



Call for Papers

21.2.2019

SUMMARY:

The School of Theology (University of Eastern Finland, Joensuu) is planning the next international and ecumenical research conference on patristic understandings of diakonia. It will be the fourth such conference held. Our purpose is to continue the work of earlier symposia (2014, 2015, 2017), inspired by the Rome 2009 conference “Diaconia, diaconiae, diaconato.”

The topic is ‘What did deacons do?’ In this conference, we will be focusing on Late Antiquity, especially the 3rd and 4th centuries.

Most of the 2017 congress, along with some additional papers, was published by Mohr Siebeck as *Deacons and Diakonia in Early Christianity: The First Two Centuries* (Deacons 2018). Our co-operating partners are Prof. Bart J. Koet (Tilburg), Dr. John N. Collins (Melbourne), Dr. Anni Hentschel (Würzburg) and Dr. Edwina Murphy (Sydney) as well as the Finnish Association for Research in Diaconia, Patristic Society of Finland and IDC – Pro Diaconia Christi.

The conference will be held on May 12th – 14th 2020 in Joensuu, Finland.

An Invitation and Call for Papers

Background

1. Today churches are often very active in extending help to those in need. Such social engagement has been understood as an important Christian responsibility and is conducted in Christian circles under names like Charity or Caritas or Philanthropy or – as commonly in central, mostly Protestant, circles of Europe –

Diaconia. A common understanding has been that this word was used in the early church for the charitable activity of early deacons. (See Latvus 2017)

2. In 1986, Dieter Georgi noted difficulties in the translation of the Greek “*diakonia*” words. Since the publication in 1990 of the study by John N. Collins, *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources*, we have seen widespread discussion of the meaning of *diakonia* in the New Testament. Many Protestant Churches have adopted Collins’ view of the deacon as an agent of the community, encouraged in this by Anni Hentschel’s dissertation *Diakonie im Neuen Testament* (2007). These two studies are to be borne in mind in evaluating some papers on diaconia in the first centuries CE from the major conference of 2009 in Rome (with Prof. B.J. Koet as one of the initiators and organizers) and published as *Diakonia, diaconiae, diaconato*, (2010). Collins’ keynote address was published in Collins (2012).

3. For the first centuries CE we have, for example, an overview of activities of deaconesses (Madigan – Osiek 2005). We still lack such an analysis for deacons, although much of the first two centuries is covered in *Deacons* (2018).

4. The character of ecclesial ministry has been a lively question within the churches over recent decades. The churches exhibit different ministerial arrangements but at the same time have been working towards mutual recognition of ministry. WCC’s BEM report of 1982 presented one proposal, and the Porvoo Agreement of 1992 built on this. Such ecumenical initiatives are ongoing. The key questions are: How shall the “serving” character of the ministry be understood? And: How shall these kinds of tasks be distributed between ministries?

5. Discussion of deacons/deaconesses in the New Testament arising from the investigations by Collins and Hentschel are currently expanding into later periods. See Pylvänäinen (2017), reports of two symposiums in Joensuu (2014, 2015) in *Diakonian tutkimus* 3/2015, and *Deacons* (2018). Earlier specialist studies (e.g. Theodor Fliedner, Paul Philippi) have been shown to have interpreted patristic texts according to a predetermined agenda (Ryökäs 2011, Ryökäs 2015).

The Theme

6. In this context, we are calling for papers on patristic understandings of deacons (incl. deaconesses), particularly focusing on the status and functions of deacons. This will reveal the variety of activities undertaken as well as more about the inner workings of early Christian communities. Further light may also be cast upon the semantics of diakonia – and this would be a bonus – but the main focus will be on the identity and activities of the deacon within individual patristic texts.

7. The conference will examine evidence especially from the third and fourth centuries. However, we also welcome papers which take into account development prior to this period as well as looking into consequences during later periods, until about the 6th century.

8. At the same time, we aim to account for the variety in the interpretations of these texts. Accordingly, we are keen to hear how these texts have been read during the Reformation (e.g. Calvin, Luther, Zwingli, Bucer, but also in the Catholic and Orthodox tradition) and within the diaconia movement since the mid-19th century. Even an analysis of the modern use of patristic material can be enlightening. From such investigations, we may be in a better position to assess where we stand today and how we might make modifications as necessary.

