

CONTRASTING ECCLESIAL FUNCTIONS  
IN THE SECOND CENTURY:

‘ DIAKONIA ’, ‘ DIAKONOI ’, ‘ EPISKOPOI ’ AND ‘ PRESBYTEROI ’  
IN THE *SHEPHERD OF HERMAS* AND IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH’S *LETTERS*

*Introduction.*<sup>1</sup>

The Apostolic Fathers corpus is a collection of rather heterogeneous second century texts, compiled as such in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> The number of texts comprised in it varied over the times; the recent Loeb text edition counts eleven texts: *1 Clement*, *2 Clement*, the so called *Epistle of Barnabas*, the *Didache*, the *Epistle to Diognetus*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the *Letters of Ignatius of Antioch*, the *Letter of Polycarp*, *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* and the *Fragments of Papias and Quadratus*.<sup>3</sup>

In modern scholarship their dates may range from the last part of the first century – such as *1 Clement*,<sup>4</sup> *Didache*<sup>5</sup> or some parts of

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was first presented at the *Diakonia, Diaconiae, Diaconato: semantica e storia nei Padri della Chiesa. XXXVIII Incontro di studiosi dell’antichità Cristiana*, Rome, 7-9 May 2009. I would like to thank Alistair Stewart-Sykes for his comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. J.B. Cotelier, SS. *Patrum qui temporibus apostolicis floruerunt opera*, 2 vols., Lutetia Parisorum 1672); then L.J. Ittig *Bibliotheca Patrum Apostolicorum Graeco-Latina. Praemissa est Dissertatio de patribus apostolicis*, Leipzig 1699. On the name of the collection see H.J. de Jonge, *On the Origin of the Term Apostolic Fathers*, in *JThS* 29(1978), pp. 503-505.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2 vols., ed. B.D. Ehrman, [Loeb Classical Library 24-25], Cambridge, Mass. – London 2003. All Greek and English citations refer to this edition.

<sup>4</sup> A *terminus a quo* in the 70s has recently been proposed while the *ante quem* remains the second half of the second century: cf. A. Gregory, *1Clement. An Introduction*, in *The Expository Times* 117(2006), pp. 223-30, esp. 227-228.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. J. Draper, *The Apostolic Fathers: The Didache*, in *The Expository Times* 117(2006), pp. 177-181, esp. 177-178.

Hermas<sup>6</sup> – to the beginning of the second half of the second century – the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*<sup>7</sup> and *Diognetus*.<sup>8</sup>

Two are safely located in Rome, the *Shepherd of Hermas* and *1 Clement*, others in Antioch of Syria, and others in Smyrna in Asia Minor. For other texts of this collection, modern scholarship has been rather cautious about assigning them to one place or another: so *2 Clement*, for instance, only allows for speculative theories due to the lack of evidence to support a assured location,<sup>9</sup> while in case of the *Epistle of Barnabas* Alexandria in Egypt has been argued strongly but Asia Minor and Syro-Palestine have also been suggested.<sup>10</sup>

As such, their time span – as well as the geographical one – reveals a very heterogeneous group of texts. Corroborating here the fact that the very collection is, as mentioned, a modern construct, it is only reasonable to say that any case of exporting an agreement on any given topic among the Apostolic Fathers texts, to the larger context of early Christianity, is weak and is easily subjected to historically methodological critique. A disagreement on a particular matter, however, having a smaller scope, can perhaps be said to bear some relevance outside the collection.

In the following, I will address the matter of diaconate by describing the presence of the terms *diakonia* and *diakonoi* and also of *episkopoi* and *presbyteroi* in two texts: the *Shepherd of Hermas* and Ignatius of Antioch's *Letters*. The main question will be: what is it that each of these texts has to say about *diakonia* and these related terms? For this purpose, the two analyzed works will be here approached mainly as 'texts' and not as 'sources' for historical realities.<sup>11</sup> Acknowledging that these texts are by no means treatises

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. C. Osiek, *The Shepherd of Hermas: a Commentary*, [Hermeneia], Minneapolis 1999, pp. 18-20.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. S. Parvis, *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, in *The Expository Times* 118(2006), pp. 105-112, esp. 105-107.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. P. Foster, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, in *The Expository Times* 118(2006), pp. 162-168, esp. 164.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *The Apostolic Fathers...*, vol. II, p. 158.

<sup>10</sup> See discussion in J. Carleton Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas. Outlook and Background*, Tübingen 1994, pp. 30-42.

<sup>11</sup> A similar distinction was recently employed in a different context by Andrew Gregory, in *Does the Modern Category of "Jewish-Christian Gospel" distort*

on *diakonia*, and that, furthermore, the presence of some of these terms is rather scarce, this paper is an attempt to determine what can we say about *diakonia*, *diakonoi*, *episkopoi* or *presbyteroi* starting from these texts.

