

1. The Work of Ministry in Ephesians 4:12 – *Lionel Windsor*

Ephesians 4:11-12 is a foundational and often-cited text in relation to pastoral ministry:

And he [Christ] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ... (Ephesians 4:11-12, *ESV*)

The focus of this essay is on the phrase, ‘the work of ministry’ (verse 12). What exactly is this work of ministry? The question has been posed and answered at many times and in various ways. Our aims here are, firstly, to seek some biblical precision and clarity on this phrase, and secondly, to draw out some implications for pastoral ministry today.

1.1. *Ministry means ‘service’?*

Ephesians 4:12 is frequently brought in to discussions about the *status* of those in formal ministry roles. This is an issue that can often become problematic. In previous generations, the problem expressed itself in clericalism;¹ more recently it has surfaced in the over-professionalisation of pastoral roles² and the phenomenon of the ‘celebrity’ pastor or preacher.³ This problem is frequently countered by the use of a simple slogan: ‘Ministry means service’.⁴ The slogan is meant to imply that ministerial pride is absurd. Because the biblical word ‘ministry’ (διακονία) itself is fundamentally about serving, and therefore about being humble, there is absolutely no room for ministers to be proud, to feel privileged or to over-professionalise their role.

¹ Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, 2 vols., *The Anchor Bible* 34, 34A (Garden City: Doubleday, 1974), pp 477-484.

² For a discussion of the problem in general see John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals: A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2013).

³ Rachel Held Evans, ‘When Jesus Meets TMZ: Why Celebrity Culture Is Overtaking Our Pulpits,’ *Relevant Magazine*, February 9, 2012, <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/god/church/features/28236-when-jesus-meets-tmz>.

⁴ E.g. ‘In the Bible, the word “ministry” means “service”’: *Full-Time Paid Ministry in the Diocese of Sydney*, (Sydney: Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney Department of Ministry Training & Development, 2nd ed. 2009), p 6.

Ministers are, by definition, merely servants of others. Thus ministerial pride is, quite literally, a contradiction in terms.

The simplicity and effectiveness of this lexical claim cannot be denied. It nips in the bud any notion that ministry is a career or a way to secure one's place in the world. However, is the lexical claim *true*? In the Bible, does the word 'ministry' really mean 'service'?

1.2. *The history of the claim*

In 1990, John Collins, lecturer in theology and history at the Melbourne College of Divinity, published a book titled after the Greek word: *Diakonia*.⁵ In his book, Collins thoroughly re-examined the Greek sources, and came to some significant and far-reaching conclusions regarding the meaning of the term.

1.2.1. *Origins*

According to Collins, the idea that the word *διακονία* *essentially* means 'humble, loving service' can be traced to the Lutheran churchmen of nineteenth-century Germany.⁶ In the face of modern trends towards urbanisation and industrialisation, a pressing need arose to care for the large numbers of displaced weak, sick, needy and suffering German people.⁷ A diaconal movement arose to carry out this task. The movement was undergirded by the claim that *διακονία* referred to the kind of loving, humble service exemplified by its members. In 1935, the claim gained great theological and exegetical *gravitas* when it was incorporated into the article on *διακονία* and its cognates in Kittel's famous *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)*.⁸ The article is at pains to

⁵ John N Collins, *Diakonia: Re-Interpreting the Ancient Sources* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

⁶ Collins, *Diakonia*, pp 8-11.

⁷ Cf. Kari Latvus, 'The Paradigm Challenged: A New Analysis of the Origin of Diakonia,' *Stud. Theol.* 62, no. 2 (2008): pp 142-143.

⁸ Hermann W Beyer, 'διακονέω, διακονία, διάκονος,' ed. Gerhard Kittel, *Theologisches Wörterbuch Zum Neuen Testament* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1935), pp 81-93; ET trans. Geoffrey W Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), pp 81-93. Beyer relied heavily on the work of Brandt whose monograph had connected *διάκονος* / *διακονία* with the ideals of the Lutheran diaconate (Collins, *Diakonia*, p 11). For a further instance of theological presuppositions affecting semantic analysis in the TDNT (in this instance Klaus Wegenast's article on the term *διδάσκω*) see Claire S Smith, 'Unchanged "Teaching": The Meaning of *Didaskō* in 1 Timothy 2:12,' in *Women, Sermons and the Bible: Essays Interacting with John Dickson's Hearing Her Voice*, ed. Peter G Bolt and Tony Payne (Sydney: Matthias Media, 2014), Kindle, § 3.a.iv.

emphasise the humble, servile nature of the word-group. It claims that the secular Greek verb διακονέω fundamentally meant ‘to wait at table’.⁹ This table-service was the ‘original concrete sense which is still echoed in its figurative meanings’.¹⁰ The article argues that early Christians took this basic secular meaning – waiting at tables – and transformed it into a general mindset involving humble service towards one’s neighbour. Thus ‘to minister’ in the New Testament refers to ‘any “discharge of service” in genuine love.’¹¹ So in Ephesians 4:12, the word διακονία means ‘all significant activity for the edification of the community.’¹²

1.2.2. Influence

This idea that διακονία essentially means ‘humble service’ has been highly influential in New Testament studies and beyond.¹³ It is often used to draw implications concerning the nature of ‘ministry’ today.

For example, the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* follows the *TDNT* closely: it argues that the word ‘ministry’ in Ephesians 4:12 means ‘all services in the Christian community.’¹⁴

Eduard Schweizer, writing in 1971 about the significance of the term διακονία for church offices, states:

Thus the New Testament throughout and uniformly chooses a word that is entirely unbiblical and non-religious and never includes association with a particular dignity or position ... In the development of Greek the basic meaning, ‘to serve at table,’ was extended to include the more comprehensive idea of ‘serving.’ It nearly always denotes something of inferior value ... The New

⁹ LXX usage of the term is negligible. The verb διακονέω is absent altogether from the LXX, the noun διακονία occurs only once in an apocryphal book (1 Maccabees 11:58), and the noun διάκονος appears only rarely: it is used to translate the piel participle of שָׂרַף 3 times (Esther 1:10, 2:2, 6:3) and the noun נָעַר once (Esther 6:5); it also occurs in places with no MT equivalent twice (4 Maccabees 9:17; addition to Proverbs 10:4).

¹⁰ Beyer, ‘διακονέω, διακονία, διάκονος’ (ET), p 82. The original is even more emphatic: ‘ihm ursprünglich ein ganz bestimmter anschaulicher Sinn zugrunde liegt, der auch in den übertragenen Bedeutungen des Wortes noch nachklingt’ (p 81).

