministry/minister. This term, particularly in the NT, is used to translate *diakonia/diakonos*. It is important to have in mind a key component of such English word that captures one important angle of the biblical meaning of *diakonia*: A minor servant, under a higher authority, that acts for the benefit of others.² Calvin and the Calvinist reformation avoided to translate the Latin term *minister* as *priest* and opted for the literal Latin word *minister* to describe Church officers.³

¹ **The verb** *abad, to serve*, and the derivative terms *ebed slave, servant; abad work* (Eccl 12:1); *aboda labor, service; abudda service (household servants)* (Gen 26:14; Job 1:3); *abdut servitude, bondage* (Ezr 9:8, 9; Neh 9:17) and *mabad work* (Job 34:25), are widely used in the Old Testament.

² **Minister.** c.1300, "one who acts upon the authority of another," from O.Fr. *ministre* "servant," from L. *minister* (gen. *ministri*) "servant, priest's assistant" (in M.L. "priest"), from *minus*, minor "less," hence "subordinate," comp. suffix *-teros*. Meaning "priest" is attested in Eng. from early 14c. Political sense of "high officer of the state" is attested from 1620s, from notion of "service to the crown." The verb is from c.1300, originally "to serve (food or drink)." (*Online Etymology Dictionary*).

³ “The term *minister* has long been appropriated in a distinctive way to the clergy. The language of 1 Corinthians 4:1-2; Hebrews 8:2; Matthew 20:26, etc. must have helped to familiarize the thought that those charged with spiritual functions in the Christian Church were called upon to be the servants (*ministri*) of their brethren. Even before the Reformation the word *minister* was occasionally used in English to describe those of the clergy actually taking part in a function, or the celebrant as distinguished from the assistants,

I. Central Theses of the Document.

These are the central biblical teaching around the theme of diakonia. We will express them summarily and then we will show their development in the Bible.

- A. In Imitation of God, and as an expression of the Image of God, Humanity was created *to serve* with love and devotion God, each other, and creation.
- B. The Fall brought a disruption of the fundamental vocation of humanity who became autonomous from God; violence and forced domination, a consequence of sin, became the mark of human relationships, and creation also suffered the abuse and exploitation of humanity, until today.
- C. After the Fall, God's Torah and interventions in history have the purpose of showing how to live a life of *service* to God, to others and to creation.
- D. ***Service to God.*** Israel was liberated from Egypt to *serve God*, and this is the central term to describe Israel's relationship with God: *Service*. Israelites were in bondage to God, they were God's servants to obey and do God's will and serve his purposes on earth. Worship is also described as *service*.
- E. The Deaconship of all believers. *Service* defined all sorts of work, agriculture, architecture, politics, elaborating clothing. All occupations were a service to the glory of God and a concrete way to fulfill the cultural mandate for the benefit of others and of creation.
- F. ***Service to the land (creation).*** In the context of God's original vocation to humanity, as servants of the earth, God's people are called to a healthy stewardship of creation. Ecclesiastes 5:9 describes a king that is doing what is right, with these terms: *Serving the land (cultivated fields)*.
- G. ***Service to others.*** All kind of occupations, including those in the higher positions of authority, were called to serve those in lower positions.
- H. ***The Servant of God.*** The coming Messiah was described as the *Servant of YHWH*.

but it was not then used sine addito to designate an ecclesiastic. This employment of the term dates from Calvin, who objected to the name priest etc. as involving an erroneous conception of the nature of the sacred office. These Calvinistic views had some influence in England. In the Book of Common Prayer the word minister occurs frequently in the sense of the officiant at a service, and in the thirty-second of the Canons Ecclesiastical (1603) we read "no bishop shall make a person deacon and minister both upon one day", where clearly minister stands as the equivalent of priest. As regards modern usage the Hist. Eng. Dictionary says: "The use of minister as the designation of an Anglican clergyman (formerly extensively current, sometimes with more specific application to a beneficed clergyman) has latterly become rare, and is now chiefly associated with Low Church views; but it is still the ordinary appellation of one appointed to spiritual office in any non-Episcopal communion, especially of one having a pastoral charge". (*Catholic Encyclopedia, minister.*)

I. ***A Servant People.*** The goal of God for the redeemed people is also expressed in terms of *servanthood*. As the most prominent people of Israel were called *servants*, so also all God's people are called *servants*.

I. Old Testament Background: Service. The Hebrew verb *abad*, to serve, and its derivative terms.⁴

A. Creational Foundations

1. God's creation is described as the model of work/service. Creation is a model of God's service to humanity. God made the world so that it will be a place for humanity to live and flourish and to experience harmony and shalom in their fullness. God's generous and loving care for all his creatures is celebrated in the Psalms 104 and 145 among others.
2. Adam and Eve were created in the image of God (Gen 1:28-29). Genesis describes God's work in regal terms, even without using the word "king." Consequently, as bearers of God's image, Adam and Eve's original calling and blessing is expressed in terms used to describe the functions of a king. The two Hebrew verbs, *kabas* (*subduing*) and *rada* (*ruling, exercising dominion*) "entail benevolent care for the rest of creation as entrusted into human custodianship." It is *Servant-kingship* (Chris Wright, *OT Ethics*, 120).

*So, human dominion within creation, if it is a form of kingship, must be modeled on this biblical pattern: If we have dominion over God's other creatures, then we are called to live in peace with them as good shepherds and humble servants. We cannot say that we are made in the image of God and then use that as our pretext to abuse, neglect or even belittle other species, when God does none of those things. As kings, we have the power of life and death over them, and the right to exercise it in accordance with the principles of justice and mercy; but we have the parallel duty, not only to God but to them, to love them and protect them. (Chris Wright, *OT Ethics*, 122).*

3. Adam and Eve were created as servants of God, of each other and of creation. Their fundamental vocation in life is described in terms of *work/service*. Thus, for example, in Genesis 2:5 we read that "*there was no one to work the ground.*" The verb here is *abad* and the translation can also be "there was no one to serve the ground."

