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# Deacons (διάκονος) and διακονία in the writings of Justin and Irenaeus

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## 1. *Introduction*

Both Justin and Irenaeus wrote major Christian works in the second half of the second century. The former composed his *Apologies* and *Dialogue with Trypho* around the 150s, or at the midpoint of the second century. By contrast Irenaeus wrote his two surviving works two to three decades later. Justin was active in the imperial capital, where the size of the city may have resulted in a multiplicity of autonomous, or at least semi-autonomous Christian communities. Irenaeus, was bishop of the provincial city Lyon in Gaul. It is difficult to provide an accurate estimate of the population of the city, but it may have been one to two orders of magnitude smaller than Rome.[1] These demographic realities need to be kept in mind when considering the roles of deacons and their forms of service in these two distinct urban centres during the second half of the second century.

## 2. *Justin on Deacons*

There are only a few extant writings that can be attributed to Justin with any certainty. These are found in three late medieval or early modern manuscripts. The earliest of these, *Parisinus graecus 450*, is a compendium of writings assigned to Justin and other early Christian authors. It 'comprises 467 paper folios measuring 28.5x21.5cm, and was completed according to the colophon, on 11 September 1364 (fol. 461 a).'[2] Of the remaining two manuscripts, Claromantanus 82/Philippicus 3081 dated to 2 April 1541, has been shown to be a direct copy of *Parisinus graecus 450*.[3] Although not as widely accepted, there are reasons to suspect that the third manuscript, Ottobonianus 274 (also dated to the middle of the sixteenth century), is another copy of *Parisinus graecus 450*.[4] Therefore only *Parisinus graecus 450* provides independent attestation to the writings of Justin. Among its fourteen tractates, only three have any claim on being authentically writings of Justin – the *Dialogue with Trypho*, and the *First and Second Apologies*.[5] Thus in considering Justin's views on deacons (διάκονος) and service (διακονία), only ideas expressed in these three texts will be considered.

The occurrence of the relevant terms in the three authentic writings of Justin is as follows: *First Apology*: διάκονος twice, διακονία zero; *Second Apology*: διάκονος zero, διακονία zero; *Dialogue with Trypho*: διάκονος zero, διακονία zero. Hence the

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[1] It is frequently stated that the population of ancient Rome reached its maximal point during the second century with more than one million inhabitants. See P.A. Brunt, *Italian Manpower: 225 BC to AD 14* (New York: OUP, 1971) 376-388; O.R. Robinson, *Ancient Rome: City Planning and Administration* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 8. These figure have been challenged by Glenn Storey on the basis of population density studies of urban locations such as Pompeii and Ostia during the first century. Thus he argues for an estimate of the population of Rome of 'roughly 450,000 inhabitants'. G.R. Storey, 'The Population of Ancient Rome', *Antiquity* 71 (1997) 966-978.

[2] D. Minns and P. Parvis, *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr: Apologies* (Oxford: OUP, 2009) 3.

[3] P. Bobichon, 'Oeuvres de Justin Martyr: le manuscript Loan 36/13 de la British Library, un apographe de manuscript de Paris (Parisinus graecus 450)', *Scriptorium* 57 (2003) 157-158.

[4] Minns and Parvis, *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr: Apologies*, 3.

[5] Minns and Parvis argue that the *Second Apology* was originally part of the *First Apology*, but came to be considered a separate work when a leaf was shed from the *First Apology*. Minns and Parvis, *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr: Apologies*, 28-31.

evidence is limited, but the two examples of the use of the term 'deacon' contained in the *First Apology* are instructive in regard to Justin's view on the function of those who bore such a title in early Christian communities.