¹¹ Beyer, ‘διακονέω, διακονία, διάκονος’ (ET), p 87. Original: ‘jede Dienstleistung, die aus rechter Liebesgesinnung heraus geschieht’ (p 87).

¹² Beyer, ‘διακονέω, διακονία, διάκονος’ (ET), p 87. Original: ‘jede für den Aufbau wichtige Betätigung in der Gemeinde’ (p 87).

¹³ Indeed, the welfare agency of the German Lutheran Churches, employing around half a million people, is named *Diakonisches Werk*: see John N Collins, ‘Re-Interpreting *Diakonia* in Germany,’ *Ecclesiology* 5 (2009), p 70.

¹⁴ Klaus Hess, ‘Serve, Deacon, Worship,’ ed. Colin Brown, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978), p 546.

Testament's choice of this word is all the more striking in that the basic meaning 'to serve at table' is still current throughout, as is the general meaning 'to serve'.¹⁵

The very choice of the word, which still clearly involves the idea of humble activity, proves that the Church wishes to denote the attitude of one who is at the service of God and his fellow-men, not a position carrying with it rights and powers.¹⁶

On the passage that concerns us here, Ephesians 4:11-12, Markus Barth in his 1974 commentary writes:

In summary, the task of the special ministers mentioned in Ephesians 4:11 is to be servants in that ministry which is entrusted to the whole church. Their place is not above but below the great number of saints who are not adorned by resounding titles. Every one of the special ministers is a *servus servorum Dei* ... In turn, the task of the whole church and of every saint is to carry out a work of service for the praise of God and the benefit of all who need it.¹⁷

Moving forward to 1990, Andrew Lincoln writes in his commentary on Ephesians 4:11-12:

These officers are Christ's gifts to the Church, but again it becomes clear that such a perspective on their role should never lead to self-glorification. They have been given to carry out the work of service, and it is service which provides the framework for understanding any ministerial function or office¹⁸

The claim that *διακονία* means 'service' has also affected many of our translations, especially those closer to the 'dynamic equivalence' end of the translation spectrum. Modern translations of Ephesians 4:12a include: 'to prepare his people for works of service' (*NIV*), 'to prepare all God's people for the work of Christian service' (*GNT*) and 'to train Christ's followers in skilled servant work' (*The Message*).

1.2.3. *Challenged*

The question Collins forces us to ask is this: Is this interpretation of *διακονία* as 'service' in Ephesians 4:12 legitimate? Of course, it cannot

¹⁵ Eduard Schweizer, *Church Order in the New Testament*, SBT 32 (London: SCM, 1971), pp 174-175.

¹⁶ Schweizer, *Church Order*, p 177.

¹⁷ Barth, *Ephesians*, p 481.

¹⁸ Andrew T Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), p 254.

be denied that there are key places in the Gospels where Jesus uses the *διακον*- word-group in the context of ‘waiting at tables’ (e.g. Luke 12:37, 22:27) and he often draws out implications involving humble service (e.g. Mark 9:35). However, this observation by itself does not mean that ‘waiting at tables’ is the basic, ‘original’ sense which influences all other uses of the word. We need to guard against the problem diagnosed by James Barr (in reference to the *TDNT*), which he labelled ‘illegitimate totality transfer’.¹⁹ The problem occurs when we forget that ‘any one instance of a word will not bear all the meanings possible for that word.’²⁰ Is, then, the claim that ‘ministry’ always means ‘service’ an instance of illegitimate totality transfer?

Dieter Georgi

An early challenge to the notion was mounted in 1964 by Dieter Georgi in his work on 2 Corinthians.²¹ Georgi re-examined a number of the sources and contested the prevailing consensus that Paul’s work as a ‘minister’ or *διάκονος* should be understood primarily in terms of humble service. Georgi conceded that sometimes the word means table-waiter, but often it means something quite different. For Georgi, the key background is that of a Cynic notion:

The *διακονία* of the true Cynic therefore consists in being messenger, scout, the herald of the gods ... Thus the *διακονία* of the Cynic is the expression of his world-encompassing missionary consciousness. He sees himself as God’s representative in the world; he has a mission in and to the entire world.²²

¹⁹ James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), p 218.

²⁰ Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics*, rev. and exp. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p 25. See also Donald A Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), p 62: ‘The fallacy in this instance lies in the supposition that the meaning of a word in a specific context is much broader than the context itself allows and may bring with it the word’s entire semantic range’. Cf. Frederick W Danker, ‘*Diakonia*: Re-Interpreting the Ancient Sources by John N Collins / Die Diakonie der Gerechtigkeit und der Versöhnung in der Apologie des 2. Korintherbriefes: Analyse und Auslegung von 2 Kor 2,14-4,6; 5:11–6:10, by Anacleto de Oliveira,’ *Crit. Rev. Books Relig.* (1991): p 181.

²¹ Dieter Georgi, *Die Gegner des Paulus im 2. Korintherbrief*, *Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament* 11 (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1964). ET *The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians*, *Studies of the New Testament and Its World* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987), pp 27-32.

²² Georgi, *Opponents*, p 28.

For Georgi, this concept of ‘missionary consciousness’ is sufficient to understand the New Testament usage, including the usage in Ephesians 4:12. Thus:

The NT term almost never involves an act of charity. Instead, nearly all instances are meant to refer to acts of proclamation.²³

Georgi’s observations were significant, but too brief, and did not allow for sufficient nuance or depth to provide a significant change in the understanding of the term.

John Collins

John Collins’ work does, however, provide the necessary nuance and detailed re-examination of the sources needed for a thoroughgoing challenge. Collins notes that the idea of ‘waiting at table’ cannot be called the ‘basic meaning’ of the verb διακονέω. Admittedly, the concept of ‘waiting at table’ does appear in about a quarter of all instances in the sources, but this statistic alone is not sufficient – indeed, about half of these instances occur in a single work about dinner parties (Athenaeus’s *Deipnosophistae*)!²⁴

Rather, Collins points to other, more pervasive underlying notions for the use of the word-group. The διάκονος, for example is very often some sort of ‘go-between’. The word-group is often used to connote movement, or carrying something. In Plato’s *Republic*, for example, the word διάκονος refers to a (hypothetical) free citizen with a task of being a ‘trader’, ‘courier’. The word is not chosen in order to express the humility of the citizen’s task; rather it simply refers to someone who carries something from one person or place to another.²⁵

About a third of all instances of the διακον- word-group involve the conveying of messages – i.e. carrying a ‘word’ from one person to another.²⁶ Indeed, the word-group often has religious overtones, and is used in contexts where a message is brought from heaven to earth.²⁷ Two key passages in this regard are found in Josephus, *B.J.* 3.354, 4.626,

²³ Georgi, *Opponents*, p 29.

