



**LUCAN "CONTEXT" διακονέω? EXAMINING THE SERVANTHOOD IN
LIGHT OF WESLEYAN DEACONESS ORDER**

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Abstract

Servanthood, an attitude exemplified by Jesus Christ, is central to the New Testament, including Lucan accounts. Servanthood has been given a wide range of interpretations as Luke discusses it to the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ. However, there is a dearth of literature on the context of Luke with the term διακονέω that appears only once in the Gospels, Luke 10:40 and how women are called to be servants for the glory of God. The paper, therefore, examines servanthood from διακονέω and its cognates in Lucan context. This is with a view to enabling Wesleyan Deaconess Order to better serve those above and below them by giving the Gospel and becoming imitators of Jesus Christ. The paper adopts Fuch's theory of the New Hermeneutic as the framework. It reveals that servanthood is Christ's mandate for his followers, especially Deaconesses' functions in the Church of Christ: charitable activity, the proclamation of the Word, and the task of leadership. It recommends that the Wesleyan Deaconess Order, which is a legitimate development of theology and upholds the threefold ministry of servanthood, namely service, office and ministry, should express the pattern in Christ as enshrined in Luke 10:40.

Keywords: Servanthood, Wesleyan Deaconess Order, διακονέω, Lucan Women.

Introduction

ἡ δὲ Μάρθα περιεσπᾶτο περὶ πολλὴν διακονίαν·
 But Martha was distracted with much serving;
 ἐπιστᾶσα δὲ εἶπεν,
 and she went to him and said,
 κύριε, οὐ μέλει σοι ὅτι ἡ ἀδελφὴ μου μόνην με κατέλιπεν διακονεῖν;
 "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?
 εἰπέ οὖν αὐτῇ ἵνα μοι συναντιλάβηται.
 Tell her then to help me." (Luke 10:40)

The abovementioned passage refers to Martha's attitude towards her sister, Mary, when Jesus came to their home in Bethany, a village on the outskirts of Jerusalem (John 11:1). Martha was determined to provide the best possible hospitality for their distinguished guest and wanted Jesus to encourage Mary in her failure of hostess duties to help with the serving. Servanthood, service given in love, is intrinsic in Lucan accounts. It is the very essence of the activities of the verb διακονέω that are expressed abstractly with the noun διάκονος, denoting "service, office," which appears only once in the Gospels, Luke 10:40 and eight times in the Acts. The term διάκονος, which denotes servant, is the one who executes the activities designated by διακονέω.

The word διάκονος often perceives as a female Deacon, also known as Deaconess, has a broader meaning. Deaconess could be defined as "One who waits on the tables." The Harper's Bible Dictionary puts it this way: "Deaconess and Deaconesses are persons who attended to church charities people of character and common sense."¹ The 1990 Constitution of the Methodist Church Nigeria, section 28, sub-section ii states that

Deaconesses are "women workers of requisite spiritual and intellectual calibre - who, after three years of training, are admitted by the approval of Conference into the order. Deaconesses shall serve in any capacity according to their category as the conference may deem fit."²

Deaconess has no certain description of office in the New Testament (Philippians 1:1 and in 1 Timothy 3:8-13). But the significance of the title, pointing to service in distinction from the work of ruling. Entrusted to the elders or bishops, implies that they would have the care of the poor, "Serving table" like the "Seven." Earlier than this, Phoebe of Cenchreae is called a "Servant of the Church whose works would be care of the sick and strangers" (Romans 16:1). The word "Deaconess" refers to the highest tribute to the servicewomen rendered in the early Church. It is unfortunate that in contemporary society some Deaconesses have resolved only to process and recess in every church service, thereby ignoring their social ministry. While some hardly see men asking their hands in marriage, others have entered into a questionable relationship with their male ministers/Priests and so forgetting that Phoebe and Apostle Paul, Shovel ton and Revd. Mellor worked together without erotic motion. For some others, their church denominations have misconstrued the essence of

¹ P. J. Achtemeier. *Harper's Bible Dictionary*. New York: Harper Collins Publishing, 1985.