⁴ *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament TWOT, Enhanced BDG, Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*, Chris Wright's "*OT Ethics for the People of God*"

4. In Gen 2:15 we read that “*The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.*” The two Hebrew verbs used here can be translated also as “*to serve and keep it.*” The second verb, *shamar*, is used mainly in relation to “keeping a sacred duty” like the keeping of Torah or obedience to it. In this way, the fundamental vocation of humanity is expressed in terms of a sacred service to God’s creation.
5. “The curse (Gen 3:16–17) was only the pain and hardship which were to accompany labor, not the labor itself. This point is made when Lamech says at the birth of Noah that he “shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord has cursed” (Gen 5:29). (TWOT)
6. A main part of being created in the image of God consist in the imitation of God who works/serves (Gen 1:28-30). Thus, humanity is commanded to rest in imitation of God, who rests from his work after it is finished (Ex 20:11; Deut 5:14–15).
7. In Genesis 4:9 we learn, with a negative example, that we were also created to be *keepers* (Heb. *Shamar*) of each other.

B. The Fall

One of the manifestations of sin in the life of the first couple is that their relationship will be marked by a will to control, subordinate and dominate.

Your desire will be for your husband,
and he will rule over you. (Gen 3:16)

Forced domination is a consequence of sin, it is a *described* reality as it is a *prescribed* curse, and it will mark human relationships until today.

As we just read, Cain will renounce to his responsibility to serve and be a keeper of his brother and the life of humanity, since then, is marked by violence. Power is used and abused against humanity, as Genesis 4 to 11 shows clearly and the rest of the Bible will document eloquently.

C. The Kingdom of God: Relationships made right.

I. Abad In the Old Testament⁵

abad appears 290 times in the OT. The use of this term describes multiple realities in life, but all of them have in common the idea of *service*. It is translated with diverse words like: “to do or make,” “to worship, obey” (God) and also as “to enslave, reduce to servitude.” So, we find a broad spectrum for the use of the word *abad*.

⁵ The information on *abad* and its derivatives is taken form the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*.

It is out of these realities of life that the word is used metaphorically to describe the service to God, to others and to creation. All of these are very apt metaphors to point out the deep sense of the service or ministry we are called to do in God's name.

The Kingdom of God is a reality for God's people that is aimed to make things right and bring them to their original intent. Thus, after the Fall, God's Torah and interventions in history have the purpose of showing how to live a life of *service* to God, to others and to creation. That kind of service is introduced in the context of the hard realities of a fallen humanity and creation. Thus, in that context, God's kingdom seems to be an *upside down kingdom*, so contrary to the way individuals and societies behave.

The following are some relevant cases in which Scriptures underline the fundamental character of service regardless the office or situation of people. We are underlying those that are more significant for the purposes of this report: service to *things, people and God*.

1. ***Service to the land (creation)***. In the context of God's original vocation to humanity, as servants of the earth (see above under Creation), it is quite interesting that Ecclesiastes 5:9 describes, in light of the injustices in society, a king that is doing what is right: *Serving the land (cultivated fields)*⁶
2. ***Service defines all sorts of work***, agriculture, architecture, politics, elaborating clothing (see Appendix one).
3. ***Service to others***. Slavery and all forms of servitude are described with the same words. Also work and other occupations are described as a form of service. Political submission and military service fall under the same category. It is outstanding to find that the Law protected slaves from different forms of abuse. Also, it is equally remarkable, particularly in the context of the empires, cultures and societies of those days, that those in the higher positions of authority were called to serve those in lower positions.

A crucial passage in the first book of Kings 12:7 illustrates this fact:

“If today you will be a servant to these people and serve them and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants.”

Rehoboam the young king was asked by his northern subjects to relieve them from the oppressive policies of Solomon. The words just quoted were the advice he received from the elders. He refused to hear them, and the kingdom was divided. But those words expressed the ideal of all forms of kingship: *Service*. An ideal only fulfilled by the

⁶ *But this is gain for a land in every way: a king committed to cultivated fields* (ESV).
After all, a king who cultivates the field is an advantage to the land (NASB95).

servant-king Jesus.

4. ***Service to God.*** Israel was liberated from Egypt to *serve God*, and this will be the central term to describe Israel's relationship with God: *Service*. God's people served God in their rites and ceremonies and in their everyday life. They were in bondage to God, they were God's servants to obey and do God's will and serve his purposes on earth. Worship is also described as *service*.
5. ***The Servant of God.*** The most prominent term used by Isaiah to describe the coming Messiah was *Servant of YHWH*. In light of the failed monarchy and God's judgment (the exile) on Israel and Judah, it becomes clear that the only king that was going to fulfill God's plan for Israel, the nations and all of creation was the *Servant of the Lord*.
6. ***A Servant People.*** The goal of God for the redeemed people is also expressed in terms of *servanthood*. As the most prominent people of Israel were called *servants* (patriarchs, founding leaders, prophets, judges, kings, and even angels) so also all God's people are called *servants*.

D. Transitional Remarks to the NT

A central mark of the Old Testament teaching on *service* is that, inherent to our being created in the image of God, is the reality that by serving we are imaging a generous, caring, and serving God.

The contrast that we will explore shortly in Jesus of a *Servant-King* is present already in the creation account. The terms used to describe the cultural mandate given to the first couple, terms that the biblical narrative will use later to refer to realities of dominion and kingship, of God and humans, are also loaded with ideas of loving and generous care to fellow human beings and to creation.

In the biblical language of *service/servant*, we discover that all those who were prominent leaders of Israel (Patriarchs, Judges, Kings, Priests and Prophets), including the whole nation of Israel, were called *servants* of God and each other. Considered from that perspective, the Torah, as a guide for living, was an excellent educator on what it meant in practical and every day terms to be *a nation and kingdom of servants*. No doubt, in that context, as it continues to be in ours, such vision was counter cultural and radical.

Worship, a central practice of Israelite practice and life, is defined as *aboda, service*. The priests and ministers and called *servants*. Priests and Levites, who were a paradigm for the nation, were trained and equipped daily in *aboda/diakonia*. In their daily practice, they were learning that by serving the rest of their brothers and sisters, they were serving God.

And as we well know, worship for Israelites was not confined to the sanctuary/temple. Fear of God, the heart of piety, was expressed in an exclusive

adoration of the true and only God (*The Shema* of Deut 6:4-5), and also in the humble recognition and respect for the sacredness of all human persons (regardless of ethnicity, race, social and political status, age and gender, see Leviticus 19) and of all creation.

Worship, thus, was expressed primarily in the daily services at the temple, and also in all actions of life, in work and family life, and in social, economic, and political relationships. And of course, ingrained in Torah's lessons was the care of creation, as an essential part of Israelite piety, according to Torah. The world and life view expressed in God's Word was a fully integrated and wholistic vision on how to restore and work for shalom.