²⁴ Collins, *Diakonia*, 75. In any case, even in the places where the διακον- word-group is used to refer to table-waiting, the sense of a menial status or servility is not necessarily in the foreground. The use of the word draws attention to the type of ‘fetching’ activity involved in table-waiting, rather than to the status of the table-waiter (p 156).

²⁵ Collins, *Diakonia*, pp 78-79, 146.

²⁶ Collins, *Diakonia*, p 96.

²⁷ Collins, *Diakonia*, pp 96-132.

where Josephus uses the word δῆκονος as a job description for himself. Josephus portrays himself as a bringer of a momentous message to the future Roman Emperor concerning God’s will for the Empire and for the nations.²⁸ Here it is certainly not a word denoting humility; in fact, the Emperor Vespasian expresses how *unfitting* it is for a δῆκονος to be found in humble circumstances:

It is a shameful thing (said he) that this man who hath foretold my coming to the empire beforehand, and been the minister (δῆκονος) of a divine message to me, should still be retained in the condition of a captive or prisoner. (Josephus, *B.J.* 4.626 [Whiston])

Here we see the term δῆκονος used within a narrative ‘charged with ideas of divine inspiration, election, and mission’.²⁹ This helps us to understand one of the key uses of the δῆκον- word-group for the Apostle Paul himself in the Corinthian letters: that is, the idea of being a ‘spokesman’ of God and/or a ‘medium’ of divine revelation and blessings (see esp. 1 Corinthians 3:5; 2 Corinthians 3:6, 6:4, 11:23).³⁰ Furthermore, it is close to the use of the term δῆκονος in Ephesians 3:7 where Paul describes himself as a person dispensing heavenly knowledge:³¹

Of this gospel I was made a minister (δῆκονος) according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, ... (Ephesians 3:7-8)

For Paul in Ephesians, then, being a δῆκονος means being a ‘bringer’ – in this instance, a ‘bringer’ of heavenly knowledge to the world. We will see in a moment that this has a bearing on the use of the term δῆκονία in Ephesians 4:12. Before examining this text, however, we will briefly survey how Collins’ now 25-year-old thesis has been received by scholars.

1.2.4. *The Challenge Applauded*

Collins’ thesis was warmly applauded by many in the English-speaking world when it was published. Karl Donfried, for example, writing soon after Collins’ work was published, described it as ‘magnificent’ and ‘meticulous’

²⁸ Collins, *Diakonia*, pp 111-115.

²⁹ Collins, *Diakonia*, p 115.

³⁰ Collins, *Diakonia*, pp 195-216.

³¹ Collins, ‘Re-Interpreting *Diakonia*,’ p 233.

before going about applying Collins' insights to his own (American Lutheran) church life.³² Paula Gooder, writing 16 years later, notes:

Collins has never been criticized for his linguistic findings on the Hellenistic usage of the word group. Most scholars seem to accept that his findings and interpretation of the Hellenistic material are accurate.³³

For Gooder, the value of Collins' research for New Testament scholarship is that it 'broadens the linguistic basis' for understanding the *διακον*-word-group.³⁴ It prevents us from jumping to the conclusion that the 'meaning' of the word-group must be 'menial service', and allows us to look at other possibilities.

It is most significant that Frederick Danker, the reviser of Bauer's standard Greek lexicon (*BDAG*), both gave Collins' work a glowing review,³⁵ and also used Collins' findings to thoroughly revise the relevant entries in his lexicon. Thus, although the second (1979) edition of the lexicon lists as the first meaning of each of the respective elements of the word-group: 'wait on someone at table', 'service' and 'servant',³⁶ the third (2000) edition of the lexicon has been revised: the first meaning of each of the respective elements of the word-group are now: 'to function as an intermediary', 'service rendered in an intermediary capacity' and 'one who serves as an intermediary in a transaction'.³⁷

In the German-speaking world, Anni Hentschel has written a significant monograph on the meaning of the term *διακονία*. While her work is largely independent of Collins, she accepts Collins' basic approach to the ancient sources, and comes to conclusions that are similar to his, albeit not identical. Hentschel prefers to see in the

³² Karl P Donfried, 'Ministry: Rethinking the Term *Diakonia*,' *Concordia Theol. Q.* 56, no. 1 (1992), p 2.

³³ Paula Gooder, '*Diakonia* in the New Testament: A Dialogue with John N. Collins,' *Ecclesiology* 3, no. 1 (2006), p 47.

³⁴ Gooder, '*Diakonia*,' p 48.

³⁵ Danker, '*Diakonia* / Die Diakonie,' pp 181-182.

³⁶ Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), pp 184-185.

³⁷ Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp 229-231.

διακον- word-group a fundamental notion of ‘commission’ or ‘mandate’.³⁸ Collins has provided a detailed review and response.³⁹

1.2.5. *The Challenge Overlooked*

There are few, if any, articles and commentaries that actively oppose the core of Collins’ thesis. Nevertheless, in many cases, scholars are still unaware of his ground-breaking work.⁴⁰ This is certainly the case when it comes to commentaries on Ephesians. For example, the significant commentaries by O’Brien (1999) and Hoehner (2002) follow the older view that the word διακονία basically means ‘service’.⁴¹ These and other commentaries make statements such as: ‘the work of ministry ... refers to the common service of all believers’;⁴² ‘The noun διακονία ... conveys the idea of serving the Lord by ministering to one another’;⁴³ ‘the work of service depicts a disposition toward these gifts given by Christ ... best displayed in service rather than self-aggrandizement’.⁴⁴

³⁸ German ‘Beauftragung’. See Anni Hentschel, *Diakonia im Neuen Testament: Studien zur Semantik unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Rolle von Frauen* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007). This is similar to Gooder’s view: ‘In my view the most significant and persuasive outcome of Collins’s interpretation is that ministry is not primarily about caring for one’s neighbours but about fulfilling a task commissioned by a master (whether this be in the case of a ‘normal’ servant or in the case of a servant of God or of the church).’ (Gooder, ‘*Diakonia*,’ p 54).

³⁹ Collins, ‘Re-Interpreting *Diakonia*.’

⁴⁰ Gooder, ‘*Diakonia*,’ p 46.