² *Methodist Church Nigeria Constitution 1990*. Ibadan: Oluseyi Press Ltd., 1990, p. 12.

their servanthood to the glory of God. These and many other challenges confronting contemporary Deaconess Order. As a corollary to these challenges, many women that have such a calling are either discouraged to join the vocation or misled into the priestly ministry, thereby failing to exhibit their "ordained" servanthood. The questions arising from the above submission are as follows. How have Martha and Mary exhibited their servanthood in the selected biblical passage? In what ways have Luke deployed the *διακ*-stem to explicate Christian servanthood with emphasis on women servanthood in his accounts? Is Wesleyan Deaconess Order a legitimate development of theology? In what ways can the exegesis of *διακονέω* in Luke 10:40 serve as a catalyst to enabling women that have a calling into Deaconess Order to move into the vocation without guilt? To attempt to these questions, the paper adopts Fuch's New Hermeneutic Theory, which posits that the text is not just the servant that transmits kerygmatic formulations, but rather a master that directs us into the language context of our existence.³ And it is in the light of those questions that the paper receives a profound significance.

Luke and Women Servanthood

Luke, the Physician, by nation a Syrian of Antioch⁴, a companion of Apostle Paul wrote the gospel ascribed to him and its second volume, the Acts of the Apostles in the region of Achaia and Boetia. Luke's authorship of Acts is ascertained in the use of the first-person plural pronouns in some narratives in Acts. These passages are referred to as the "we sections," (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16).⁵ Shreds of evidence abound from the abovementioned passages in Acts and from some Church Fathers (Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons (c. 185 CE), Tertullian, Origen, and Clement of Alexandria) and some other documents (the Muratorian Canon, the Anti-Marcionite prologue) that Luke is the companion of Paul.⁶

Luke as a friend of women has never been challenged until recently when some feminist theologians drew attention to what is termed Luke's "androcentric" bias.⁷ In their opinion, Luke presents women as passive recipients of Jesus' teaching and are portrayed as objects of healing. They are voiceless learners but they exhibit some feminine traits, that is, they are quiet, always grateful and they are prayerful. These are attitudes suitable to support the headship of a male.

Women should not be seen as passive individuals to be compared to the depiction of men and women in the Gospel of Luke. While thirty-nine men were named in Luke, only ten women were so favoured, except for the seventy-six in the genealogy. Also, in the teaching of Jesus women were mentioned eighteen times and men one hundred and fifty-eight times. Women spoke fifteen times in Luke and only

³ E. Fuchs. *Hermeneutik*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1970, p. 211.

⁴ D. E. Hiebert. *An Introduction to the New Testament – The Gospels and Acts*, Vol. 1. Chicago: Moody Press, 2003, p. 126. Eusebius and Jerome likewise named Antioch of Syria as their place of residence. In some passages, Luke reveals a deep interest in that city: Acts 11:19-30; 13:1; 14:26-28; 15:22, 30-35; 18:22). Luke himself mentioned a deacon whose place of origin was Antioch: Nicolas in Acts 6:5. This supposition might be right because of the status of Antioch in the spread of Christianity, and records of detailed touches that indicate a personal familiarity with the place validate this claim.

⁵ R. C. Tannehill. *Luke*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996, p. 2.

⁶ D. Guthrie. *New Testament Introduction*. England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990, pp. 99 ff.

⁷ M. E. Hunt. "Androcentrism" in *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, eds. Letty M. Russell & Clarkson Shannon. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996, p. 7.

ten instances were their words given. Corroborating this view, Ringe adds that Luke's Gospel legitimises male dominance rather than standing as a manifesto for women in leadership roles. She contends that women in Lucan narratives serve on the margins and are thus deprived of places of responsibility and leadership in the community that formed around Jesus.

These submissions are sound, but not without some criticisms from certain scholars who formed a contrary opinion. These contend that Luke has no bias against women as he records a great deal of material about women that could not be found elsewhere in the other Gospels. Fitzmeyer opines that one of Luke's compositional characteristics is to pair stories about men and women. This he calls "step parallelism".⁸ What this implies is that both received equal recognition and status in Luke's narratives. Turid Seim buttresses this fact as he notes that this gender-pairing order seems unimportant, as Luke does not give one gender literary precedence over the other.⁹ We agree with these latter views. A thorough analysis of Luke's work reveals that both males and females were objects of healing, both were learners from Jesus and at no time were women discriminated against by Jesus. Similarly, only Luke places women in the larger company of all of Jesus' acquaintances. It is apparent that Luke had a special interest in women, and this has been regarded as one of his major characteristics.¹⁰ His special interest and love for women may account for the suggestion that Luke was probably a woman whose identity was disguised by the latter church.¹¹ This view cannot hold, as it is glaring that the writing was from a male's perspective. The notion that women are passive and quiet cannot also be accepted. Women served Jesus during his earthly ministry and their ability to remember what He had told them during this period concerning his death and resurrection led to an event, which turned the mourning over his death to the joy of Easter. Despite their being marginalised, they participated actively as witnesses to the Easter event. They were prominent in the birth narratives, they exhibited attitudes of true disciples, some of them were missionaries with Jesus, and they were involved in prophetic ministry and were models of repentance and total surrender of all to Jesus. These confirmed the positive portrayal and service of women in Luke's Gospel and that he was indeed a friend of women. Therefore, Lucan accounts on women, especially *διακονέω* could be relied on and adjudged reliable manuscripts in comparison with their contemporaries.