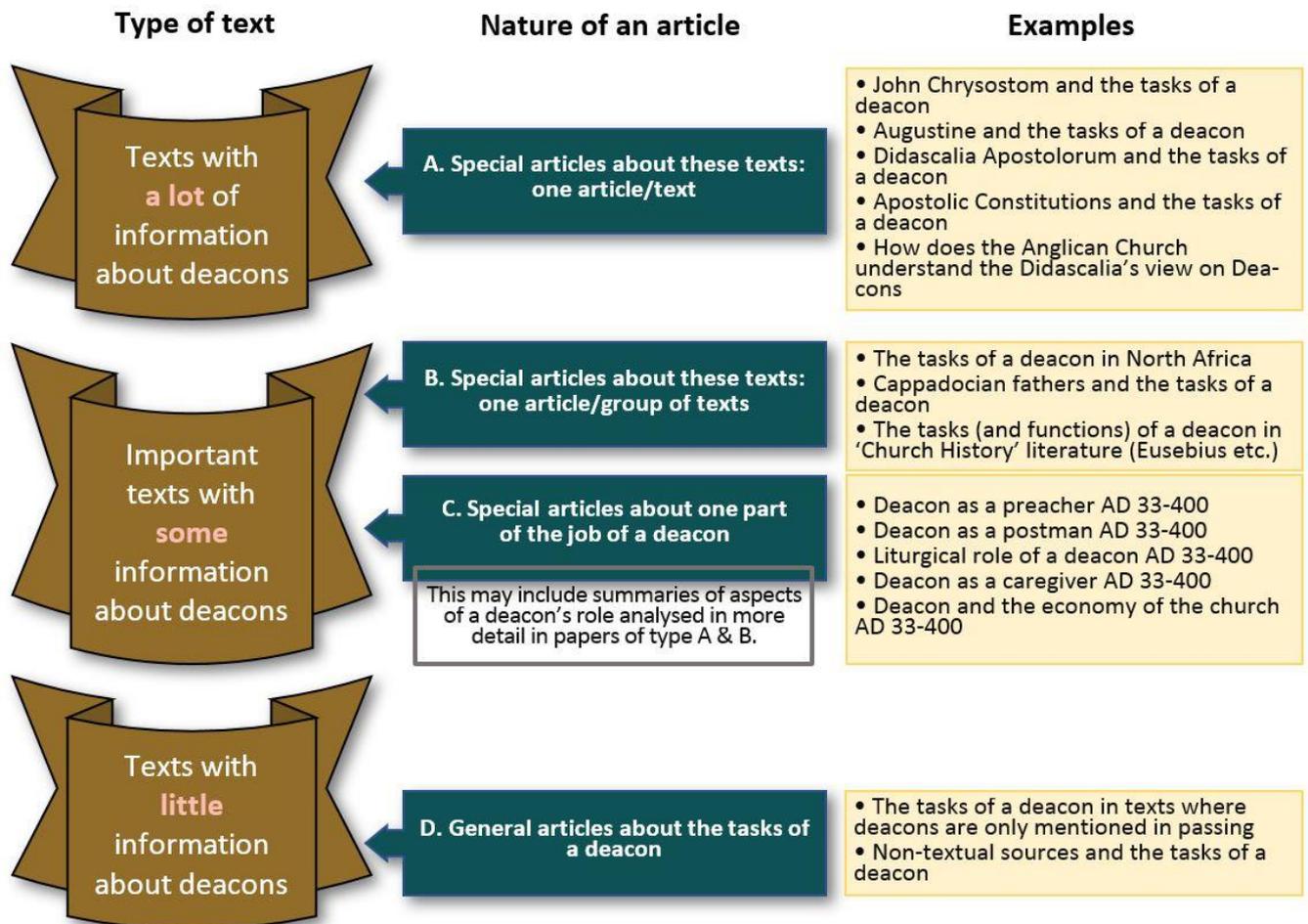


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9. The 2020 conference in Joensuu, Finland on 12th-14th May will examine the question “What Did Deacons Do in Late Antiquity?” focusing on the 3rd-4th centuries. We plan to follow up with further conferences in 2022 (3-6 c.) and about 2025 (5-6 c. and beyond). The overlap in the schedule will allow for later conferences to round off earlier investigations.

10. Publication opportunities: Selected papers, related to the 3rd-6th centuries, are planned to be published by Mohr Siebeck in Volume 2 of *Deacons and Diakonia in Early Christianity*. Papers related to the reception of patristic material may be published in a special *Diakonian tutkimus / Journal for the Study of Diaconia* edition.

An example of the first would be: "What did deacons do according to John Chrysostom in his letters to Olympia?" Of the second: "How does the Anglican Church understand the Early Fathers' views on Deacons?"



11. If you would like to be involved in this project, please send a proposal for a 30-minute paper to Esko Ryökäs: esko.ryokas@uef.fi The language of the conference is English. Some ideas are presented in the figure above. This is a preliminary call, but we would like to get your title and abstract by 25 April 2019 so that we can arrange the themes. In autumn 2019, we will publish a preliminary program.

12. Bonus: The biannual festival of Finnish orthodox choir music will be held in Joensuu on 15-17 May 2020.

More: www.uef.fi/deacons2020 (<https://wiki.uef.fi/x/DQEuAw>)

Literature

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