In the first reference, Justin describes various features of group meetings. This commences with a brief description of a person newly initiated into the community having been baptized, then being brought to a place of meeting with fellow believers (*1 Apol.* 65.1). In describing the format of such gatherings Justin states that after the believers have ceased praying they then greet one another with a kiss (*1 Apol.* 65.2). The next phase of the meeting is the eucharistic rite. It is interesting to note that Justin does not refer to the person leading the rite as a presbyter, πρεσβύτερος, which had become fairly standard terminology by this period.[6] Instead he uses the term προεστῶτος, typically translated as 'president'. In the New Testament the term is used only once, in conjunction with πρεσβύτερος, to denote the elders who preside or rule in a good manner, οἱ καλῶς προεστῶτες πρεσβύτεροι (1 Tim 5.17). It is possible that this description contained in 1 Timothy denotes different types of elders, with οἱ καλῶς προεστῶτες πρεσβύτεροι being ruling elders who are praised for their sound leadership.[7] However, others have felt that such a distinction is not warranted.[8] If the former view is correct, then the term προεστῶτος may function as a title denoting a sub-group of elders, that is namely a way of referring to the senior or leading elder. If it does not denote a separate class of elders, then Justin may have been using it as a term that would have more currency with pagan readers in place of the in-group technical term πρεσβύτερος. Either way, Justin conceives as this person being the liturgical leader during the Eucharistic rite.

Alongside the προεστῶτος or 'president' are other figures, οἱ διάκονοι 'the deacons'. The manner in which Justin introduces the term, οἱ καλούμενοι παρ᾽ ἡμιν διάκονοι, 'the ones called among us "deacons"' (*1 Apol.* 65.5), suggests that even if the term itself was not a neologism, then the way he was using the term could not be assumed to be familiar to his implied non-Christian readers. Moreover, in contradistinction to Justin describing a singular προεστῶτος or 'president' at the Eucharist, he describes a multiplicity of deacons taking part in the ritual. It appears that they functioned primarily as administrants. Their first duty described in this passage was conducted during the Eucharist. Justin notes that after the thanksgiving of thanks was voiced by the 'president', with the accompanying response of 'Amen' from the people, the deacons then 'give to each of those present to partake of the eucharistized bread and wine and water' (*1 Apol.* 65.5). The precise mechanics for the sharing of the bread, or for the mixing of water with the wine are not discussed. The deacons' function is therefore described as being that of distributing the bread and diluted wine.[9]

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[6] See 1 *Clem.* 44:5; 47:6; 2 *Clem.* 17:3,5; Ign. *Mag.* 3:1; 6:1; Ign. *Trall.* 3:1; 12:2; among many other references.

[7] Thus Marshall suggests, 'it is much more probable that the passage is distinguishing a sub-group of elders who had fuller duties than the others.' I.H. Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999) 611.

[8] Towner feels the only distinction is between elders who discharge there duties well, and those who do not. P.H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2006) 361.

[9] There is much debate about the precise nature of the reference here and in *1 Apol.* 65.3 to the contents of the cup, or 'cups', if one is willing to amend the text. In *1 Apol.* 65.3 the text literally reads, 'a cup of water and mixture.' Here the explanation of Minns and Parvis seems preferable. The president is presented with 'bread and a cup, presumably already prepared' (*1 Apol.* 65.3). Furthermore, they hypothesize that it unreasonable to suppose that the deacons who brought these elements to the

The second function of the deacons mentioned by Justin still involved distribution of the bread and wine. However, this tooks place after the service when the bread and wine were distributed to those not in attendance at the gathering: 'and to those who are absent they carry away a portion' (*1 Apol.* 65.5). No explanation is provided for the reason why certain group members might be absent. It is possible to envisage a number of scenarios, many of which would not be mutually exclusive. However, what Justin emphasizes is that the role of the deacon extended beyond the confines of the Eucharistic gathering itself. Moreover, partaking of the bread and wine was considered suitably important that fellow group members were to partake of the elements on a weekly basis even if they were not able to attend the group meeting with fellow believers.

The role of deacons in distributing the eucharistic elements to absent believers is further emphasized in second of Justin's depiction of those described as διάκονοι. Thus Justin reiterates that 'there is a distribution and partaking of the eucharistized elements to each one, and it is sent to those who are not present by means of the deacons' (*1 Apol.* 67.5). This conveys the same information as contained in *1 Apol.* 65.5, even though slightly different language is employed. What these twin descriptions do offer is the possibility of considering the way in which such a distribution was carried out given what is known of the structure of Christian communities in Rome in the second century. In what he describes as a 'fractionation', Peter Lampe views communities of believers in Rome as dispersed and having separate local identities in the city. Thus he argues, '[i]n the pre-Constantinian period, the Christians of the city of Rome assembled in premises that were provided by private persons and that were scattered across the city (fractionation).'[10] Within this context Justin's description of deacons carrying the eucharistic elements to absent community members might not involve such figures travelling across the entire urban area. The discrete communities may have encompassed smaller and far more localized areas. Discussing the texts in Justin that refer to deacons distributing the eucharist to absent community members, Lampe makes the following observation.

