

## Duties of The Church Diaconal According to Acts 6:1-7

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### ABSTRACT

Diaconal ministry to those in need is a statement that needs to be proven by conducting a study based on the original manuscripts of the Bible. So to achieve this goal, the author conducts literary research using biblical studies of the New Testament and using a historical-critical approach. As the number of disciples grew, there was one ministry that the apostles neglected, the "table ministry." This ministry is concerned with providing daily assistance to widows and the poor. Democratically, the apostles proposed that the disciples choose seven well-known, Spirit-filled, and wise men to carry out this ministry. Many people consider the ministry of the Diakonia separate from the ministry of the Word. But there is an interesting thing that the author finds here, namely diaconal ministry is one form of word ministry.

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## INTRODUCTION

The poor and widows are a community that always exists in social and church life. In the Bible, both the Old Testament (OT) and the New Testament (NT), there is a lot of explanation about their existence. According to research by A. George, quoted by Hortensius Mandaru in the PL, there are 245 references to "poor people" with 6 main words; two popular words are *ani* (used 80 times) and *anaw* (used 25 times), these two words refer to a low and oppressed social situation. Apart from these two main words, there are four other words that also refer to poverty. (Mandaru, 1992) The four words are: *ebyon* (61 times) refers to people who expect and need something, *dal* (48 times) generally refers to physical weakness and material poverty, *rash* (21 times) refers to severe economic poverty, *poorer* (6 times) refers to a person who is dependent and submissive to others. (Mandaru, 1992) Furthermore, Ihroni translated that the words *dal* clearly refer to those who are suffering, oppressed, weak, humiliated, depressed, and helpless. (Ihroni, 1995) From the several words explained above, the meanings of the words that are closest to the formulation of poor are *ani*, *dal*, *rash*, and *misken*. These four words refer to economic or wealth poverty, as a result of economic or property poverty it can lead to spiritual poverty.

Based on testimony in the OT Bible, the categories of poor people are widows, orphans, foreigners (as immigrants who have a weak position in society), and Levites (former worship officials at holy places in the interior which were closed by King Josiah during religious reform, so that they are unemployed and lose their source of income). (Mandaru, 1992; Nolan, 1991; Weiden, 1987) In the NT Bible, the word used for poor people is "Ptockas" meaning very poor, who hope in God, who are useless, or who are literally begging. The classification of poor people is divided into two groups, namely: first, poor people who are still able to earn a living such as slaves and daily laborers, and those who live on donations or charity such as the sick, blind, lame, lepers, and destitute. From the three main ideas, the author can conclude that all three have something in common, namely that those categorized as poor are people who have precarious jobs and people who cannot support themselves.

In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke continues the history of Jesus as the liberator of the poor. Here we see the liberating power, the Spirit sent by the risen Christ, at work in the first Christian churches. Luke, in his second writing in the Acts of the Apostles, truly understands the existence of the congregation at that time. The problem of poverty is a problem that always requires special attention. When the number of disciples increased, there was grumbling between the Greek-speaking Jews against the Hebrews, because the distribution to their widows was neglected in the daily service. At that time, injustice had arisen, so treatment was needed to overcome injustice in the congregation, and this injustice occurred at the dinner table after worship. The apostles realized that a wrong condition had developed. They understand that in this case, firm action needs to be taken so that the bad atmosphere does not continue to develop. In a truly democratic way, the congregation is called to gather. The

apostles suggested that the disciples choose people who were known to be good, full of the Spirit and wisdom to deal with the injustices that occurred in the congregation. (Susanto, 2010) The seven people chosen to serve the poor were: Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas. These people were considered good, full of the Spirit and wisdom (Acts 6:3). With their persistence in serving widows and the poor, the Word of God spread more and more, and the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased. (Mandaru, 1992) The author of the Acts of the Apostles highlighted the selection of these seven men in the context of the work of the Holy Spirit in the early church. The Book of Acts tells a lot about the role of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the author limits this writing to one of the works of the Holy Spirit which is reflected in Acts. 6:1-7. Through the passage of Acts. 6:1-7 found at least two important messages for readers, namely the work of the Holy Spirit which was always present in the life of the early church, and the ministry of diakonia which is a manifestation of the ministry of the Word.