All of life was religious, and every action, from the simpler to the most transcendent, was an act of adoration and service to God by those who were called to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:4-6).

In summary, *service* is the foundational vocation of humanity and must be expressed in all areas of life. *Service* is the search for the wellbeing of creation, of our fellow human beings and the glory of God. We are called, in a fallen world, to model with our life and in all of our relationships, a central value of God's upside down Kingdom: *diakonia*. We must aim for the *deaconship of all believers*.

II. New Testament teachings on *Diakonia* in the Horizon of God's Kingdom.⁷

⁷ Some of the lexicographical sources for the NT are: Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed.) (229–231).

A. Jesus, the *diakonos-King*.

As we read Matthew's gospel, or any of the other Gospels, it becomes evident that the kingdom of God is an "upside down kingdom" (Kraybill), a kingdom whose King and subjects are completely the opposite of any kingdom we have known, in the OT writings or in the history of Humanity.

If we remember the kings of Israel, the way they conducted their affairs, and their personal style of governing, we see some hints and signs of what God expected from them and how much they adjusted or not to Torah. Even in the best cases, there was a very, very long way to go in terms of achieving the norm and simple principles taught in Deuteronomy, in terms of *Servant-Kingship*.

The model of political authority in Israel is servanthood. 'Moses was faithful as a servant in God's house' (Heb 3:5)... Though an outstanding leader, among the greatest in human history, Moses could be soberly described as 'the most humble man on earth' (Nu 12:3). Not surprisingly then, the Deuteronomic law of kingship strictly forbids a king from exalting himself above his brothers; he should rather set an example in embodying the demands and values of the law (Deut. 17:14-20). In fact, this remarkable text more or less says that whatever a king in Israel is to be, he is not to be like any usual earthly king who enjoys weapons (military prestige), wealth (silver and gold) or wives (harem). In the context of the day it might have been wondered whether it was worth being a king at all in such terms. Israel was a very different model of kingship indeed, a model sadly even David scarcely adhered to, and Solomon forgot altogether. (Chris Wright, OT Ethics, 148-49).

According to the books of Samuel and Kings, David and Solomon, representatives of the golden years of monarchy, were very far from God's mark. It is proper to apply the writing in the wall for king Belshazzar, to David and Solomon. They also "were weighed on the scales and were found wanting." (Dan 5:26-28). Their kingdom also was divided and given in the hands of foreign empires. The opening genealogy in Matthew is a sad reminder of this fact: the monarchy ended up in the exile (1:6-11), but continued to the **Prince of Shalom** (Isaiah 9:6), about whom it is said that

*Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever." (Is 9:7).*

B. A Narrative of *Jesus' diakonia*.

Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (BGAD); *Theological dictionary of the New Testament*. 1964- (G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley & G. Friedrich, Ed.) (electronic ed.). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.(TDNT); Balz, H. R., & Schneider, G. (1990-). *Vol. 1: Exegetical dictionary of the New Testament* (302–304). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans. (EDNT).

A central passage in the Gospel of Matthew (as in Mark 10:45, Luke 22:27), that becomes like the peak of a mountain from which we can look back and forth and have the best possible perspective on Jesus' ministry/service/diakonia is Matt 20:25-28. In this passage, with the very words of Jesus and his self-explanation of what he has been doing, we learn that his life, words and deeds were an expression of **diakonia**. Jesus was a deacon/servant who gave his life for the integral well-being of many. Jesus expressed his Lordship and Kingship in *diakonia/service*.

*You know that the rulers of the Gentiles **lord it over them**, and their high officials **exercise authority** over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your diakonos/servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served (diakonethenai), but to serve (diakonesai), and to give his life as a ransom for many.*

A similar passage is found in Mark 9:33-35

*They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant (**diakonos**) of all."*

In Luke 22:25-27 the same lesson is mentioned:

*Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves (**diakoon**). For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves (**diakoon**).*

And of course, John 13:1-17 gives us the extraordinary example of Jesus and his clear teaching during his last Passover celebration with his disciples. It is quite clear that by his actions and words, Jesus redefines what it means to be King; the king is a servant.

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. ¹³"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶Very truly I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

1. *Diakonia* in the Horizon of God's Kingdom.

Matthew's Gospel is about the present arrival of the kingdom: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." (3:2, 4:17, 10:7). It was the central theme of the proclamation and performance of John the Baptist, of Jesus, and of the apostles. It was a kingdom of justice and shalom (4:23, 9:35 in light of 6:33).

Early in the narrative we learn that Matthew's gospel is about Emanuel, a theme that opens and closes Matthew's masterfully woven narrative (1:23, 28:20). Emanuel is in Isaiah a Messiah, a king.

The following passages are highly important as the OT background for Jesus and Matthew's understanding of the kingdom of God: Micah 5:2-5, Ezekiel 34 (esp. vv. 4, 5, 16), 2 Sam 7 (esp. vv 13-14), Isaiah 42:1-5, Ps 78:70-72, Ezekiel 37:24-26. They carefully select the elements that are highlighted in Matthew, presenting Jesus as a *Servant-King*, while at the same time leave aside those features that confirmed the Jewish expectations and messianic hopes of a king that destroys his enemies, the Gentiles, to establish an Israelite kingdom and thus to gain peace.

The narrative opens with a clear connection to the OT kingdom of David (1:1). Jesus is son of David and rightful heir of the kingdom (2 Sam 7). The magi came looking for the king of the Jews (2:2) and Micah's prophecy says that

"...out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel." (2:6).

This is a royal title that combines the ideas of kingship and shepherd, King-Servant, that was fulfilled in Jesus (2:6). In Matthew we find a counter narrative of the prevalent views on what a kingdom meant, in Rome or Judea. By means of the following key terms, used to point out to Jesus as king: *Son of David and Shepherd*, the Gospel of Matthew underlines the counter cultural character of Jesus' Kingdom (Willard M. Swartley, *Covenant of Peace*, 2006:77-84).

2. Jesus, Son of David, and his healing ministry.

Jesus is then the **Son of David**. This title is used nine times in Matthew (more than in the other gospels). In the genealogy (1:1) and the birth narrative (1:20) it is used to establish the credentials of Jesus as legitimate heir of David's throne. Six times it is used in Jesus' public ministry, and ***in five of them the title is connected to Jesus' healing ministry*** (9:27-31; 12:22-24; 15:21-28; 20:29-34; 21:1-11; 21:14-16). The last time it occurs is in 22:42 where the Pharisees declare that the Messiah is son of David.