⁴¹ Peter T O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), p 303 n 127, as expected, refers to the earlier (pre-2000) version of Bauer’s lexicon.

⁴² O’Brien, *Ephesians*, pp 303-304.

⁴³ Harold W Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), p 550.

⁴⁴ Stephen E Fowl, *Ephesians: A Commentary, The New Testament Library* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 2012), p 142. See also Clinton E Arnold, *Ephesians, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), pp 262-263; William J Larkin, *Ephesians: A Handbook on the Greek Text, Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2009), p 79. Ernest Best, *Ephesians* (London: T & T Clark International, 1998), p 396, refers to Collins but seems to have given the book too cursory a reading; he wrongly takes the term διακονία to mean simply ‘communication’, which he then subsumes under the category of ‘service’. More surprisingly, a 2001 article in the *Expository Times* expressly addressing the issue of what the word διακονία means in Ephesians 4:12 makes no reference to Collins’ work: J C O’Neill, ‘“The Work of the Ministry” in Ephesians 4:12 and the New Testament,’ *Expository Times* 112 (2001), pp 336-40. Interestingly, O’Neill’s argument would have been greatly strengthened had Collins’ work come to his attention before he wrote his article. O’Neill laments the rise of a view that sees church ministers simply as managers, organisers and motivators of the ‘real’ ministry

1.2.6. *The Challenge Critiqued / Modified*

Other scholars have taken Collins' insights on board, while modifying or critiquing individual aspects of his thesis. Collins has been critiqued by some who claim he places too much weight on the concept of the 'messenger',⁴⁵ and by others for his relative lack of emphasis on concepts of humility and service *associated* with ministry.⁴⁶ This lack of emphasis is understandable given Collins' particular interest in recovering the dignity of clerical calling.⁴⁷ He tends to concentrate on the Pauline references, and his emphasis falls on the exalted nature of the office of the *διάκονος* as a bearer of God's word to people. This can leave the impression that Collins is uninterested in instances where the word-group is clearly *associated* with humble service – not only in Jesus' words in the Gospels (e.g. Luke 17:7-10, Luke 22:24-27), but also in Paul's letters (e.g. 1 Corinthians 3:5-7).

It is important to note, however, that Collins himself is *not* claiming that ancient or modern ideas of ministry have no place at all for 'humble service'. He is simply claiming that 'ministry' and 'humble service' are not synonyms. For Collins, the most pervasive element of the *διάκον*-word-group is that of the 'go-between'. In many instances we could render this as 'bringer': the word-group may denote activities as varied as bringing dishes to a table and bringing a message from the gods to humanity. It can also be used more broadly to refer to tasks or offices involving attendance or assistance. Thus, while any given instance of the

which is done by lay people. O'Neill accepts that 'minister' means 'servant', but attempts to work against the more radical implications of this observation by arguing that a 'servant' of people is also a 'servant' of God and therefore also has authority.

⁴⁵ 'According to Collins, the principle [sic] meaning of the concept is connected to the role of messenger': Latvus, 'The Paradigm Challenged,' pp 144, 149. This is a little unfair to Collins, who in fact sees the concept of the 'go-between' as broader than the concept of the 'messenger'.

⁴⁶ I am grateful to the insights of Colin Marshall, 'What Is "Ministry" and Who Are the "Ministers"?' An Evaluation of John Collins' Re-Interpretation of *Diakonia* in the New Testament and Implications for Contemporary Views of the Diaconate and Lay Ministry.' (Unpublished MA Project, Moore Theological College, 2007), pp 16-24.

⁴⁷ E.g. Collins, *Diakonia*, pp 20-41.

διακον- word-group may certainly *connote* ‘humble service’ (e.g. Mark 9:35, 43, 45),⁴⁸ it does not in every instance *mean* ‘humble service’.⁴⁹

1.3. *Who does the ‘Work of Ministry’ in Ephesians 4:11-12?*

In Ephesians, as we have seen, the concept of the ‘go-between’ takes on a distinct form. In Ephesians 3:7, Paul describes himself as being a ‘bringer’ (διάκονος) of heavenly knowledge to the world, with some parallels to Josephus’ description of himself as a ‘bringer’ (διάκονος) of a divine message to the Emperor (*B.J.* 3.354, 4.626). The most natural meaning of the term ‘ministry’ (διακονία) in Ephesians 4:12, therefore, is the activity of ‘bringing’ God’s word to the world, thus mediating divine revelation and blessing.⁵⁰

We now turn to look more closely at the significance of the term in Ephesians 4:11-12. The first question that interpreters often ask when approaching these verses is this: Who actually performs the work of ministry?⁵¹ Do the officials of verse 11 perform the work of ministry, or do the saints of verse 12 perform the work of ministry? Verse 12 can be punctuated in two different ways, leading to two different answers. It all depends on where one places the comma!

1.3.1. *The ‘officials’ (esp. the Pastors / Teachers) do the ‘Work of Ministry’?*

Translations before the mid-20th century generally placed a comma after the word ‘saints’ in verse 12.⁵² This punctuation implies that verse 12 consists of three co-ordinate prepositional phrases, all describing the activity of the officials in verse 11. In this understanding, Ephesians 4:11-12 reads:

⁴⁸ Collins, *Diakonia*, p 252, understands Mark 10:45 as follows: ‘the Son of man is not one who holds such a position in the world as to have attendants – the διάκονοι of the rich and powerful – coming up to him and being despatched by him about the various tasks of his own choosing; he has his own task to go to, and it is for the purpose of setting the profane grandeur of one way of life against the prophetic dedication of the other that Mark has brought these oddly fitting infinitives together.’

⁴⁹ Cf. Gooder, ‘*Diakonia*,’ p 55.

⁵⁰ Collins, *Diakonia*, p 233.

⁵¹ T David Gordon, “‘Equipping’ Ministry in Ephesians 4:11-12,” *J. Evang. Theol. Soc.* 37, no. 1 (1994), p 69.

⁵² This understanding is reflected in the *KJV*, *RV* and the first edition of the *RSV*. See also John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 1960), § 4.3.2, p 1055.