An Overview of Martha and Mary as a "Model" of Women Servanthood

Mary and Martha have been regarded as the most important and prominent women in the life of Jesus apart from His mother.¹² The evidence lies in the Gospel accounts of how the two featured in His life, (John 11:1-44; 2:1-11). These two women are best known for their hospitality and love for Jesus and the disciples.

⁸ J. A. Fitzmyer. *The Gospel According to Luke, Vol. 1*. New York: Doubleday, 1985.

⁹ T. Seim. *The Gospel of Luke. Searching the Scriptures, Vol. 2*. Elisabeth S. Fiorenza. (Ed.). New York: Cross Road, 1994.

¹⁰ L. E. Porter. *Women's Vision in Western Literature: The Empathic Community*. Oxford: Praeger, 2005, p. 1182-1228.

¹¹ S. Ringe. *Luke*. Westminster Bible Companion. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995, p. 11.

¹² O. O. Olajutan. "The role of women in the New Testament as service to humanity" in *Religion and service to humanity*, ed. A. Odumuyiwa & M.A. Opeloye. Publication of NASR, 1993, pp. 139-145.

Luke reports that Jesus entered an unnamed village. Some commentators believed that it must have been Bethany.¹³ He was received into Martha's house in the village. Luke says that Martha had a sister named Mary. According to John's Gospel, they were the sisters of Lazarus, who lived in Bethany (John 11: 12-18) There is no further information in Luke other than that he mentioned that Jesus came "into Martha's house." Fiorenza notes that Martha may be one of the numbers of relatively well-off and independent women who kept their own house and placed it at the disposition of the community and of itinerant preachers.¹⁴ This is a conceivable opinion (cf. Acts. 16: 11-15). Luke may not be aware of the existence of Lazarus; hence there is no mention of his name in this episode.¹⁵

The Lucan and Johannine accounts share some similarities in the ways these sisters are portrayed. In both gospels, Mary is described as the sister of Martha. Martha is the dominant figure in both and she initiates the approach to Jesus in both gospels. She does the talking in the two accounts (Luke 10:40; John 12:2); she serves at dinner in John, and in Luke, she is said to be busy about serving.

Luke presents Mary as Martha's sister (Luke 10:39). The account goes further, "she sat at the Lord's feet and listened to His teaching" (Revised Standard Version), while the New Testament in Modern English says, "who settled down at the Lord's feet and was listening to what He said."¹⁶ Sitting at the feet of or "to sit beside" connotes the posture of a disciple.¹⁷ Thus here, the implication is that Mary, as a disciple assumes her position at the feet of a teacher in the manner of Paul who sat at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) as a disciple.¹⁸ Parvey also believes that Mary assumes a disciple's posture, a posture that expresses the zeal to learn and which is typical of the picture of a pupil receiving instruction from a teacher.¹⁹

It is significant that Jesus, unlike the Jewish rabbis of his days encouraged a woman to sit at His feet. This is an extraordinary feature as the disciple here is a woman. With this, Jesus shows that a woman is qualified for theological training and that a woman's work is not confined to the kitchen.

Luke 10:48 confines Martha to the role of providing hospitality for guests and this is always regarded as a woman's duty. Luke describes it as "distracted with much serving." This led to Martha's fretting request for the release of Mary to participate in the work. This verse presents Martha's dilemma as being torn between being hospitable and the lure of listening to and joining the substantive conversation of their guest. Tension was mounting within her. She displays her distress when she vents her feelings by accusing Jesus of not caring about the negligence of Mary to help her.

¹³ Laurence Porter, "Luke," p. 999.