Such healing ministry is highly significant. It is connected to OT passages (Zech 9:9-11, Isaiah 35:5-6; 61:1-2) that describe healing as a central feature of kingdom of peace brought about by the shepherd-king. "Clearly, Matthew considers healing an identifying mark of the kingdom's coming and of Jesus own identity as Messiah." (Swartley, *ibid.*, 78). **It is a central mark of Jesus' diakonia.**

Thus, in addition to the previously quoted passages, we find many more instances in which Jesus develops a holistic ministry for people (4:23, 9:35) and identifies his healings with the announced coming of the kingdom.

Jesus saw and valued people with a different perspective than the religion of his days and *served* them with compassion and love. This was the hallmark of his life and ministry. He did not only see their sins but also the consequences and suffering caused by them. This was Jesus' deepest pain, and the urgent reason for sending his disciples into their first missionary trip.

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.

³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." (9:36-38).

As we read Matthew's gospel (or any other Gospel), we discover that Jesus had a deep and genuine appreciation for all kinds of people, regardless of their social, ethnic, political, religious, or even moral background. And he treated and served them accordingly. He knew that every person was created in the image of God and had a value, worth, and dignity given by God that did not depend on relative and frequently degrading human categories and taxonomies.

3. *Jesus' Integral Diakonia, to heal all forms of suffering for all kinds of people.*

"Jesus' view of service grows out of the OT command of love for one's neighbour, which He takes and links with the command of love for God to constitute the substance of the divinely willed ethical conduct of His followers." (TDNT, *diakonos*). That is why in contrast to his contemporaries, Jesus puts no limits to love. True love of neighbor is unlimited and all inclusive (Mt 5:38-48).

Matthew 8 and 9 are meant to represent the comprehensiveness and inclusivity of Jesus' ministry. Jesus' ministry presented a frontal attack to ***all the forces of sin and evil*** that oppress human life. When we reflect on each of the miracles, and the careful selection the author made of them, it is easy to discover his attempt to represent the totality of hostile realities in the life of people:

- *A Sickness that destroys and isolates from society – leprosy. 8:1ff*
- *Paralysis and profound suffering – twice 8:5ff and 9:1ff.*
- *Different sicknesses – not specified 8:16*

- *Demon-possession – three times mentioned 8:16, 28ff, 9:32*
- *Forces of nature threatening life 8:23ff*
- *Sins 9:2*
- *Death 9:18, 24*
- *Blindness 9:27ff*
- *Dumbness 9:32ff*
- *And, of course, those called to be followers and disciples of Jesus.*

The kind of people to whom Jesus *ministered* are also representative of humanity. In that sense, his ministry/diakonia is aimed to all kinds of people:

A common man, the son-servant of a centurion (a gentile), Peter's mother-in-law, the sick masses, the disciples, the Gadarene possessed men, the paralytics, tax collectors and sinners, the ruler's daughter and the sick woman, the blind and dumb men, and the masses without shepherd.

The previous points are fundamental lessons for the disciples; they need to grow in their faith and understanding of who Jesus is, and what his Kingdom and presence (God with us) demand of those who follow him learning from his words and wonderful deeds. The disciples' own ministry, illustrated and described in ch. 10, and condensed in terms of disciple making in 28:16-20, should find in Jesus the model *par excellence* of what *diakonia* means.

In the commissioning of the 12, healings are a central part of the proclamation of the already arrived kingdom (10:1, 7-8). The apostles are charged with a mission of *diakonia*.

When Jesus is questioned by the disciples of John about his identity as the Messiah, he replies by pointing to his miracles and healings, which are in line with the prophecy (11:4). Matthew will point out how Jesus healings, even in the midst of fierce opposition, are the fulfillment of Messianic prophecies (12:18-20 from Isaiah 42:1-4, 9). When the opposition increased and Jesus withdraws from the Jewish people, and as a sign of judgment Jesus speaks in parables (ch.13), denying public teaching, the only connection with the crowds will be *healing* (21:14). This last passage is highly significant, since it happens precisely when Jesus fulfills Zechariah's prophecy of the humble *servant-king*.

4. Humility, the other side of *diakonia*.

A highly significant passage for our purposes is Matthew 11:28-30. Jesus calls to discipleship those who are described with the words "toiled and burdened." They are people from the lowest class, "people who have to work hard, who toil and sweat their guts out, who are exhausted by strenuous work which wears them out...who have to carry heavy loads...people who suffer under the violent use of power...dependent workers who have to wear themselves out earning their meager daily wage." (K. Wengst *Humility*, pp. 37-39).⁸

It is quite meaningful that Jesus calls them to be his disciples appealing to his own condition and character: "for I am gentle and humble in heart." This is one of the few places in the Synoptic Gospels where Jesus speaks of himself and his character.

⁸ Klaus Wengst, *Humility. Solidarity of the humiliated*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.

This is a designation for the impoverished and humiliated who deliberately accept their situation, set their hope on God, withdraw from the complex of violence and practice a different form of justice and righteousness from those who rule by force... Here Jesus calls people out of oppressed and oppressive circumstances to his discipleship, the new community of his disciples which escapes the conditions of exploitation and domination and in which these conditions are no longer to hold. (Ibid. 39).

Humility is the essential and indispensable attribute for genuine *diakonia*. Jesus is the *humble* king, son of David, and he shows it in his triumphal entry to Jerusalem where his actions are a demonstration of his character (Matt 21:1-9). ***He rules by serving, using his power to the benefit and shalom of others.***

The marks and character of a disciple must be *service*. The Beatitudes point in this direction when they underline the virtues that were also features of Jesus character: poor in spirit, humble, merciful, with hunger and thirst for justice, shalom-maker...

Thus, when we read Matthew 25:31-46 it is no surprise that in the final judgment the true disciples of Jesus, his little ones, are those who have lived practicing *diakonia* towards their fellow human beings, in the name of Jesus.

Jesus trained his disciples for missions with his own example and teachings. He wanted a church where there is room for all kinds of people, where servant hospitality is practiced towards everyone, where the hungry, the foreigner, the homeless, the sick and the delinquent (25:31-46) have a privileged place in the community of saints.

The term *diakonia* thus comes to have the full sense of active Christian love for the neighbour and as such it is a mark of true discipleship of Jesus. For what the Christian does to even the least of his fellowmen he does to the Lord Himself. (TDNT, *diakonia*).