> Must we think here only of sick or incapacitated members of one's *own* house-church community? The text does not compel such a limited interpretation. It is conceivable also that with the words "those who do not attend" members of *other* house-church communities in the city are meant.[11]

Notwithstanding this statement, and while acknowledging that the text does not absolutely 'compel' the interpretation rejected by Lampe, it does seem more probable that deacons primarily carried the eucharistic elements to members of their own communities. The reasons for this could be wider than those listed by Lampe – illness or incapacity. Rather, if members were in servitude they may not have had the opportunity to leave the *domus* of their masters. In fact another of Lampe's comments, which might provide a more accurate description of the independence of Justin's community, may tell against his suggestion that the deacons carried bread and wine to members of other house-church groups. He states, '[w]e have to consider that Justin's circle existed very autonomously, as a free school, an organization independent from the rest of the house-church communities of the city.'[12] Such

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president in order that he may offer thanks over them. See Minns and Parvis, *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr: Apologies*, 254-255, n.7.

[10] P. Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries* (London: T&T Clark, 2003) 364.

[11] Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 386.

[12] Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 377.

independence between house-churches does not necessarily imply any degree of antagonism.[13] Instead such localized and autonomous communities may reflect the geographical spread of the city both in its urban and suburban areas. Further, the lack of larger spaces may have been a limiting on the size of Christian meetings. Consequently, the small but scattered nature of early Christian communities, and their autonomous existence may have aided the survival of the movement. For if one group was punished, then the members may not have possessed knowledge of other groups in the city.

Given the dispersed structure of multiple Christian communities in Rome around the middle of the second century, deacons need to be understood as operating in that context. Communities may have comprise between twenty to fifty individuals. If that estimate is correct, then the deacons could have distributed the eucharistic elements to absent members with relative ease and probably without having to travel great distances. However, given the relatively autonomous nature of these early Christian groups in Rome it is difficult to assess whether the role Justin describes for deacons distributing bread and wine to absent believers was commonplace practice, or whether it was one of the distinctive features of his own Christian community. The lack of corroborating sources means that the most that can be inferred with relative confidence is that in Justin's community, deacons regularly carried the eucharistic elements to members of the group who for whatever reason were unable to attend the eucharistic ritual in person.

Therefore, in the authentic writings of Justin, dating from the second century, two related tasks are described as being carried out by deacons. First during the regular community gathering the deacons assisted the figure whom Justin calls the προεστῶτος, 'president'. After the act of giving thanks over the bread and wine the deacons then distributed the elements to the assembled community members (*1 Apol.* 65.5). The second related activity took place after those gathered members had partaken of the bread and the wine – and presumably after the conclusion of the service although Justin does not make that point explicitly. At that point the deacons carried the bread and wine away to any group members who had not been present at the group meeting.

## 3. *Irenaeus on Deacons and διακονία*

Only two genuine works of Irenaeus survive. These were most likely written twenty-five to thirty years after the writings of Justin. The earliest of these, probably written sometime around 180-185, is commonly known as *Adversus Haereses* or *Against the Heresies*, but also was given the longer title *Refutation and Overthrow of the Knowledge Falsely So Called*. The second extant work is *Demonstration (Epideixis) of the Apostolic Preaching*, which survives only in one Armenian manuscript. However, Eusebius of Caesarea gives the titles of six other works, among which he quotes from some of them.[14] However, the claim made by Eusebius that Irenaeus

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[13] While houses may have been the predominant type of meeting places for early believers, as Adams has correctly observed, there were other types of spaces in which Christian communities met. See Edward Adams, *The Earliest Christian Meeting Places: Almost Exclusively House?* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013) esp. 198-202.