¹⁴ E.S. Fiorenza. *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993, p. 745.

¹⁵ S. Ringe. *Luke*. Westminster Bible Companion. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995, p. 161.

¹⁶ C. Vaughan (gen. ed.). *The New Testament from twenty-six translations*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan House, 2017.

¹⁷ J. Fitzmyer. *The Gospel According to Luke, Vol.1*. New York: Doubleday, 1981, p. 893. Cf. H. Marshall. *Luke: Historian and Theologian*. Grand Rapids Michigan: Zondervan House, 1970, p. 452.

¹⁸ H. I. Marshall. *Luke: Historian and Theologian*. Grand Rapids Michigan: Zondervan House, 2006, p. 452.

¹⁹ K. Weiss. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1. Kittel, G and G. Friedrich. (Eds.), Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1977, p. 630.

Nevertheless, she showed her willingness to serve Jesus even as it meant assuming a servant's role.²⁰

To Martha, Jesus' response in vv. 41-42 was unexpected. Jesus' remarks are neither an attempt to devalue Martha's efforts at hospitality nor an attempt to attack a woman's traditional role. Rather, Jesus defends Mary's right to learn from Him and says this is a crucial thing for those who wish to serve him. The actions of Mary were not repulsive to Jesus because listening could precede action. In addition, Jesus makes it clear for women as well as men that one's primary task is to be a proper disciple, and only in that context can one be a proper hostess. This implies that gender is not a hindrance to becoming a disciple and it is in hearing the words from the Master that a disciple can be active in the ministry. Carter notes that Jesus' intention here is to help Martha to understand ministry as a partnership, and Luke portrays this in the account²¹. These views emphasise the concept of *διακονία*, "service," as an act of participation with others in ministry on behalf of either the community or the individual. Both are involved in ministry but in different modes. In this sense, Jesus did not condemn Martha by comparison; rather he comments that "Mary has chosen a good portion and not the better"²². Contrary to the opinion that Jesus' remarks affect only Martha, she is described as being distracted from Jesus who Himself is the source of Christian ministry. It is observed that Mary also has a portion, which implies that she must also be a "doer" and not the "hearer" of the word. Thus for Mary, it is not enough to hear the Word of God; one must do it. Mary's listening is good, but she must do, like Martha. This confirms the principle of partnership in ministry.

D'Angelo agrees with Carter's opinion that the sisters were one of a series of pairs of women ministers in the New Testament²³. She opines that the addition of "also" in verse 39 indicates that both are Jesus' students. Sharon Ringe offers an entirely different opinion on this story. She retorts that the story is a sad one for women. In her opinion, Martha, who welcomes Jesus and expends considerable energy in providing hospitality for him and those travelling with him is referred to as being "distracted and worried." Jesus' remark to Martha is too brusque. Instead of receiving a blessing, as someone being hospitable, she receives a scolding. She reasons further that the fact that Mary is sitting at the Lord's feet as a silent listener portrays her as inactive and that, unlike the male disciples who were given the commission to preach, Mary was not given such an injunction. This interpretation is probably superfluous and accepting it could also lead to reading into the text what the writer does not intend. In no way did Jesus condemn either of the sisters' services. The passage does not describe a conflict between housework and headwork. The passage rather depicts strong bases for women's learning and working in the church. Rather than creating an unhealthy rivalry or comparison between the two sisters, Jesus defended one, Mary, and did not deprecate Martha. In like manner, Mary could not be regarded as passive as the scene itself suggests. This is because she took a bold step in leaving her expected hostess duties of preparing and serving dinner to listen to Jesus. This story is probably

²⁰ This is because, in the Jewish context, women were not allowed to serve meals if there were men in attendance unless there were no servants to be engaged.

²¹ W. Carter. "Getting Martha out of the kitchen," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 58 (1996), pp. 164-280.

²² L. E. Porter. *Women's Vision in Western Literature: The Empathic Community*. Oxford: Praeger, 2005, p. 1206.

²³ R. D'Angelo. "Women partners in the New Testament," *Journal of Feminist Studies of Religion*, 6 (1990), pp. 65-86.

a defence for women's freedom. Mary's role of discipleship and Martha's hospitality are equally important.