We are called to be *deacons* and to use our gifts and power to serve and even to be willing to put our lives for the shalom of others (see Ephesians 5:1-2). The ***imitatio Christi, imitation of Christ***, is fundamental for citizens of the kingdom, for the members of the Father's household.

C. The Early Church and the practice of *Diakonia*

As we already saw, *diakonia* was used by Jesus to describe his own public life and ministry/service. Jesus was the embodiment of what we were created to do, our fundamental calling as human beings. Jesus was also the concrete expression of a Servant-King according to God's heart. *Diakonia* was expressed in a holistic, integral service to others and in them to God.

Jesus taught that *diakonia* had to be the mark of his disciples. Jesus gave them an example and model for life and ministry.

In summary, *diakonos*, *diakoneo* and *diakonia* appear to have been used in a general way to refer to ministers, servants, ministry and service in the church before *diakonos* was used to designate the office of deacon. In light of the initial broad use of *diakonos*, *diakoneo* and *diakonia* to refer to Jesus, his followers and their work, one might conceive of a diaconate of all believers similar to Martin Luther's priesthood of all believers because all church members are called to serve and to minister apart from a particular office of deacon or pastor. (Jeannine E. Olson, *Deacons and Deaconesses in the Bible and the Early Church*, 22).

The book of Acts provides excellent examples of the way the Early church embodied *diakonia* as an everyday practice, as an ethos that characterized their communal life. And that happened long before the churches had the office of deacons.

Peter defines the ministry of the 12 apostles as a *diakonia* (1:17) and they choose a substitute for Judas that will now will share in the *diakonia* of the apostles (1:25). The underlying fact is that the apostolic ministry, as later will be the case with the one of those chosen to *diakonia* (see 6:2 and 4 Word), not as a office but as a character and nature

Diakonia then, is *historically and theologically*, previous to the office of deacon and has primacy over it.

serve the tables is a *diakonein/serve tables service/diakonia* of the technical term for the description of the of their service.

Acts 2:41-47 and 4:32-35 are relevant summaries of the lifestyle of the early Christian church in Jerusalem. There was a genuine, spontaneous and generous *koinonia* that was expressed in a *diakonia* that addressed the economic, social and religious needs of people.

32. And the multitude which believed had one heart and one soul; and no man did say that any of those things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. 33. And the apostles did bear witness of the resurrection of Jesus Christ with great power; and great grace was upon them all. 34. For there was one among them that kicked: for so many as possessed lands or houses, setting them, they brought the price of those things which were sold, 35. And they laid it at the feet of the apostles: and it was distributed to every man according as he had need.

John Calvin makes the following comment to this passage that not only describes well the essence of *diakonia* but also is quite relevant to our present days:

“This points us to the meaning of the words that no one counted anything his own, but that they had all things in common. For no one held his possessions privately for himself to be selfishly enjoyed to the neglect of others, but they were prepared, as need required, to share them in common.

“And now we must have hearts that are harder than iron if we are not moved by the reading of this narrative. In those days the believers gave abundantly of what was their own; we in our days are content not only jealously to retain what we possess, but callously to rob others. They set forth their own possessions with simplicity and faithfulness; we device a thousand cunning devices whereby we may acquire everything for ourselves by hook or by crook. They laid down at the apostles’ feet; we do not fear, with sacrilegious boldness, to convert to our own use what was offered to God. They sold their own possessions in those days; in our day it is the lust to purchase that reigns supreme. At that time love made each man’s own possessions common property for those in need; in our day such is the inhumanity of many, that they begrudge to the poor a common dwelling upon earth, the common use of water, air, and sky.” (Calvin New Testament Commentaries, *the Acts of the Apostles vol. 1*. p. 130).

The care for the discriminated widows in Acts 6:1-7 is another model of the economic *diakonia* practiced by the early church. The care for the poor and needy widows of Hellenistic background was assured. A practiced that became institutionalized in the Christian churches in the years to come.

D. Diakonia in Paul's Missionary Practice and Theology

1. *Diakonia* in Paul's Missionary Third Trip

Diakonia was central in the life of the early church and became an essential part of Paul’s mission to the Gentiles and his theology. "A particular service which played a great role in the life of Paul was the gathering and transmission of the collection for the saints in Jerusalem." (TDNT, *diakonia*). Something that is not always recognized or even noticed.

2 Cor. 8-9 is the narrative of the way in which the Macedonian churches *served* poor people in Jerusalem and how their remarkable example is used by Paul to stimulate the Corinthians to practice economic *diakonia* in imitation of the Macedonian churches and

particularly of heir Lord Jesus, the Messiah. *The Macedonian churches' diakonia* is explained with an eloquent theological reflection that elucidates the deep dimensions of *diakonia* and is presented as a paradigm for all churches. A consideration of the main aspects of Paul's teaching on *diakonia* is important for our purpose.

During his encounters with the leaders of the Jerusalem Church, Paul received a charge, that was already an integral part of his mission, and was carried out with more intensity in his coming missionary trips: To remember the poor in Jerusalem.

*James, Cephas and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews. All they asked was that we **should continue to remember the poor**, the very thing **I had been eager to do all along**. (Gal. 2:9-10).*

This is what Paul and Barnabas did according to Acts 11:29 and 24:17; see also how Paul in his main letters, makes reference to this central task of his missionary trips (Rom 15:15-18, 25-28, 31; 1 Cor 16:1; and the passage that we will analyze more closely: 2 Cor 8-9) and that he articulates it in terms of *diakonia*.

Paul first puts in perspective the origin and reason of the churches' *diakonia* to relief the poor in Jerusalem: God is the originator of it. It is not a human achievement but a divine grace that enables Christians to *serve*. Then Paul argues that giving and serving others must be carried out according to the true nature of *diakonia*: As a humble and discrete service to benefit others, notably exemplified by our Lord Jesus. Finally, Paul demonstrates that such *diakonia* is, in its deepest sense, an act of worship, a *leitourgia*, a *liturgy* that produces the humble and total adoration of those involved in the performance of *diakonia*. Let us consider this teaching in a more detailed way.

a. God's grace is the Divine Origin of *diakonia*. (8:1, 7; 9:8, 14).