[14] For further details see P. Foster and S. Parvis (eds), *Irenaeus: Life, Scripture, Legacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012) xii-xiii. The titles of these six works are: (1) *Against Blastus, On Schism* (*HE* V.20.1); (2) *Against Florinus, On the Monarchy, or On the Fact That God Is Not the Maker of Evil* (*HE* V.20.1, 4-8); (3) *On the Ogdoad* (*HE* V.20.1, 2); (4) A letter to Victor of Rome (*HE* V.24.11, 12-17); (5) *On Knowledge* (*HE* V.26); and (6) A book of various discourses (*HE* V.26).

wrote a treatise against Marcion (*HE* IV.25) appears to be an inference drawn from Irenaeus' statement that he intended to produce such a work (see *HE* V.8-9; *Haer.* I.25.2; *Haer.* III.12.16). Lastly, there are a number of fragments of dubious authenticity written in Greek, Syriac, and Armenian, which have been attributed to Irenaeus.[15]

A further problem that arises, which hampers an analysis of Irenaeus' use of διάκονος and διακονία terminology, is the fact the majority of his surviving writings are extant only in versional witnesses. Therefore, apart from some Greek fragments, Irenaeus' writings survive primarily in Latin and Armenian translations. For the *Adversus Haereses* there are only two surviving Greek fragments. The first is P.Oxy 405, which is dated on the basis of palaeography to the beginning of the third century and which contains III.9.2-3. Second, there exists a Jena papyrus, most likely early fourth century, which contains portions of V.3.2-13.1. Neither of these surviving Greek fragments contain material that provides evidence for Irenaeus' use of διάκονος and διακονία terminology. By contrast, a complete Latin edition of all five books survives as does an Armenian version of books IV and V, along with fragments from the other books.[16] Irenaeus' second work, *Demonstration*, survives in the same Armenian manuscript that contains books IV and V of *Adversus Haereses*.[17] This means that there is no extant witness to Irenaeus' use of 'deacon' or 'service' terminology in the original Greek. This is less of a problem for references to 'deacon', since the Latin term *diaconus* functions as a technical term and almost certainly renders the Greek word διάκονος. It is more difficult to identify examples of 'service' terminology in either Latin or Armenian that may be direct translations of διακονία terminology. This is because in contrast to the almost one-to-one correspondence that exists between διάκονος and *diaconus*, such a correspondence does not exist between διακονία and only a single Latin or Armenian term.

In *Adversus Haereses*, Irenaeus makes reference to deacons on two occasions. Both of these references occur without any gloss explaining the functions that were carried out by such office holders. In his description of the deceitful and devilish activities of a certain Marcus, Irenaeus describes Marcus as a cad who uses love-potions to entice and defile female believers. Irenaeus recounts the following case:

> A sad example of this occurred in the case of a certain Asiatic, one of our deacons, who had received him (Marcus) into his house. His wife, a woman of remarkable beauty, fell a victim both in mind and body to this magician, and, for a long time, travelled about with him. At last, when, with no small difficulty, the brethren had converted her, she spent her whole time in the exercise of public confession, weeping over and lamenting the defilement which she had received from this magician. (*Ad. Haer.* I.13.5).

The women in question is not named, but rather described as the wife of a deacon. Irenaeus uses of this term, without any explanation, suggests that it could be presumed to be widespread and well-known terminology at least among his anticipated readers. In the extant Latin the relevant portion of text reads, *ut et diaconus quidam eorum qui sunt in Asia nostri*. It appears that 'diaconus' originated as a Greek loanword taken over into Latin. It corresponds to the Greek term διάκονος, and denotes a specific role in early Christian communities. The earliest documented usage of this term in the Jesus movement is found in Paul's letters to the Romans and

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[15] The list of these fragments is found in *CPG* 1 (1983), numbers 1311-17.

[16] For fuller details see Foster and Parvis (eds), *Irenaeus: Life, Scripture, Legacy*, xi.