In addition, Jesus' action is similarly worthwhile as he broke with the tradition which forbade a Rabbi from interacting with women who were not his relatives. By teaching Mary, Jesus performed what was not expected of a Jew. Jesus recognised their services in the home and the Christian community. Evans rightly says that Jesus related to Mary in a teacher-disciple relationship and, by defending Mary's right to a role than commonly denied a Jewess; Jesus was following a far-reaching principle of human liberation.²⁴

Exegesis

The selected biblical passage abovementioned indicates two different usages of the διακ- stem. First, it was employed as a noun, διακονίαν, accusative feminine singular of διακονία, connoting "service, office, ministry;" and second, as a verb, διακονεῖν, infinitive present active of διακονέω, meaning "to wait on someone at the table, serve" and in a broader sense "to serve as a deacon."

The original frame of reference for the use of the entire word group of the διακ- stem in secular Greek was that of table service. The basic meaning of the verb διακονέω, correspondingly, was "wait on tables." From this meaning, the wider sense has been derived: "care for one's livelihood," and finally "serve" in general.

The word group is distinct from other terms that are related in meaning that it "has the special quality of indicating very personally the service rendered to another." Especially noteworthy is the difference in meaning between δουλεύω and διακονέω with the word groups belonging to each. The δουλ- words express a relationship of dependence and the subordination of the δοῦλος to the κύριος. Διακονέω and its cognates, on the other hand, express much more strongly the idea of service on behalf of someone. This distinction suggests why διακονέω does not appear at all in the LXX and why διακονία and διάκονος play only a very insignificant role there, while words of the δουλ- stem are common.

In Luke and Acts, the word group with its theological connotations plays a significant role. First, of the seven occurrences in Mark, Luke has taken over only one reference (Luke 4:39); however, it is a crystal submission that he brings in the ideas that are expressed in the omitted Markan passages in other connections, which he at times reshapes, while at times he uses a special tradition. Second, the saying about the greatness of service and the servanthood of Jesus (Mark 9:35; 10:43) is offered as a redactionally revised variant in the tradition in Luke 22:26f.; the mention of the women who serve Jesus in the Passion report in Mark 15:41 is redactionally reshaped by Luke in the context of the work of Jesus in Galilee in Luke 8:3; perhaps Luke 22:43 takes into consideration the service of the angels to Jesus, omitted from Luke's account of Mark 1:13. Third, a special tradition belongs to Luke 10:40 (cf. John 12:2). Indeed, the parable in Luke 17:7-10 is also derived from a special tradition, although Luke 17:8 with διακονέω is redactionally shaped. Fourth, the parable in Luke 12:35-38 is taken over from Q, but the promise has been redactionally formed first by Luke.

²⁴ M. J. Evans. *Woman in the Bible*. Exeter: Paternoster, 1983, p. 45.

The 10 occurrences of διακονέω in Acts are distributed in two areas of meaning. First, the apostolic ministry, with emphasis on the proclamation of the word (Acts 1:17, 25; 6:4; 19:22; 20:24; 21:19); and second, care for the poor (Acts 6:1f.), to which the collection for Jerusalem belongs (Acts 11:29; 12:25). Luke adopts the content and manner of expression of the churches that Paul started among the Gentiles (Romans 15:25; 2Corinthians 3-6). Luke avoids the word διάκονος in all his accounts. As a result of this that Luke 10:40 has suffered gross misinterpretations over the years. For instance, the perception of Martha being described as a bloody carnal and unspiritual person is not true. Martha made one of the noblest confessions of faith in John 11:27. In the context of Luke 10:40, she was indignant at what appeared in her eyes as a slight of service on Mary's part; and she called for Jesus to rebuke it. Jesus' words never deny that a service had been neglected, but rather they stress that Mary had honoured a higher service. It is the representation of different services rendered by the two sisters that appeared to be Luke's reason for including this intimate and revealing story of Martha and Mary. What then is the disposition of Luke concerning servanthood?