First, Paul mentions that generosity in giving in the life of the Macedonians (and hopefully in the Corinthians and other churches) has a divine origin. It is a grace that comes from God. See the underlining in the following verses:

*I want you to know about **the grace that God has given** the Macedonian churches.*

*²In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ³For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this **diakonia**/service to the Lord's people. ⁵And they went beyond our expectations; having given themselves first of all to the Lord, they gave themselves by the will of God also to us. ⁶So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion **this act of grace on your part**. ⁷But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see*

that you also excel in this grace of giving.

And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. (9:8)

...because of the surpassing grace God has given you (9:14)

Paul gives repeated testimony of the **grace** that God gave to these churches. In this context he is not speaking of the grace for salvation, but rather of the way that the Macedonian Christians demonstrated the sincerity of their love and of their confession of the gospel of Jesus, because of God's gift/grace to them.

Paul encourages the Corinthians to excel, as they do in other "spiritual gifts," also "**in this grace of giving.**" (v 7).

God himself is willing and able to enable Christians (9:8) in a surpassing way (14).

In summary, Giving generously is only possible when God gives us his grace which enable us to do it. God enables us in order that we might reflect his glory in the act of giving. He who is the Giver *par excellence*, enable us to be like him, to imitate him and in doing thus, to glorify his name.

b. The centrality of the example of our Lord Jesus (8: 9).

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

As we already saw in our review of the Gospels, Jesus is the embodiment of *diakonia*. He is the model *deacon*, and his life must be replicated by those who bear his name (John 13:13-17). The towel and the basin are also for us to use in serving others.

c. The character of *diakonia*: A Humble and Silent Service in search of the well being of others (8:4, 19, 20; 9:1, 12, 13).

The following selection of verses, particularly their underlining, aims to call attention to the repeated uses of the word *diakonia* to describe what the Macedonians did and what the Corinthians and us are called to do.

8:4. *"the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints."*

8:19: *" which we administer in order to honor the Lord himself "*

8:20 *"the way we administer this liberal gift."*

9:1 *"this service for the saints."*

9:12 *"this service that you perform (LEITURGIA)"*

9:13 "because of the service by which you have proved yourselves..."

A deacon in biblical times was a waiter or waitress: Mostly a slave who served at the table on behalf of his master. A person who does his/her best to please the guests eating at the table, in order to honor his lord. The glory and honor of the master depends on the excellence of the service performed by the waiter. Yet, he is only a servant, an administrator, a waiter/waitress.

Diakonia has a divine origin and yet, paradoxically, **it must be performed in a humble, silent, inconspicuous way.** Like Jesus did.

In addition we learn that the Macedonians did it **voluntarily**. "Entirely on their own...urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service/*diakonia* to the saints."

If we inquire for the reasons of this attitude, we have already a clear answer in what we just said. **Giving is a miracle of the grace of God working through us.** The only appropriate response to it is gratitude to God. "We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty." (Lk 17:10).

Another powerful reason springs from the fact that nothing we possess is ours. "The earth belongs to the Lord." (Ps. 24).

We are just stewards, administrators of the goods that the Lord has entrusted to us. When we give, we are sharing what belongs to the Lord, as he has commanded us. We are like "the servant whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time." (Mt 24:45).

We are just following his instructions: "*Freely you have received, freely give.*" (Mt 10:8).

A third important reason lies in the fact that our Lord Jesus identifies himself with the church of the poor and gives to those who have been privileged with wealth, security, and comfort the opportunity to serve him in his servants, his little ones, his brethren, who are his witnesses among the nations (Mt 25).

It is quite interesting that the description of Jesus' "little ones" in Matthew 25 (the description of Judgment day) underlines their socio-economical condition. They are hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, in jail, and foreigners. And yet, they are fulfilling the great commission and the great commandment. Jesus is with them and in them all the days until the end of the age. And wealthy Christians are called to serve Jesus serving them. Not only in a spiritual way, but in concrete acts of love: feeding, clothing, taking care, providing a shelter and welcoming them.

No wonder the diligence and generosity of the Macedonians.

Poor people can be rich in generosity, and frequently they are, as Jesus the poor carpenter

of Galilee was. In the midst of severe and growing poverty the Macedonians served their Lord serving others with overflowing joy and unending generosity. They were a church that to the forces of death responded with life.

As Gabriel García Márquez said in his Nobel prize Address, "*Faced with oppression, plundering and abandonment, we respond with life.*"

d. Liturgy is the chief end of *diakonia*. (9:12-15).

"For the ministry/*diakonia* of this service/*leitourgia* ..." (12) (NASV)

¹²For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. ¹³Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, people will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. ¹⁴And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. ¹⁵Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

At the end of his exposition, Paul shows the deep spiritual nature of *diakonia*. It produces one of the best, most spontaneous, and deeply felt forms of worship and gratitude to God. "*Supplying for the needs of the Lord's people*" produces abundant, "*overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.*"

people will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

Also *diakonia* is the best proof of the "*sincerity of your love*" (8:8) as now Paul says: "*the service/diakonia by which you have proved yourselves.*" A concrete demonstration of our love to God must be shown in our love to the little ones, disenfranchised, poor and neglected (Mt 25:31-46). As the Macedonians did; as Jesus did.

Liturgy in Scriptures is the public service that a priest/minister performs in the sanctuary to worship God. A ritual, ceremonial, religious act. This is the language of the Holy temple, of the services that priests perform in the holy place, in the holy of holies.

Paul describes here the act of giving of the Corinthians as a sacred function; as a liturgical act. And that is what, in the last analysis, such act is. An act of worship. But it is more than that.

Such act of worship has such power and impact that makes other Christians to worship God in glad adoration; in one of the best and purer expressions of worship: **thanksgiving**. See v 12.

The service/*diakonia* Christians perform leads other people to **praise God** since it shows in concrete ways their obedience to the gospel. (v 13) See also Matthew 5:16. This is another form of evangelization.

Intersession, communion, fraternal love, are tangible results of mature giving. A giving which not comes out of a paternalistic attitude or creates a fruitless dependence. Such spiritual fruits grow in the fertile soil of God's grace given generously to believers. (v 14)

The chapter ends with a note of **worship**: Paul falls on his knees with a heart full of gratitude and says: "**Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift,**" namely, **the grace** that God gives to his people, which makes them diligent in supplying for the needs of the poor, and which ultimately results in an act of worship to the God of grace.

Christians in the midst of a materialistic society, which has institutionalized egotism and greed, are instructed to live a life style which denies the power of the god of this century, money, over their lives.