[17] Irenaeus' *Demonstration* does not appear to contain any relevant data for this study. There are no references to the office of 'deacon' and no cases where the text appears to be translating the underlying term διακονία.

to the Philippians. In Romans the term is applied to Phoebe who is described as 'a deacon of the church in Cenchrea' (Rom. 16.2). In Philippians the reference is more generalised, where Paul and Timothy greet all the believers in Philippi alongside the bishops/overseers and deacons: σὺν ἐπισκόποις καὶ διακόνοις, (Phil. 1.1). There are four further occurrences of the term in 1 Timothy, (1 Tim. 3.8, 10, 12, 13). In those contexts the specific duties of the office of deacon are not described, rather the author of 1 Timothy is concerned to instruct deacons that their moral behaviour should correspond to the status of their office.[18] In the passage that occurs in the first book of *Adversus Haereses*, Irenaeus sees a misalignment between the foolish decision of the unnamed deacon, the moral behaviour of his wife, and expected wisdom and moral behaviour that befits the diaconal office. Irenaeus may have the ethical qualities for deacons that are described in 1 Timothy in mind when he laments the case of the Asiatic deacon permitting Marcus to enter his house.

The second reference to the office of deacon is found in book III of *Adversus Haereses*. In the context of describing the teachings of the apostles, Irenaeus recounts what he understands to be a text that narrates the appointment of deacons. Thus he states:

> Stephen, who was chosen the first deacon by the apostles, and who, of all men, was the first to follow the footsteps of the martyrdom of the Lord, being the first that was slain for confessing Christ (*Ad. Haer.* III.12.10).

Here the story of the appointment of deacons is drawn from Acts 6.1-6, where Stephen is the first named among the newly constituted group of apostolic helpers (Acts 6.5). Significantly, although Stephen is not named as a deacon in Acts, Irenaeus is already aware of the tradition that identifies Stephen as the first deacon among the initial seven appointed to that role. Stephen is identified in a few broadly contemporary sources. For instance, in the martyrdom account concerning the deaths of believers at Lyon and Vienne, Stephan is present as the prototypical and perfect martyr

> καὶ ὑπὲρ τῶν τὰ δεινὰ διατιθέντων ηὔχοντο, καθάπερ Στέφανος ὁ τέλειος μάρτυς· (*Epis. Ecclesiarum apud Lugdunum et Viennam*, 2.5.5).[19]

However, he is not identified as a deacon. It may be the case that Irenaeus is the first extant source to name Stephan as a deacon and to cast him explicitly in the role of being the first deacon. This identification is made on the basis of the account of Stephen's appointment in Acts 6, but in that context he is not described use the technical term 'deacon'.

The use of διακονία terminology, as mentioned earlier, is more difficult to track due to the various ways the term might be rendered with Latin words. Equivalents such as 'ministerium' or 'ministratio' may well render from this Greek word group. One fairly clear cut example involves Irenaeus' discussion of the varieties of spiritual gifts. He writes, 'there are diversities of gifts, differences of administrations (*ministerium*)' (*Ad. Haer.* II.28.7). Here Irenaeus is citing Paul's comments made to the Corinthians concerning spiritual gifts: Διαιρέσεις δὲ χαρισμάτων εἰσίν … καὶ διαιρέσεις διακονιῶν εἰσιν (1 Cor. 12.4-5). In this context it can be seen that the Latin translator has employed 'ministerium' as an equivalent for what was almost certainly the underlying Greek term διακονία. However, Irenaeus' argument is different from that of Paul. He is refuting the notion that those who 'still

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[18] This point is also mentioned by I.H. Marshall when he states, 'descriptions of function are absent from the deacon code in 1 Tim 3. The lists are mainly concerned with character.' I.H. Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999) 487.
[19] H. Musurillo, *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, vol. II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972) 82-83.

dwell on earth, and have not yet sat down on his throne' (*Ad. Haer.* II.28.7) can claim to have perfect knowledge. While acknowledging the variety of spirit-given gifts and of services, he goes on to cite Paul say that 'we know in part, and prophecy in part'. Thus the gifts of the spirit are not proof of perfect spiritual knowledge. In this context Irenaeus does little to clarify what he might have meant by the term διακονία, apart from it referring to the variety of the types of service within the believing community.[20]

Irenaeus employs the verbal form *ministro* in the context of describing the ministry or 'service' of the church on behalf of others and imitation of Christ. For Irenaeus these acts of service are not simply *imitatio Christi*, they are also a continuation of the work of Christ. He states,