Luke emphasises the various contextual renditions of διακονία, "service, office, ministry" in his revision of the tradition of servanthood as follows. First, the apostolic office, like all leading offices in the church, has the character of service. This emphasis is derived from Jesus' word and service, which Luke indicates clearly by designating the apostolate explicitly as a service (Acts 1:17, 25; 6:4, etc.), placing the service of Jesus before the eyes of Christians who hold leading positions (Luke 22:26), and transforming parables of Jesus into exhortations to the leaders (Luke 12:35-38, 42-46, 47f; 17:7-10). The motif of service plays a decisive role in this transformation. Second, for Luke, apostolic service consists in the proclamation of the Word (Acts 6:4, etc.) and is a witness (cf. 1:22; 20:24, etc.). Third, service to the poor and the needy (Luke 6:1f.; cf. 2:42) belongs to the basic functions of the life of the Christian community. The effectiveness of service to the poor and the needy was a major concern of the early Christian community and was not given adequate attention. As a result of this, in Acts 6:1-6, Luke introduces a new office of service (Deaconess Order) because of a conflict concerning care for the poor and the needy. He did this by having them installed by the apostles, by limiting their service to the care of the poor and the needy (Acts 6:8), and by avoiding the title "διάκονος."²⁵ It is in this manner that the concept of Deaconess Order was born in Lucan accounts. Therefore, for Luke, service, office and ministry constitute Christian servanthood.

Deaconess and Servanthood

Paul mentions Phoebe, διάκονος "Deaconess" of the Church of Cenchreae (Romans 16:1) and there is also unambiguous reference in 1Timothy 3:11. The widows mentioned in 1Timothy 5:3:10 may also be connected with the role. Not until the end of the fourth century is much known about the office of Deaconess. The "Didascalia" and the "Apostolic" constitutions describe their functions as an assistant to the clergy in the baptizing of women, ministers to the poor and sick, to martyrs and confessors in prison preparation of women for Church membership; acting as doorkeepers in that part of the Church where women members sat; and having supervision over the female members

²⁵ H. Balz and G. Schneider. Eds. *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume 1. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999, pp.302-304.

of the Christian, both public and private. They also, it is recorded, had to make occasional reports to the bishop and the presbyters.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul shows us that he was perfectly conversant with the blessings the women wrought in the Apostolic Church. After naming Phoebe with a high price, he goes on to mention others. Prisca, Junia, Tryphaena and Tryphosa, and Persis may have served in Rome. We can assume that all these women were consecrated as Deaconesses.

In the constitutions of the Holy Apostles, a work in Greek which appeared in eight volumes in the middle of the fourth century, and which gives all the rules and regulations of the early Christian Church, we read: The Bishop shall in the presence of the Presbyters, lay his hand on the Deacons and Deaconesses, and offer the following prayer.

O Eternal God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, thou who didn't condescend to let thine only-begotten Son be born of a woman, thou who didn't fill the holy women - Miriam, Deborah, Hannah and Huldah-with the Holy Ghost and didn't select women to be the guardians of the holy gates ... Mercifully behold these thy servants who are now to be consecrated to the office of Deaconess. Fill them with the Holy Spirit, that they may perform the work to which they are called in a worthy manner, to thy glory and the exaltation of thy Son Jesus Christ, through whom honour and worship be unto thee and the Holy Ghost now and forever. Amen.²⁶

Constantinople was the centre of Deaconess Work in the fourth century. John Chrysostom, Bishop of that city (then the Eastern capital of the Roman Empire) had 40 Deaconesses in his Church. When the emperor's daughter-in-law, Urodia, plotted against him because he preached against the sins of her court, the Deaconesses defended him vigorously. A most famous Deaconess of that period was Olympians, a wealthy widow. She was known throughout Constantinople for her bravery and genius.

After 600 A.D, there was little mention of Deaconesses. The Roman Catholic Church was calling its women into convents numbers. The order of nuns sought sanctity by withdrawing from all contracts with the World, while the early Deaconess poured out their lives for the needy ones in the world around them. In addition, the nuns had to take the vow of celibacy while the Deaconess took no vows.

The office of the Deaconess disappeared more and more. About 700 A.D; it had entirely dropped out in the accident. In Constantinople, the office still existed in 1200 A.D, but it was found nowhere else in the orient. As the centuries passed, there were some interesting attempts in Europe to bring back the service of women in its evangelical simplicity, as it had been known in the early Church.

The Wesleyan Church in England first showed evidence of an interest in Deaconess Work in 1888; but the record showed that it was not until 1920 that the conference formally adopted the Wesleyan Deaconess order as part of its work, although it was a separate department of conference. The training school, Wesley Deaconess College, Yorkshire was acquired in 1902.

²⁶ F. O. Sewapo. *The Mission of Women in Luke's Gospel and its Implications for Deaconess Order in Methodist Church, Nigeria. Dissertation.* Cliff College, Calver, Hope Valley, United Kingdom, 2010, p. 66.