### THEORETICAL REVIEW

The Book of Acts (Greek: *praxeis apostolon*) is the title given to the fifth book of the New Testament Bible, dating back to the last years of the 2nd century, as the second part of the History of the Beginning of Christianity. The first part we know as the Gospel According to Luke. (Douglas, 1995) Scholars have different opinions regarding the content of the book of Acts. Some agree that Acts is a book of history, but some are not and some are somewhere in the middle, between agreeing and not. Among them as described by Perrin and Dulling, Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, Wismoady Wahono and Xavier Leon-Dufour as follows. In their book *The New Testament: An Introduction*, Perrin and Dulling state:

"The book of Acts is an early Christian historical book, which tells of the spread of Christians from Jerusalem to Rome, but not as an empirical history in the modern sense".  
(Perrin & Dulling, 1982)

Similarly, Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart argue that the Book of Acts is a book of history, because it contains what is called "*Hellenistic historiography*", a kind of historical writing that originated in Thucydides (460 - 400 B.C.) and developed during Hellenistic times (300 B.C. - 200 B.C.). (Fee & Stuart, 1996) Such history is not only written to record events of the past, but it is also written to encourage and please (i.e. to be interesting reading) and to inform, state doctrine, or offer an apologetics. (Fee & Stuart, 1996) However, this does not mean that Acts is a purely historical book that records only a series of events that occurred in the past. On the other hand, Wismoady Wahono wrote his opinion in the book Here I found that although this book is rich in information about the ancient church, we cannot consider the book of Acts as a book of church history, because the main purpose of writing it is not to present the history of the ancient church. The author has made a selection of existing materials, and processed them to fulfill the original purpose of writing. (Wahono, 1986)

Acts is said to occupy a traditional place between the Gospels and the Epistles. On the one hand, Acts is a general continuation of the Gospels (other than the actual continuation of the third); On the other hand, he provided a hysterical background for earlier letters and confirmed the apostolic status of most of their authors. Therefore, this book is recognized as an innumerable document for the early history of Christianity. (Douglas, 1995) Another distinctive feature of Acts is that most of the book contains sermons, lectures and speeches delivered by various personalities on various occasions and in front of diverse audiences.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Research method is a scientific way to obtain data with a specific purpose and use, where the results can be used to solve the problem under study. (Sugiyono, 2002) Research methodology is also a research step that explains the way research can be carried out so that research hypotheses can be tested scientifically, empirically, and rationally. (Iskandar, 2005) In this writing the author conducts qualitative research methods, and literature study methods. "In the method of collecting data from various sources as much as possible as theory and information related to research. These sources must be relevant and accountable academically, validate and validity scientifically, such as books, journals, encyclopedias and other bibliography materials." (Zaluchu, 2021)

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

For the author's benefit in carrying out interpretive work, the author will divide the passage of Acts. 6:1-7 in several main points because each verse has a connection and cause-effect relationship that produces the goal of the disciples' ministry. These main ideas include:

1. 6: 1-2 : The reason for the conflict
2. 6: 3-4 : Selection criteria
3. 6: 5-6 : The selection process and the people selected
4. 6: 7 : Impact of service