And [Christ] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers,

[1.] for the equipping of the saints,

[2.] for [the] work of ministry,

[3.] for [the] building of the body of Christ

In this understanding, the work of ministry is done by the ‘officials’ of verse 11 – or by the ‘officials’ mentioned last, i.e. the pastors / teachers. ‘The saints’ do not do the work of ministry, they simply receive it. This is Collins’ view, which he finds consistent with his argument that *διακονία* must involve dispensing heavenly knowledge:

The author of Ephesians also celebrates gifts in the church but is speaking only of gifts upon teachers (‘pastors’ being taken as part of these; Ephesians 4:11). This is in accord with the emphasis that the epistle has earlier placed on the communication of God’s mystery, the process where Paul had the leading role as *διάκονος* (3:7); the emphasis on teaching is also in accord with the outcomes held up for emulation in this passage, namely, unity in faith, solidarity in doctrine, and maturity in truth (4:13-16). With teaching then the overriding theme and teachers the only figures mentioned, the ‘work of ministry’ (*ἔργον διακονίας*, 4:12) can only be understood as part of this teaching process within the church so that it signifies here, against the background of the heavenly Christ dispensing his word through teachers, the work done by the kind of ‘minister’ who dispenses heavenly knowledge (Ephesians 3:7; Colossians 1:7, 23, 25); the usage is close in meaning to instances at 2 Corinthians 3:7-9; 5:18.⁵³

This view is not Collins’ alone; it has enjoyed something of a ‘revival’ among a number of other modern authors, many of whom, like Collins, are seeking to uphold the significance of the distinct teaching offices.⁵⁴

In its favour, this view is consistent with the most likely semantic field of *διακονία* in Ephesians, i.e. the idea of bringing God’s revelation to people. Just as Paul can describe his own apostolic role as that of a *διάκονος* (Ephesians 3:7), so too the teachers of the church can be described in terms of *διακονία*, i.e. dispensing God’s word.

⁵³ Collins, *Diakonia*, p 233.

⁵⁴ Gordon, “‘Equipping’ Ministry”; Henry P Hamaan, ‘The Translation of Ephesians 4:12: A Necessary Revision,’ *Concordia J.* 14, no. 1 (1988), pp 42-49; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, pp 253-254; Marshall, ‘What Is “Ministry”,’ pp 25-29; O’Neill, ‘The Work of the Ministry.’

However, this view is not without its problems, which we can see more clearly when we examine the alternative view.

1.3.2. *The ‘Work of Ministry’ is for ‘The Saints’?*

A second understanding of the passage, reflected in most modern translations (e.g. the *ESV*), removes the comma after the word ‘saints’. In this understanding, Ephesians 4:11-12 reads:

And [Christ] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers,

--> for the equipping of the saints

--> for [the] work of ministry

--> for [the] building of the body of Christ

In this view, ‘the work of ministry’ is an activity for ‘the saints’ (usually understood as the whole church); and the task of the officials in verse 11 is to equip the saints for their work of ministry.

This view was put forward forcefully by Markus Barth, in his 1974 commentary on Ephesians, in a stridently anti-clerical section titled ‘The Church without Laymen and Priests’.⁵⁵ Barth believes that the former interpretation has an:

aristocratic, that is, a clerical and ecclesiastic flavour; it distinguishes the (mass of the) ‘saints’ from the (superior class of the) officers of the church. A clergy is now distinct from the laity, to whom the privilege and burden of carrying out the prescribed construction work are exclusively assigned.⁵⁶

By contrast, Barth argues, removing the comma means that:

All the saints (and among them, each saint) are enabled by the four or five types of servants enumerated in 4:11 to fulfil the ministry given to them, so that the whole church is taken into Christ’s service and given missionary substance, purpose and structure.⁵⁷

Before we dismiss this view as being too driven by the democratic, anti-clerical, ‘every member ministry’ mindset of the mid-to-late 20th

⁵⁵ Barth, *Ephesians*, pp 477-484.

⁵⁶ Barth, *Ephesians*, p 479.

⁵⁷ Barth, *Ephesians*, p 479.

century, we need to realise that there are at least two significant exegetical arguments in its favour.⁵⁸

Firstly, the Greek construction used for the first phrase is different to the construction used for the second and third phrases. The first phrase, ‘for the equipping of the saints’ uses the preposition πρὸς + the article. The second two phrases, ‘for [the] work of ministry’ and ‘for [the] building of the body of Christ’, use a different preposition (εἰς) and no article. While the change in prepositions is not decisive in itself, when combined with the lack of article there is a reasonably strong argument that the ‘saints’ are the ones who do the ‘work of ministry’.⁵⁹

Secondly, ‘the saints’ are mentioned at the end of the first phrase. This suggests that there is a shift in focus at that point from the prior group (the officials of verse 11), to a new group, ‘the saints’.⁶⁰ Again, this implies that it is the ‘saints’ who do the ‘work of ministry’.⁶¹

However, despite these exegetical arguments in favour of this view, the glaring problem remains: it does not seem to fit with the conclusion we came to above, that the word ‘ministry’ (διακονία) in this particular context (i.e. in Ephesians) is best understood as referring to a specific activity in ‘bringing’ a message or revelation from God to people (cf. Paul’s special role as διάκονος in Ephesians 3:7). The meaning of the word in this context seems to fit more comfortably with the particular ‘offices’ of verse 11 than it does with something that the whole church does. Hentschel tentatively suggests that the word διακονία functions in a special way here: it elevates regular Christian word and deed to the level of a ‘commission’ from God to build Christ’s body.⁶² However, again, this solution is an extra level of abstraction that does not fit easily with any of the known uses of the word.

⁵⁸ I am grateful to my colleague Peter Orr for his insights on this matter, in Peter Orr, ‘Paul as Pastor in Ephesians’ (paper presented at the Paul as Pastor conference, Ridley College, Melbourne, 2014).

⁵⁹ Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), p 278. O’Neill, ‘The Work of the Ministry,’ p 339, points to some minuscules that omit the article, but the evidence is not strong.

⁶⁰ O’Brien, *Ephesians*, pp 302-303.

⁶¹ A third argument involves the fact that the ‘work of ministry’ is equivalent to ‘building the body’ (verse 12), which a few verses later is described as a task for the whole body (verse 16): See e.g. Hentschel, *Diakonia*, pp 393-394; Craig Loscalzo, ‘Ephesians 4:1-16,’ *Rev. Expo.* 85 (1988), pp 687-91. See also the rhetorical analysis by Juan Manuel Granados Rojas, ‘Ephesians 4,12: A Revised Reading,’ *Biblica* 92, no. 1 (2011), pp 81-96. This argument assumes, however, that ‘the saints’ means ‘the whole body’, an assumption that we will question below.

⁶² Hentschel, *Diakonia*, pp 393-395.

Thus we seem to be at an impasse. If we cannot answer the question of ‘Who does the work of ministry?’, how will we be able to understand what the work of ministry is?