John Wesley Deaconess Order

While Methodism does not object on principle to the admission of women to the ordained ministry, the practical problems created by the itinerancy are such that, in practice, women may not offer themselves as candidates. (A moment's reflection on the position of a married woman in the itinerant ministry would show that these "practical Problems" are not artfully continued to support a prejudice. They are inherent like the case.)

But Methodism has an honoured place for the full-time ministry of women in the Wesley Deaconess Order. This order was founded by Dr Stephenson, and for more than half a century has served the Church with that deep unselfish devotion that so often marks the Christian Service of women. It was only in keeping with the spirit of the order that at recent Conference its members asked leave to refuse a proposed increase in their meagre allowances because of the general financial stringency.

To be accepted as a Candidate, a woman must be at least twenty-one years of age, must have a good general education, and must possess those gifts of mind and spirit which will enable her to endure the hard and exacting life of a Deaconess. She receives two years of training at the order's College at likely, Yorkshire, and there follows a period of service in circuit or mission work, during which she wears the grey uniform of a probationer. Having satisfactorily completed her probation, the Deaconess is then ordained by the laying on of hands and by the vote of the conference, and is fully received as a Wesley Deaconess.

The work done by the Deaconesses is hard but full of variety and interest for people of the right types. On the staff of a central mission, their ministry is exercised chiefly amongst women and girls, and the Youth Clubs and Sunday Schools. And those who know what the Wesley Deaconess can do to lighten the burden of life borne by the old and invalid, often living in single rooms and with no income but the Old Age Pension, know the best value of their work.

There are other fields of service, such as the home Mission, Departments of six caravans have each staffed by two Deaconesses, and many a languishing counting "cause "has been given new hope and life by their service. Other Deaconesses find special vocations in moral Welfare and Youth work. But all are doing a job of which they and Methodism may well be proud of.

Candidates are "handpicked." There is no place in the order for the intense, the glum and humourless, or for that somewhat frightening type of district visitor, tight-hipped and impatient of the frailties of ordinary people. The modern Deaconess must bring to her work intelligence, an unsentimental sympathy and practical down-to-earth common sense. Godliness with gaiety is great gain and nowhere more so than is the blue-uniformed sisterhood of the Wesley Deaconess order.

Qualities of a Wesleyan Deaconess

A Wesleyan Deaconess who is truly called of God must manifest some of these traits.

Visions: This is the ability to foresee the future. A Deaconess needs this before she can be an effective and successful leader. James Dum says "To envision is to take a mental journey from the known into the unknown; it is to arrive at the future and perceive it clearly while still living in the present". A Deaconess must be a good dreamer just like Joseph, Son of Jacob in the book of Genesis of the Holy Bible.

Action: Whatever one visualizes (good or bad) has to come to open through action. There is no action without reaction, whether positive or negative. A Deaconess must be positive to get things done, however not by doing everything herself, but by the assistance of others. And so, she must be an active leader.

Humility: She must humble herself as Apostle Peter admonishes: "Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1Peter 5:5). Every Deaconess should borrow a leaf from Jesus (Philippians 2:5-11).

Respectability: (1 Tim. 3:2) it is a way of holding standards acceptable to society. A Deaconess must be deserving of high regard. She must command respect in her speech and action.

Spirit-Filled Life: She must be led by the Spirit of God. It is the Holy Spirit that inspires holy men and women of God to lead God's people into the right path. Those who are filled with the Holy Spirit also bear the fruit of the spirit namely: "Love, Joy, Peace, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22.)

Sense of Humour: She must have the ability to see things as amusing, especially during those tense situations and yet still be able to hold her ground.

Charisma: This is a special grace of God to whosoever has it. Whosoever does not have it should seek for it from the Lord. Charisma is a special quality that gives a leader influence, charm, or inspiration over a large number of people. A Deaconess needs this gift.

Above Reproach: (1Timothy 3:3) She must have a blameless character. Every follower (even though he or she may not be able to achieve it) expects his or her life should measure up to the standards set by God in the scriptures for Christians. She must have a good reputation in and outside the Church.

Integrity: The word "Integrity" has been defined as "doing what you are supposed to do when no one is watching" It also strengthened firmness of character complete sincerity and honesty. A Deaconess of Integrity walks securely (Proverbs 10:9; 13:6).

Endurance: This is the ability to bear patiently and remain firm. Deaconesses were referred to as "giants in faith" (Hebrews 11:35-38).