The first congregation lived in the context of "Greek" and "Roman" culture. This means that the Roman empire ruled, but language, culture, philosophy, religion, economics and social ideas all came from Greece. Regarding the custom of diakonia in the Greco-Roman tradition, G. Riemer gives his opinion. (Riemer, 2004) What about Greek diakonia? Greek morality emphasized the obligation to care for others: parents, family, friends, fellow citizens, strangers, the elderly, people who experienced injustice. Generosity is considered a commendable attitude. This is called "Philanthropy". Philanthropy (Greek: *philein* means love, and *anthropos* means human) is the action of someone who loves fellow humans, so that they donate their time, money and energy to help other people. This term is generally given to people who give a lot of money to charity. Usually, philanthropists are rich people who often donate to the poor. But not all poor people had to be considered, but only those counted as Greek/Roman citizens. Non-citizens may even be oppressed or ignored. In Middle Eastern countries, such as Israel and Egypt, efforts to care

for the poor are considered important. This is striking in the OT, where God emphasizes mercy and justice towards the needy within the framework of covenant fellowship.

When the number of students increases, the problems they face also increase. The term "disciples" in Acts appears to refer not to a particular group of church leaders, but to all Christian believers. The word "disciples" is a term for Christian believers (cf. Acts 9:1, 26). (Bartlett, 2003) In those days, Greek-speaking Jews (Jews born in Palestine, but who had their own synagogue in Jerusalem, and in that synagogue the Old Testament was read in Greek) complained against Hebrews (Jews born in Palestine, speaking Aramaic and read the Scriptures in Hebrew), that their widows were neglected in the daily service (diakonia) of food. This is an understandable phenomenon in the development of the congregation in such a short period of time. The expansion of the congregation was due to many migrations, both from Greek-speaking Jews and Hebrew-speaking Jews. (L. B. Indonesia, 1981) Both groups were Jews.

The disputes that occurred between these two groups were not ignored by the apostles. The word *ολόκληρο σεν* states that the 12 apostles held a meeting with all communities or all congregations (cf. 4:23). The apostles gathered all the congregations to gather. Truly a democratic way. The apostles did not decree or determine but proposed, the congregation decided. In this discussion the apostles remained firm in their stance that their primary duty was to preach the Word of God. This does not mean that the task of "serving the table" was neglected. After the congregation had gathered, the apostles proposed to elect seven people who were solely to take care of the diakonia. They proposed to choose not without criteria. The men to be chosen should be well known, and full of the Spirit and wisdom. *Αραιώσ* shows that one of the criteria for people who will administer diakonia is people who are testifying or who work as witnesses. Or in other words, this person is really active in carrying out testimony. *σοφία*, what is meant here is wisdom or worldly wisdom. (Brink, 2012) This makes it possible to imply *marroume, nouj* for all events. The person who will manage the congregation's money and donations must have a good reputation. The use of the word *crei,a* in Hellenistics means "function and position" not "requirement". *Επιλέγω* saw that the election of the seven men was transferred from the congregation to the apostles. So, being good, filled with the Spirit and wise are the criteria for people who will be assigned to take care of diakonia in the congregation.

This proposal was accepted by all the congregation, so they chose seven men according to the criteria of the apostles. Seven people were immediately selected who were considered capable. The words *Επέλεξαν* indicate that these seven people were chosen to preach the Word through diakonia. Apart from that, the selection illustrates the selection management aspect, because there are criteria in the selection. Those chosen were Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicholas. Verse 7 is the fruit of ministry or the results of the ministry of the apostles and seven people who were specially chosen for the ministry of the Word and for the ministry of diakonia. In particular, the event of the selection of seven people for diakonia ministry was seen as very important.