We will now offer an important corrective, followed by a proposed solution.

1.4. *The movement from truth to unity in Ephesians 4:7-16*

The discussion of Ephesians 4:11-12 is often dominated by pragmatic questions concerning church order, structure and roles. These present-day questions, however, are not necessarily the concern of this passage. In fact, there is good reason to conclude that Paul is not here describing a static model of church order, but rather is portraying a stage in the *temporal* movement of gospel truth from the ascended Christ, through the agency of certain gifts, to ‘the whole body’.

In Ephesians 4:1-6, Paul exhorts the Ephesian Christians to maintain the ‘unity’ to which they have been ‘called’ – a loving unity based on the truth of the gospel (cf. Ephesians 1:13, 17-18).⁶³ In verses 7-16, Paul describes how this truth-based unity is achieved in God’s plan. The unity comes about through a dynamic process – a process that begins with a diversity of gifts (verse 7) and ends with a united body (verse 16). There are three features to notice about this process. Firstly, it involves a movement of *God’s word* from Christ to his people. Secondly, it involves a *temporal* movement from past to future. Thirdly, it begins with special individuals, and ends with ‘all’ members of the body.

Firstly, the process involves a movement of *God’s word* from Christ to his people. The initial ‘gifts’ of the ascended Christ are people with ‘speaking’ offices (verse 11), and the result is that all members of Christ’s body are ‘speaking the truth [of the gospel] in love’ together (verses 15-16).⁶⁴

⁶³ Barth, *Ephesians*, p 480; Loscalzo, ‘Ephesians 4:1-16,’ p 688.

⁶⁴ For a strong argument that the verb ἀληθεύω here refers to ‘speaking the truth’ rather than simply ‘living out the truth’ see O’Brien, *Ephesians*, pp 310-311. The verb means ‘speaking the truth’ consistently in the LXX (Genesis 20:16; 42:16; Proverbs 21:3; Isaiah 44:26; Sirach 34:4); elsewhere in Galatians it refers to speaking the truth of the gospel (Galatians 4:16, cf. 2:5, 14). The ‘truth’ in Ephesians 1:13 is the truth of the gospel.

Secondly, the process involves a *temporal* movement from past to future. Certain events have already occurred in the past. Christ descended, ascended and gave gifts to his people (verses 8-10). Some of these gifts consisted of certain special ‘offices’ (verse 11), which lead to the ‘equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the building of the body of Christ’ (verse 12). In verse 13, Paul turns to describe a projected future result: a time when ‘we all attain to the unity of faith’ (verse 13), no longer shaken by every false teaching (verse 14), but all participating in a self-growing body (verse 16). Verses 13-16 are future-oriented: the verses are dominated by three subjunctive verbs, with adverbs indicating future time and a conjunction indicating purpose or result: ‘until we arrive’ (μέχρι καταντήσωμεν, verse 13),⁶⁵ ‘so that we may no longer be’ (ἵνα μηκέτι ὦμεν, verse 14), and ‘[so that] we may grow up’ ([ἵνα] ... αὐξήσωμεν, verse 15). This implies that Paul in verses 13-16 is envisaging a future state.

Thirdly, the process described in verses 11-16 begins with special individuals, and ends with ‘all’ members of the body. Verse 11 describes the particular ‘gifts’ of Christ: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. In verse 13, however, as soon as the future comes into in view, the emphasis is on ‘all’ members of the body. The future state involves ‘all of us’ (οἱ πάντες + first person plural verb) attaining to ‘unity’ (verse 13). The terms ‘all’ (πᾶς), ‘one’ (εἷς), and ‘we’ (i.e. first person plural verbs) continue to recur throughout verses 13-16. Thus verses 13-16 are marked out from what precedes them not only by their future orientation, but also by their focus on ‘all’ members of the body as opposed to the earlier focus on the particular ‘gifts’.

What future state is Paul envisaging? Commentators often state that verse 13 is describing an ideal and / or post-parousia eschatological state to which the church will never actually attain in this age but towards which it should constantly strive.⁶⁶ However, this is at odds with the flow of the passage. The verses that immediately follow verse 13 (verses 14-16) are clearly not describing a final eschatological state; rather they are describing the truth-and-love-based ‘growth’ of the

⁶⁵ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p 552; O’Brien, *Ephesians*, p 305.

⁶⁶ Barth, *Ephesians*, pp 484-496; Best, *Ephesians*, p 403; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p 558; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, pp 256-257; O’Brien, *Ephesians*, pp 305-308; Thielman, *Ephesians*, pp 282-283. O’Brien explains this in terms of the ‘eschatological tension between the already and the not yet’ (p 306); Hoehner explains it as something that is ‘possible for this age but may not be completed until the future, possibly when the church meets her Lord’ (p 558).

earthly body of Christ. Rather than assuming that Paul jumps from the past or present (verses 11-12) to the future (verse 13) and back to the present (verses 14-16), it is worth considering the possibility that the entirety of verses 13-16 is speaking of the same future-yet-pre-parousia state of affairs.⁶⁷ This possibility is greatly strengthened when we observe Paul's choice of the term 'unity' (ἐνότης) to describe the future state in verse 13. This word does not refer back to the final, eschatological 'summing up of all things' in Christ (cf. 1:10) but rather refers back to the 'unity of the Spirit' (4:3) which is effective in Christian lives before the eschaton (cf. 1:13-14). It also recalls the unity of Jew and Gentile in 'one' (εἷς) new humanity and one body (2:14-16).

It seems, then, that Paul is looking forward to a time in the future in which the 'unity of the Spirit' will be realised in a greater way than it was at his time. This will occur because the 'truth' of the gospel will be permeating 'all' members of the body rather than just some, which means that the body will be able to build *itself* up rather than constantly being shaken by false teaching. This unity may well be caught up with the unity of Jew and Gentile described in 2:14-16. It will be the end-point of a process that involves a movement of God's word from Christ, through special individuals, to 'all' members of the body.

How does this affect our understanding of the 'work of ministry' in verse 12? It helps us to see that the 'work of ministry' is part of a movement of God's word from Christ to his body. Just as Paul's special apostolic role as the διάκονος bringing God's revelation to the Gentiles (3:7) was a particular stage in God's plan (the οἰκονομία, 3:2), so the 'work of διακονία' in Ephesians 4:12 is also describing a stage in God's plan – it is not the whole of the plan, nor the end goal of the plan. It is also possible that the future state envisaged by Paul (i.e. the *whole* body speaking the truth in love to one another) has already occurred in our time, which would mean that the particular 'work of ministry' described in Ephesians 4:12 has been fulfilled – just as Paul's particular role as διάκονος has also been fulfilled.