> Wherefore, also, those who are in truth his disciples, receiving grace from him, do in his name perform [miracles], so as to promote the welfare of other men, according to the gift which each one has received from him. … It is not possible to name the number of the gifts which the Church, [scattered] throughout the whole world, has received from God, in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and which she exerts day by day for the benefit of the Gentiles, neither practising deception upon any, nor taking any reward from them on account of such miraculous interpositions. For as she has received freely from God, freely also does she minister to others. (*Ad. Haer.* II.32.7)

The reference to the church ministering, *ministro*, to others, is likely in the original Greek of the text to be written with the Greek verb διακονέω. Here the acts of service or ministry are attributed to the church as a collected whole, not to individuals bearing the title διάκονος, or any other specific office or heirarchical position in the group's communal structure.

Irenaeus can also speak of non-human entities as performing service. In rebutting Basilides' assertion that the prophets were inspired by different gods when they proclaimed their messages, Irenaeus makes a strong statement that the apostles, prophets and other genuine revelatory media all are devoted to the praise of one divine being.

> Now, that the preaching of the apostles, the authoritative teaching of the Lord, the announcements of the prophets, the dictated utterances of the apostles, and the ministration of the law – all of which praise one and the same Being, the God and Father of all, and not many diverse beings, nor one deriving his substance from different gods or powers, but [declare] that all things [were formed] by one and the same Father. (*Ad. Haer.* II.35.4)

The final phrase in this list of speech-acts, 'the ministration (*ministratio*) of the law', is again a further example where the underlying Greek term is likely to be some form of the noun διακονία. While one might assume that these communicative acts might more naturally be seen as having a human referent, Irenaeus interprets their function differently in this context. These verbal declarations uttered by the apostles, the Lord, the prophets, and contained in the law, function according to Irenaeus to render praise to one divine being. Consequently, they are seen as speaking in unison and therefore providing a unifying witness to the one being whom Irenaeus describes as 'the God and Father of all.' There is little consideration or reflection on how the ministration or service of the law operates to achieve this end, and no reflection on the form of service the Torah performs. Instead the διακονία language is employed in a generic way simply as an unspecified description of the mechanics of the activity of the law in rendering praise to God. For Irenaeus, this provides sufficient evidence to make his case that there is one divine being, and not a multitude of divine entities. While this

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[20] For a discussion of the meaning of the term in its Pauline context and the way it functions in Paul's argument see A.C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGNT (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2000) 931-932.

argument may have satisfied its author, it is debatable whether Basilides or his followers would have seen Irenaeus' arguments as being in the least aspect persuasive.

## 4. *Conclusions: Deacons and διακονία in Justin and Irenaeus*

Writing in the second half of the second century, both Justin and Irenaeus mention the role of deacons, yet only Irenaeus appears to employ the term διακονία.[21] In fact both writers refer to deacons twice. The later of the two authors, Irenaeus, makes his references to deacons only in passing. First he refers to a certain Asiatic deacon, whose wife fell victim to Marcus, a character whom Irenaeus portrays as a charlatan, magician, and a heretic. It is unclear whether Irenaeus views the defilement of the woman as particularly heinous because she is the wife of a deacon, or whether that detail is intended to provide verisimilitude and greater moral warning to the story. If it is the former, then Irenaeus may be alluding to the qualities expected from both ἐπίσκοπος and διάκονος, as described in the Pastoral Epistles. Specifically, deacons are to be 'husbands of one wife, good managers of their children and of their own households' (1 Tim 3.12). While it has been suggested that good management of one's household is a demonstration of the ability to be a suitable administrator alongside the ἐπίσκοπος,[22] this does not appear to be the chief concern. However, the concern in the Pastoral Epistles appears to be focused on the moral rectitude of those holding the office of deacons. If Irenaeus has the injunction from 1 Timothy in mind, then it appears to be the case that he is fundamentally concerned with the ethical standing of those who occupy the diaconal office, not with their management skills. Thus as Mounce observes, the description in 1 Timothy that enjoins deacons to be 'good managers' or to 'manage well' καλῶς, implies 'not only achieving the proper results but doing it the right way.'[23] Therefore without describing exactly what they do, Irenaeus expects deacons to be morally upright individuals with families not prone to ethical lapses.