Prudence: She is shrewd (in a good sense), cautious and thrifty (1 Timothy 3:2). A Deaconess must be cautious in practical matters in one's personal affairs. "The simple believes everything, but the prudent looks where he is going" (Proverbs 14:15).

Consistency: She must keep to the same principle of course of action that is she should not say one thing and do otherwise. She must know what to say, how to say it, when to say it, why she says it when she said and what she has said.

Manager: She manages her household well. This managerial ability includes the effective management of human and material resources available to her. God good

Deaconess are an essential ingredient to the success of good decisions made at meetings.

A Wesleyan Deaconess Servanthood

The Wesleyan Deaconess serves in the Church and outside the Church and the Church in accordance to her calling may require of her: to preach the gospel, to lead the worship of a congregation, to teach both young and old; she may be required to feed the flock of Christ, to nurse the sick, to care for the poor, to rescue the fallen, to succour the hopeless, to offer friendship, even at cost, to many who, but for she may never know a Christian friend. But in all this, she must be the true evangelist of our Lord Jesus Christ. Translating her Gospel into the language of personal service, that it may best be understood, not reckoning her ministry complete till those whom she serves can say, now we believe, not because of your speaking for we have heard for ourselves, and that this indeed the Saviour of the world. She must remember that she is one of an order whose members must be jealous for its good name honouring and helping one another, ready at all time to take up each other's work and loyally to carry it on. She must be prepared to go where she is needed less, to go to the place where she is needed more. Above all, she must remember that she is first and last, the servant of the Lord Jesus Christ and that all service is rendered to Him.

Unlike Roman Catholic Sisters, Wesleyan Deaconesses are entitled to marry a man either lay or clergy. This is because marriage is the smallest community in human society, but for the people called "Methodist", it is a genuine community of the redeemed and sanctified. The smallest of Local Churches, but a true one, the Church in miniature. Marriage is a "Sacrament", that is, a holy happening, a sign of God's grace and love between a man and woman. God divinely instituted marriage to be a one-man-one-woman relationship. God is the author and creator of the family unit. He created families for his glory and praise (Ephesians 3:14-15). Marriage is a cohesive union building a husband and a wife together in a monogamous, not polygamous relationship. From creation the woman was the glory of man, she was created from him and for him (1 Corinthians 11:79) of which a Deaconess is to a man irrespective of his or her position in the community, society, the church, even in the nation. On the one hand, many men do not have the interest to approach Deaconesses for marriage. On the other hand, some of the laypeople look at the Deaconesses' appearance or dressing and describe them holier than theirs and conclude among themselves that they may not cope with Deaconesses. Again, some Priests run away from having Deaconesses as wives. The reason might be either Priest feel that they are called into the same vocation with Deaconesses or Deaconesses may not duly respect them. And as a result of this, some Deaconesses were frustrated and end up without marrying at the time.

John Wesley gave to Deaconesses a position of genuine leadership, trust and responsibility. For instance, Grace Murray was in charge of the Orphanage home, Hannah Ball was the organising pioneer of Sunday School work, and Nancy Bolton was exercising Pastoral care and leadership at Whitney. Wesleyan Deaconess were using the very gifts they have in preaching, teaching, nursing, organising, and providing pastoral oversight. Thus John Wesley engaged her Deaconesses in the threefold ministry of servanthood, namely service, office and ministry as reflected in Lucan context of διακονέω. The contemporary church needs to remove all obstacles on the way of Deaconesses and quench the kindle fire of ambition, bitterness, zeal, envy and

covetousness that engulf the house of the living God. It is in the light of this that Deaconesses would willingly, joyfully and sacrificially exercise their ideal servanthood to the glory of God.

Conclusion

διακονέω and its cognates are in Luke 10:40 a central expression for Christian particularly women conduct oriented to Jesus' Word and behaviour and for specifically Deaconesses functions in the Church of Christ: charitable activity, the proclamation of the Word, and the task of leadership. The paper reveals that Wesleyan Deaconess Order is a legitimate development of theology and upholds the threefold ministry of servanthood, namely service, office and ministry. In this sense, women are called into the sacred order of Deaconess and by holding such a holy office are instructed to holistically serve God and humanity. Therefore, individuals and church denominations are encouraged to remove all barriers preventing Deaconesses from exhibiting their servanthood to the progress of the expansion of God's kingdom on earth as enshrined in Luke 10:40.

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