⁶⁷ This is true whether we regard verses 14-16 as parallel to verse 13 (Arnold, *Ephesians*, p 267; Fowl, *Ephesians*, p 143; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p 560; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p 257) or as describing the purpose / result of verse 13 (O'Brien, *Ephesians*, p 308).

1.5. *A proposed solution: 'The saints' as Jewish Christians?*

So then: What *is* the work of ministry? Let us assume for the moment that the exegetical arguments outlined above are in favour of 'the saints' as the ones who do the 'work of ministry'. Now, let us ask the further question: Who *are* 'the saints'?

It is normally assumed that 'the saints' are all Christians, i.e. that the term is intended to refer to all of Paul's addressees, and that they are the equivalent of the 'whole body' (Ephesians 4:16). However, Donald Robinson, former lecturer in New Testament at Moore College, has questioned this assumption.⁶⁸ Robinson looked at other instances of the term 'the saints' in Paul's letters, especially in Colossians and Ephesians. Although of course the Gentile addressees of Ephesians are called 'holy' (ἅγιος) by virtue of their relationship with Christ (e.g. Ephesians 2:21, 5:27), in certain places in Ephesians and Colossians the phrase '*the saints*' (οἱ ἅγιοι, with the article) seems to refer to a group distinct from the addressees, a group whose holy status and blessings flow *to* the addressees. So for example, Ephesians 2:19 reads:

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens **with the saints** (τῶν ἁγίων) and members of the household of God (Ephesians 2:19).

Robinson suggested that the phrase 'the saints' most naturally refers to the very early *Jewish* Christians (cf. Ephesians 2:11-12), i.e. those with the original 'inheritance', in which the Gentile Christians have become qualified to share (Ephesians 1:18, 3:18). On Ephesians 4:12, then, Robinson writes:

Are 'the saints' in this passage all believers? This is possible, but we are not shut up to such an interpretation. Referred to the ministry of Jewish believers, it [i.e. 'the work of ministering'] makes excellent sense. It was through the work of the apostles and prophets (cf. 2:20; 3:5), the evangelists, pastors and teachers, that the primitive Jewish body of believers was fitted and prepared to fulfil its foreordained role of being the Lord's 'minister' (διάκονος) or servant to the nations, and so 'build the body of Christ' which was the new unity of Jew and Gentile. To take 'ministering' with reference to preaching the gospel to the Gentiles is in line with Paul's application of this term διάκονος to himself in 3:7 and probably rests

⁶⁸ Donald W B Robinson, 'Who Were "the Saints"?,' *Reform. Theol. Rev.* 22, no. 2 (1963), pp 45-53.

on passages like Isaiah 49:6 where the task of the ‘servant’ is not merely the restoration of Israel but the bringing of salvation to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 15:16f.).⁶⁹

Robinson, then, understands the ‘work of ministry’ as the corporate responsibility of the early Jewish Christians to bring the gospel of Christ to the nations. Of course, because Robinson was writing in the mid-twentieth century, he was assuming the pervasive notion that *διακονία* meant ‘humble service’. This is why Robinson saw the need to connect the term *διακονία* with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 49:6. Unfortunately, this connection is a little tenuous, since the word for ‘Servant’ in the LXX is *δοῦλος* not *διάκονος*.⁷⁰ However, if we also take into account Collins’ insights about the semantic range of *διακονία*, the strained element of Robinson’s exposition is removed.⁷¹ The word can quite naturally refer to the task of ‘bringing’ – in this case, the early Jewish Christians collectively bringing the gospel of Christ to the nations (as in the cognate noun in 3:7, and cf. Josephus above).

May we then see ‘the saints’ as the renewed Israel, with the task to ‘bring’ God’s revelation to the world (cf. e.g. Isaiah 2:2-5)? In Ephesians 3, Paul connects the term ‘the saints’ with his own special calling and ministry to preach Christ to the nations. Paul describes himself firstly as *διάκονος*, then ‘least of all the saints,’ and then preacher of Christ to the nations (Ephesians 3:7-8).⁷² Given this connection that has already been established in Ephesians 3, it is natural

⁶⁹ Robinson, ‘Who Were “the Saints”?’, p 53.

⁷⁰ Lionel Windsor, *Paul and the Vocation of Israel: How Paul’s Jewish Identity Informs His Apostolic Ministry, with Special Reference to Romans*, BZNW 205 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), pp 105-106.

⁷¹ Interestingly, 35 years later, after Robinson had interacted with Collins’ insights and then returned to Ephesians 4:12, he favoured the traditional interpretation which regards the ‘work of ministry’ as a task for the officials alone:

“For the work of ministry” could indeed indicate a purpose for which the saints had been ‘perfected’ or ‘restored’, but this is not required by the noun *καταρισμός*, and the traditional interpretation which takes ‘for the work of *διακονία*’ as part of Christ’s purpose in giving the apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor-teachers – indeed, as indicating their function – is more consonant with the thrust of the whole passage.

We conclude that *διακονία* in Ephesians 4:12 is still confined to the supreme ministry of the word exercised by those especially called and appointed by Christ’: Donald W B Robinson, ‘Ministry/service in the Bible: Human and Divine, Secular and Sacred,’ in *Forward in Faith? Proceedings of the 1996 Conference of the Association for the Apostolic Ministry* (Australia) (Enmore: Aquila Books (Australia), 1998), p 64.

⁷² Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:9, where Paul calls himself the ‘least of the apostles’ (*Diakonia*, p 394).

in Ephesians 4 to see Paul linking his own gospel-preaching ministry as δίακονος with a more general διακονία of the ‘the saints’, understood as the renewed Israel.

In this understanding of Ephesians 4:11-12, Paul is describing the situation of the very early church, consisting of Jewish believers, who were the first to hope in Christ (Ephesians 1:12). The ascended Christ gave them apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor-teachers, who brought the gospel to them and so completed them for the ‘work of ministry’. Through their knowledge of God’s word in the Scriptures, completed in the gospel, they fulfilled their role as a holy people, the ‘saints’ – which meant collectively bringing God’s revelation to the world. Ephesians 3 describes Paul, the least of all the saints, who is a particular minister (Ephesians 3). Ephesians 4 broadens this concept to a ‘ministry’ that belongs to the saints more generally, a ministry that involves ‘bringing’ the heavenly gospel of Christ to the nations. Paul looks forward to the time when this will lead, ultimately, to a united body, where all members, both Jewish and Gentile, share the truth of the gospel in love together (Ephesians 4:15-16).