The second time Irenaeus refers to a deacon, is when he names 'Stephen, who was chosen the first deacon by the apostles', (*Ad. Haer.* III.12.10). The striking thing is that despite the description in Acts not naming Stephen as a deacon,[24] Irenaeus does so. Whether this is an inference he draws himself, or whether he draws on earlier traditions that may have done so is unclear. Presumably, whenever this link was made it was based at least in part on the narrative details that the seven were appointed to alleviate the apostles of the task of 'serving', διακονία, or distributing food to the widows. Irenaeus uses διακονία terminology in various contexts. However, his use is

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[21] As noted above, Irenaeus use of the term διακονία will remain at best an inference, unless more extensive Greek manuscripts of his works come to light. Notwithstanding this translational problem, there is one strong example where the Latin version of *Adversus Haereses* cites 1 Cor. 12.4-5. In that Pauline passage the apostle uses the term διακονία, and it is almost certain that the original text of *Ad. Haer.* II.28.7 would have likewise employed the term διακονία.

[22] Towner suggests, '[t]he concern for this management ability suggests that deacons carried out significant leadership duties in service to the overseers, or perhaps (if overseers supervised a cluster of house churches in a locality) on a par with overseers but in a more limited sphere (the house church)'. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 267.

[23] W.D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, WBC 46 (Nashville: Nelson, 2000) 205.

[24] As Peterson correctly observes, '[t]he Seven (cf. 21:8) are set apart for a ministry of "serving tables", but they are not called "deacons" and Luke's intention cannot simply have been to describe how the order of deacons originated (cf. 1 Tim. 3:8-13).' D.G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC, (Nottingham: Apollos, 2009) 228.

generalized as does not appear to convey any specifically Christian nuance, and in fact contains no explicit connection with the office of deacons.

Justin's extant writings do not employ the term διακονία. He does, however, use the term διάκονος on two occasions. Unlike Irenaeus he provides insight into at least some of the duties carried out be those who held that office, at least around the middle of the second century in Rome. Deacons are portrayed as people who assist the 'president' in the Eucharistic rite. Two aspects of their role are described. First, within the liturgical service of the gathered community deacons distributed the bread and wine that has been blessed by the president to the assembled believers. Second, at some point afterwards, the deacons take the elements of bread and wine to those community members who had not been present at the service. Thus, for Justin, deacons played an important role in the liturgical ceremonies of the assembled believers, but also had a further role beyond the worship service. They kept absent members connected to the gathered community by taking the Eucharistic elements to them. In this respect they promoted group maintenance and stability.

It is not possible to provide a global account of the role and functions of 'deacons' based upon the combined testimony of Justin and Irenaeus. Nor is it even possible to state whether the duties of the office were fairly fixed across Christian communities in the second half of the second century.[25] The reason for that is the lack of evidence. However, both authors provide an intriguing snapshot of some aspects of the diaconal role. For Justin deacons assited with the distribution of the eucharistic elements after they had been blessed, both in the immediate context of the gathered liturgical service and beyond it by taking the bread and wine to absent members. In this way they performed an important function in ensuring that those who were unable to attend the collective meetings nonetheless maintained a sense of connection with the group. By contrast, Irenaeus reveals nothing of the specific duties of deacons. His two references reveal his understanding of the presumed origin of the office, and the ethical requirements for those who hold such a position and for their families. For the former he might be dependent on what had become an almost aetiological interpretation of Acts 6:1-7. By contrast, the negative example of the Asiatic deacon who had allowed Marcus into his home with the resultant defilement of the deacon's wife is presumably a negative demonstration of the moral discernment required from those who hold diaconal office. Therefore, in the second half of the second century deacons were expected to be individuals who exemplified the moral behaviour expected from Christian leaders, and one of their key functions was in assisting the main leaders of a Christian community in the distribution of the eucharist.

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[25] Ignatius provides a greater volume of references to deacons in his seven authentic letters of the so-called Middle recension. However, his concern is more on the role of the ἐπίσκοπος 'bishop', and the presbyters and deacons are seen in some ways as a supporting cast, who assist the bishop in the leadership of the Christian community.