As the Christian congregation grows, the problems become more complex. The occurrence of grumbling between one group and another (Jews who spoke Greek, against Jews who spoke Hebrew), made the apostles have to find the best solution so that the problem did not continue and had a negative impact on the newly growing congregation. Wisely and democratically, the apostles gathered the entire congregation and proposed that they elect seven men who were known to be good, full of the Spirit and wisdom to serve the poor, and democratically these seven people were also elected. The apostles approved the election results of the congregation and laid their hands on the seven people. With good service, the Word of God spreads more and more. There are several interesting things from the passage of Acts. 6:1-7, namely: From a statistical aspect, there is an increase in the number of disciples who believe in Jesus Christ; There is an ecclesiological aspect. This means that a fellowship of people who believe in Christ has been formed; There is a homiletical aspect that is manifested in action. This means that the Word of God is manifested through diaconal ministry; In selecting the seven people for Diakonia service, the selection management aspect was realized. Selection management is seen in the existence of selection criteria; In verse 7, it describes two aspects at once, namely the missionary aspect and the statistick aspect. This means that with the presence of seven people to serve the poor, the Word of God is increasingly spread, meaning that the mission of the Kingdom of God can be preached to many people who do not yet know Jesus, so that they become believers, including priests. With the success of this mission, the number of people will automatically increase, or in other words, there will be an increase in statistics.

There are three words that are indirectly related to one another, in connection with the problem above, namely: diakonein, diakonia, and diakonos. Therefore, let's discuss these three terms one by one. *Diakonia*: this word appears in Acts. 6:1; means "providing help or service". *Diakonein*: this word appears in Acts. 6:2; means "serve". *Diakonos*: a "servant" or person who carries out diaconal duties.

Apart from the things stated above, there is also an interesting thing in this passage, namely regarding the issue of "leadership". The leadership that occurred in the early church was certainly inseparable from the role of the Holy Spirit. There are three important things that the author found after conducting a study of this text in relation to leadership. These three things are: first, leadership in the church arises solely from worldly (ordinary) needs which are also functional needs. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is called by God in His baptism (Luke 3:21-22) and Jesus calls the twelve apostles. Now the twelve apostles called others to ministry in the church. Second, Leadership arises from "below" not from "above". Leaders arise from the need of God's people for teaching and service. At the same time, leadership is from above, God-given (Eph. 4:8-11; 1 Tim. 4:14). God does not allow the congregation to lose leadership but provides worthy servants. Third, The church creates a type of congregational leadership into functions. From the beginning of Acts. 6:1-6 has stated that the church shows an amazing ability to follow basic matters follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit and respond creatively to problems that occur

in the congregation. Also judging from the Greek names of the seven people selected, these people may have come from Hellenism, a part of the church that felt discriminated against. If so, the church is also demonstrating the awareness that leadership that comes from the repressed can do the best job of representing the repressed.

In Acts. 6:1-7, is a brief account of the administrative problems of the early church in Jerusalem and their resolution may seem rather mundane. But through this passage, the author of the Acts of the Apostles reminds his readers that the administration and service of the daily internal needs of the congregation is also a vital service, not something that can be underestimated or devalued amidst other more interesting matters. The problems that occurred in the early church often also occur in the life of today's congregation. The church as a community of believers often experiences problems, which quickly require solutions that do not harm many parties. Or in other words, not taking sides with one of the conflicting groups. These problems must be resolved under the demands of the Holy Spirit.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

From Kis. 6:1-7 This can also be seen in the organization of the church. In the beginning, the apostles led the congregation in all areas of activity, namely prayer, the ministry of the Word, and the "ministry of the table". This task turned out to consume the energy, mind, and time of the apostles. Of course, this harms the congregation and interferes with fellowship. Therefore, it was decided to divide these tasks among other parties. These duties are also divided into two namely prayer ministry (ministry of the word) and table ministry (widows ministry). What is important here is the way the first church solved the problems they faced: the apostles assumed responsibility for all areas of activity (functions) of the congregation which at that time were divided into ministries of prayer, Word, and table. However, in order to be carried out optimally they reorganize these tasks. The most important thing here is the "means and results" obtained through the rearrangement, but the effort to find a solution that guarantees the interests of all parties in balance.

### **FURTHER STUDY**

The limitation of this study is that it only examines theologically the meaning of the Diakonia in Acts 6:1-7, so it is recommended that further research can be done to find other theological meanings in Acts 6:1-7.

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