This interpretation of Ephesians 4:11-16 should not be too surprising. We are simply suggesting that this passage is following the same pattern evident elsewhere in significant sections of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians: a pattern that involves the historical movement of God’s blessings / word from Israel to the nations. This pattern occurs in the introduction (1:11-14),⁷³ in the theologically central description of reconciliation (2:11-22), and in Paul’s description of his own ministry (3:1, 6, 8). Thus it is likely that the pattern occurs here in 4:11-16 also.

On this understanding, a paraphrase of Ephesians 4:12 would read:

to prepare the saints [i.e. God’s particular people Israel] for the work of ministry [i.e. ‘bringing’ the revelation of Christ to the nations] for the building of Christ’s body ...

1.6. *Implications*

If Ephesians 4:11-12 is describing a particular stage in the plan of God – i.e. if ‘the saints’ who do the ‘work of ministry’ are the early Jewish Christians through whom God brought the gospel of Christ to the world – we might ask how the passage could possibly apply to us today? This

⁷³ O’Brien, *Ephesians*, pp 115-123.

is not as significant a problem as we might think. The same issue faces us as we seek to understand and apply Paul's role as *διάκονος* in Ephesians 3:1-13. Indeed, most of the Bible – from the Old Testament through the gospels through Acts – does not apply directly to us, but needs to be understood in its particular context in God's plan for salvation before being applied to us. This is just a regular task of biblical theology.

Where, then, do we fit into the plan of God outlined in this passage?

Most obviously and directly, we fit in to the situation of Ephesians 4:15-16. We are now living in the time when the gospel has been brought by the first Jewish believers to the nations. Our task as Christ's body is to benefit from that foundational 'work of ministry', which for us means to 'speak the truth in love' together and so to grow up into Christ, our head. The rest of Paul's letter to the Ephesians (4:17-6:20) spells out the practical implications of this in some detail, discussing issues of speech, truth, love, and diverse roles under the one Lord.

However, we might ask whether there is any special 'office' today that can be said to be charged with this particular 'work of ministry'. We cannot answer this question from Ephesians 4 alone. However, the Pastoral Epistles provide valuable insights for us. A number of times in the Pastoral Epistles, Paul uses the terms *διακονία* and *διάκονος* in a similar sense to his usage in Ephesians 3:7 and 4:11, to describe his and Timothy's roles as 'bringers' of divine revelation to the churches. The apostle himself has been specially appointed for 'ministry' (1 Timothy 1:12). Timothy also has a role as a 'minister' / 'ministry' (1 Timothy 4:6; 2 Timothy 4:5) – which involves opposing false teaching, promoting truth and love, and doing the work of an 'evangelist' (1 Timothy 1:3-7, 4:6-10; cf. 2 Timothy 4:1-5).⁷⁴ The doctrine of Christ that the 'ministers' bring to the communities must subsequently be passed on to various people who also have a role that involves opposing false teaching and promoting truth and right living, especially certain 'elders' (1 Timothy 5:17, Titus 1:5-9, cf. 2 Timothy 2:2).

There is a sense, then, in which church leaders / elders today have a role in continuing and extending the 'work of ministry' which was given to the apostles and the early church. As the whole body 'speaks the truth in love' together and thereby builds itself, there will be some individuals whose role it is to lead and guide us in that task, guarding the truth of

⁷⁴ Interestingly, Timothy is a Jewish believer (2 Timothy 3:15)

the gospel, refuting error, modelling and exhorting God's people to live and love in light of that truth. We could even call these people 'ministers' in a derivative sense, even if it would be going too far to label them δῆκονοι in exactly the same exalted sense as we find it in, say, Ephesians 3:7.⁷⁵

Notice, too, a further important implication arising from our investigation – an implication that applies regardless of what we decide about who 'the saints' are. If we see that the 'work of ministry' in Ephesians 4:12 means the 'task of bringing' – in this context, the task of bringing God's revelation to people – and does not *primarily* mean 'works of humble service', then God's word gains far more prominence. In the first instance, we can see that God's word is central to all of the activities in Ephesians 4:11-16. Ephesians 4:11-16 is *not* saying that there are certain special 'word ministers' (verse 11) whose job it is to equip other people for more varied non-word 'works of service' (verse 12 *NIV*). Rather, in Ephesians 4, it's God's word 'all the way down' – from Christ through the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, through 'the saints' to the body whose job it is to 'speak the truth in love'.⁷⁶ This centrality of God's word, of course, also applies to the derivative 'ministry' and 'ministers' described in the pastoral epistles, and is applicable to us today.

What, then, of the problem we raised at the start of this essay? That is, if we conclude that 'ministry' does not necessarily mean 'loving, humble service' in Ephesians, have we removed the grounds to oppose clerical pride or ministry professionalization or the phenomenon of the celebrity pastor / preacher? Not at all: all we have lost is a slogan. We have other perfectly suitable words to promote the idea of 'humble service'. In Ephesians 4, the obvious examples are the words 'humility' (ταπεινοφροσύνη, Ephesians 4:2), and 'love' (ἀγάπη, Ephesians 4:2, 15-16). Even more importantly, we can and must constantly return to the truth that we have been saved by grace, so that we cannot boast (Ephesians 2:1-10). These concepts apply to all Christians, and therefore of course to pastors. Not only is it God's word 'all the way down,' it's also humility and love, 'all the way down' – for all those in Christ,

⁷⁵ Nobody other than Paul or Timothy in the pastorals is designated as a 'minister' in the same sense that we find in Ephesians 3:7. The 'deacons' of 1 Timothy 3:8, 10, 12 are most likely 'assistants' to overseers rather than bearers of divine revelation (Collins, *Diakonia*, pp 237-238).

⁷⁶ Despite his stridently 'anti-clerical' polemic, this is also Barth's view: he describes 'servants who act primarily by speaking' (Barth, *Ephesians*, p 483, cf. pp 479-480).

including the offices, the saints, and the body (4:2, 15). Any ministry performed in the name of Christ must always entail humility and love.

Nevertheless, the key point remains: ‘ministry’ does not *mean* ‘humble service’. Whether it is apostles, saints, Israelites, pastors, teachers, elders or anyone else: the work of ‘ministry’ in Ephesians 4:12 always was, and still is, fundamentally a matter of ‘bringing’ – bringing the saving gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to people.

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