Christians who live in a society whose dynamism and subsistence are based on selfishness, individualism, greed, and an unquenchable thirst for the accumulation of things, are called to demonstrate the reality of the God **of grace** in a lifestyle which itself is a continuous, free, and unconditional giving, and a denial of the supreme and sacred values of modern North-Americans.

Christians who live in the midst of a society in which persons have been transformed into consumers and human beings into a public; and in which everything has an economic price, including people, are called to follow in the steps of Him who knew the real value of those who are made in the image of God, and accordingly gave his own life to redeem them.

2. Theological Vision: Ephesians

Diakonia is, in Paul's thought, what defines the character and mission of the church.

In the letter to the Ephesians *diakonia is a central teaching of the letter, and it summarizes the reason for being, the central mission, and the way the Church has to be present in the world.*

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service (Gk, Diakonia), so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.
(Eph 4:11-13)

a. The Father's Eternal Plan: Reconciliation and Shalom making.

To understand better the significance of *diakonia* it is important to place it in the broader context of the theology of the letter. Ephesians major theological theme is the **reconciliation** of all things in creation under the Lordship of Jesus (1:9-10). God's made known to us his eternal plan:

*he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ,¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—
to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.*

The **mystery of the Gospel** is developed and explained in chapter 3 also as that reconciliation is applied to humanity, particularly to Jews and Gentiles (summarized in 3:6):

This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

The eternal purpose of God the Father was to make of Christ the Head and supreme authority of all things, in heaven and in earth (also in Colossians 1:15-20). This is the same theme that we saw in the Gospels: The Kingdom of God and Jesus' dominion over all things (Mt 28:16-20).

1:10, and in a more developed way 1:21-23, present the theme of Jesus' headship and lordship (God's Kingdom). This is the appropriate point of departure and framework to understand theologically the message of the letter.

1:21-23. Christ's resurrection and sitting at the right hand of God is explained in cosmic terms. He was placed *far above all principalities, powers, lordships, and all names, present and future*, it is a sovereignty that reaches the future age. **Everything** was placed *under his feet, and He was appointed to be head of the church over everything.*

His headship over creation underlines his dominion over the spiritual forces of evil (6:12), over all of creation, and especially over the church that participates of Jesus' Lordship and sovereignty.

b. Jesus, Agent of Reconciliation and Shalom maker

A most interesting tension, which we discovered in the Gospels, is developed also in Ephesians: The Sovereign Lord of all the universe exercises his power and dominion through *diakonia*: the giving of his life as an act of humble *service* for the well being of others (2:11-22) and as an offering to worship God (5:1-2).

to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. (1:10).

*For **he himself is our peace**, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier,
the dividing wall of hostility,
¹⁵by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations.
His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two,
thus **making peace**,¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross,
by which he put to death their hostility.
¹⁷**He came and preached peace** to you who were far away
and peace to those who were near.
¹⁸For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. (2:14-18)*

*Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children ²and walk in the way of love,
just as Christ loved us and **gave himself up for us**
as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (5:1-2)*

The purpose of the death of Jesus is explained in terms of shalom making. He died to reconcile Jews and Gentiles into one body, a new humanity and creation. And such sacrifice in the cross, the supreme *diakonia*, giving himself up for us, was an act of worship, a liturgy of love to God.

diakonein [the verbal form *to serve*] is now much more than a comprehensive term for any loving assistance rendered to the neighbour. It is understood as full and perfect sacrifice, as the offering of life which is the very essence of service, of being for others, whether in life or in death. Thus the concept of *diakonein* achieves its final theological depth. (TDNT, *diakonia*).

c. Jesus' Headship over the Church, First Fruits of the Unity and Harmony (shalom) of all Creation.

Ephesians 1:19-23 is very important because we see how Paul relates Jesus' headship over all of creation with his headship over the church. The centrality and importance of the church is easy to see. The church is *his body*, *his fullness* (compare to Col 2:9-10). The church, as her Lord, has been created, called and is trained to embody *diakonia*.

The central thesis announced in 1:10 finds its concrete expression in 2:1-22. People are reconciled with God, by his grace, power, and initiative (2:1-10). The Church is a community in which the enmity of humankind is destroyed by the power of the cross. **Jesus is our peace** (2:14), and at the same time an **artisan of peace** (2:16). By his sacrificial lifestyle and giving of himself, he makes possible the "life together" of Jews and Gentiles as a reconciled community, an expression of God's **shalom**. Then, **he also announced the good news of peace/shalom** (2:17).

d. The Church is called to live in unity as a Reconciled New Humanity

The unity of the Church, then, must be seen as the heart of God's eternal plan (1:3-14), the essence of what salvation means (2:1-10), the fruit of Jesus' redemption and peace-making ministry (2:11-22), and God's final demonstration of his power and grace (2:7, 10; 3:6, 9-10). Unity is also our calling, our vocation (4:1). And we have been given the resources to maintain it and express it in its fullest way possible: **The powerful presence of the Holy Spirit.**

The fruit (4:2-3) and the gifts of the Spirit (4:7-11) are the means by which we keep the unity of the body and make it grow. The ascension of Jesus to the right hand of God (Eph 1:20-23; 4:8-10) means that he is the Lord of lords and King of kings, sovereign over all of creation. As such, he gives gifts to the church (4:11) consisting in gifted persons who exercise ministries (1 Cor. 12:5 Gk. *Diakonoon*).

Those ministries or services have the goal of equipping God's people for "the work of service/diakonia" (4:12) that results in the building up of the church, the body of Christ, and in the full experience of unity and maturity, expressed in terms of "attaining the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." Becoming like Jesus was in this world.

A decisive point for understanding the concept is that early Christianity learned to regard and describe as διακονία all significant activity for the edification of the community (Eph. 4:11 ff.) (TDNT, *diakonia*).

It is highly significant that in his description of the ministry of the Church (4:12-16), Paul describes the heart of it in terms of *diakonia*, service or ministry. The gifts Christ has given to the church, consisting in persons with different ministries (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers), have in common the ministry (*diakonia*, see Acts 6:4) of the Word, and their central task is to enable the saints for works of *diakonia*, service or ministry, that come out of love.⁹

⁹ **Ch. 4:12-16. Gr. katartismon, Prepare, equip.** This word is used in the NT for *repairing nets* (Mt 4:19, Mk 1:19), and it was also used as a medical term for *putting in its place a dislocated member*. Thus, it meant *making complete especially though restoring and training*.

for works of service. Describes the goal to which leaders must aim: prepare Christians to do the work of **diakonia**, service. The formation of the saints is for the humble service of a diakonos. This connects with the fruit of the Spirit described in the first three verses. *Humility* is indispensable to becoming a servant.

so that the body of Christ may be built up. The only way to build the body is by serving each other in love (4:1-3). In 2:20-22 the Spirit is the one that builds the body; now it is the responsibility of the gifted members of the body, empowered by the Spirit.

Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, The next or concurrent reality is the visible expressions of unity, beyond and against the walls of hostility, we have raised. This is also concurrent with our knowledge and intimacy of Jesus the Messiah, our Lord, that is also concurrent with our maturing in the faith.

attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. The final goal of Christian edification and discipleship is to achieve the full measure of Jesus, the Messiah, to be *humble* like him and to serve others in his name and power. **Jesus is the model for a Christian life of service.**

We must avoid the sins that damage and destroy communal life and promote virtues that enhance and maintain it (4:17-5:14). Mutual *diakonia* and submission are the central expressions of Christian love (5:1-2, 21).

Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (5:1-2)

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. (5:21)

A central battleground for living and expressing unity and meaningful Christian relationships is *the Christian home*. All relationships in this environment must express and imitate the headship of Christ (4:13, 15; 15-6:9) and his lifestyle of *diakonia* as a King servant who loved us and gave his life for us (5:1-2).

Finally, in our confrontation with the spiritual forces of evil (6:10-20), the unity of a Spirit-filled church, that preaches (and lives!) the *gospel of peace (6:15)*, that is armed with the fruit (truth, righteousness, faith, assurance of salvation) and the sword of the Spirit (6:14-17), and that depends on God in prayer all the time (6:18-20), guarantees victory.

3. Humility, the other side of Diakonia.

Paul mentions in Ephesians 4:2 that the a key way to keep the unity of the church is being

completely humble and gentle; being patient, bearing with one another in love.

The word **Humble** (in Greek *tapeinofrosyne* means literally "servility, shameful lowliness." A quality of voluntary submission and unselfishness *humility, self-effacement*.¹⁰ In the Graeco-Roman tradition the term was used to refer to people in a lowly social position (those who had to work with their hands); also it was used as the lowly disposition of insignificant people (flattery and insubordination); upward social mobility was the way out of "humility"; and as the internalized attitude that free persons must be free from.¹¹ Seneca called slaves "friends of lower status (*humiles*).

In Mt 11:28-30 Jesus describes himself as *humble*, a counter cultural attitude towards a derogatory term that nobody would use for themselves as people of the lowest class.

v. 16 The vital importance of each member for the health and growth of the body. To the extent that as a church we do not underestimate or make stumble our sisters and brothers (Matthew 18), appreciate fully and with complete honor and dignity even the most vulnerable and little ones of the family (Matthew 25, I Corinthians 12 along racial, social, gender, and age lines), and empower them to serve, we will be able to build the Church and thus glorify God.

¹⁰Friberg, Timothy ; Friberg, Barbara ; Miller, Neva F.: *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich. : Baker Books, 2000 (Baker's Greek New Testament Library 4), S. 375

¹¹ Klaus Wengst, *Humility. Solidarity of the humiliated*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987, ch.2.

In the Pauline tradition *humility* is understood as the condition for the maintenance of the new community. Paul uses the term "humility" in its Hellenistic usage to describe himself in his situation of poverty (Phil 4:10-20).

Phil 2:3-5 makes it a general norm and explains what it means such humility in the context of the whole chapter 2. Jesus becomes the basis and norm for the action and everyday behavior of the members of the community. We are called to have the same attitude, disposition of mind, *humility* that Jesus had.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. ⁵In your relationships with one another, have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had.

Humility is to see the value of others and to realize that all are equal in God's sight. *Humility* is what makes *diakonia* possible.

Paul invites not isolated individuals but members of the community to behave in the opposite way to that prevalent in society...makes this sphere 'in Christ' another society, an alternative society as a society that shows solidarity ...Humility is not individual renunciation but the basic condition for a new society which really is all-inclusive, (Wengst, 49).

In Ephesians 4:3 and Col 3:12, humility is fundamental to maintain shalom in the community, to keep the unity of the body. Paul introduces here the tradition of reciprocal humility and submission (5:21) into a hierarchical structure (see 5:18-6:9). It was a counter cultural theology, then and now.

Jurgen Moltmann *Deaconship in the Horizon of God's Kingdom (Diakonie im Horizon des Reiches Gottes). 1984. Selected Quotes.*

"Diakonia is the necessary form of existence and the social configuration that constitutes the Church."

"If the diaconal function in Jesus' ministry is as important as proclamation and teaching, then theology must be widened to make justice to all the functions of the community... We must aim for the universal priesthood, kingship and diakonia of all believers."

In the already of God's Kingdom we have the point of departure from which we realize that "evil is stopped when good is done, misery can only find relief when its causes are eliminated, marginalization can only be overcome through community and slavery only will be abolished sharing a common liberty."

"Diakonia anticipates the new life, the new community and the world of freedom."

"Only the establishment of a community of life...can make possible to overcome social segregation which is proper of our society...Christian diakonia cannot be understood as a voluntary provision of social services added to those of the State [or private institutions]."

The *Christian* character of our service is made manifest when it starts with the community [church] and it is conceived as a social labor in a community of "Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and Barbarians, masters and servants, men and women." (cf. Gal 3,28; 1 Cor 12:13).

According to Aristotle, the natural principle of association is "people associate with those who are like them". This principle is at the roots of different forms of segregation, apartheid, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism.

We treat those we help with dignity and respect. They are subjects and not objects of compassion; before any help is the community; before any relief must come friendship. "Only when the basis of diakonia is friendship, the help to others does not have a paternalistic character and relief does not become a humiliation." "What the poor and weak need are not advocates but brothers and sisters and friends who love them."

"Diakonia in the horizon of God's kingdom is global and united. ...it is a realistic service of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18), everything that was separated reunites again; peace overcomes enmity."

"Diakonia must be integral and global. Must have an integrating character to overcome alienation."

We must aim for the deaconization of the community and the communality of diakonia.

"*Diakonia* and *community* are essentially inseparable: the community is born when persons live together in the name of Jesus and live for each other with all the strength of the Spirit. But if they exist for each other, then they do serve each other with their own gifts and energies, making a reality the "universal diakonia of all believers." (44)