*The Shepherd of Hermas.*

The *Shepherd of Hermas* was written most likely in Rome, and its dating allows for a period between c. 70 and c. 150.<sup>12</sup> Containing a number of visions Hermas experiences and long – also revealed – interpretations of them, the *Shepherd* is usually regarded as a work of Christian prophecy, although – while he carefully differentiates true from false prophets – nowhere does Hermas describe himself as such.<sup>13</sup>

There are seven occurrences of *diakonia* in the *Shepherd*.<sup>14</sup> One of them concerns Hermas in particular, and expresses his ministry of spreading and preaching the received commandments, in *mand.* 12,3(46). Of the remaining six, four express ministries exercised by the rich, one of the *diakonoi*, and one last that of the *episkopoi*.

In the second commandment – *mand.* 2,6(27) – Hermas learns from the *Shepherd* that within a household there is a ministry to help those in hardship. More explicitly, in the first similitude – *sim.* 1,9(50) –, the task of the rich is precisely to exercise God's ministries of helping the widows and the orphans, while in the second similitude – *sim.* 2,7(51) – the rich and the poor depend on one another: the rich obtains wealth with God and legitimizes

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*our Understanding of the Texts to which it Refers?*, in *Journal of the study of the New Testament* 28(2006), pp. 387-413. See esp. 392-394.

<sup>12</sup> A recent discussion of the traditional arguments for Hermas' dating can be found in A. Gregory, *Disturbing Trajectories: 1 Clement, the Shepherd of Hermas and the Development of Early Roman Christianity*, in *Rome in the Bible and the Early Church*, ed. P. Oakes, Carlisle 2002, pp. 142-166, esp. 151-153.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. J. Verheyden, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, in *The Expository Times* 117 (2006), pp. 397-401, esp. 398. See on this topic J. Reiling, *Hermas and Christian prophecy: a study of the eleventh Mandate*, [Supplements to Novum Testamentum 37], Leiden 1973.

<sup>14</sup> On the general theme of ministry in the *Shepherd* see H.O. Mayer, *The Social Setting of the Ministry as Reflected in the Writings of Hermas, Clement and Ignatius*, Waterloo 1991, pp. 55-78.

earthly wealth only by helping the poor, who in turn pray for the rich.

The ninth similitude – *sim.* 9,26,2(103) – describes, on the one hand, a ninth mountain as a wasteland with reptiles and beasts, and scattered stained stones that impersonate the *diakonoï* that snatched the livelihood of orphans and widows, and, on the other hand, – *sim.* 9,27,2(104) – a tenth mountain having trees that shelter some sheep, with the trees representing *episkopoi* who, through their ministry, provided shelter for strangers and for those in need.

The verb *diakonein* is employed once to refer to Hermas – *sim.* 8,4,1-2(70) – as he assists the shepherd upon request; twice it refers to *diakonoï*, and three times to the rich. *Diakonoï* as such are mentioned only three times in *Hermas*. In the third vision – *vis.* 3,5,1(13) – they are listed, in the building of the eschatological church, among the good squared stones along with *episkopoi* and *didaskaloi*, while in the ninth similitude – *sim.* 9,15,4(92) – they are listed with the prophets in a third row of the construction after the ‘first generation’ and the upright, and before the apostles and the *didaskaloi*. The third occurrence is the one already mentioned – *sim.* 9,26,2(103) – where stained stones represent *diakonoï* who stole the livelihood of orphans and widows.

*Hermas* speaks of *diakonia* as a ministry directed towards supporting the less fortunate – the poor, the widows, and the orphans – a task undertaken by the wealthier members of the community. Whether this is the main feature of *diakonia* or its only purpose can hardly be argued starting from the text of *Hermas*. On *diakonoï* there is even less material: of the three instances in *Hermas*, two are in simple lists with no mention of their function whatsoever. The only instance where something is said about their activity – in *sim.* 9,26,2(103) – shows again, in a negative way, the neglected yet expected care for orphans and widows.

The text of *Hermas* only mentions *episkopoi* twice. In the first case, in *vis.* 3,5,1(13), they are simply listed, in the building of the eschatological church mentioned above, represented by the good squared stones, devoid of any further description. In *sim.* 9,27,2(104) the trees represent *episkopoi* who, through their ministry, sheltered strangers and help those in need, thus intersecting with the ministry of the *diakonoï* with regard to those in need and having added a further ministry, that of being *philoxenos*. Again, the text does not

say whether these are the only two or the main two among other ministries of the *episkopos*.

On a different note, the *Shepherd of Hermas* is usually cited as evidence for a Roman not yet mono-episcopal Christianity.<sup>15</sup> Although it is obvious these two instances previously mentioned do not, by any means, point to any idea of single ruling, it is equally true that the plural used each time do not exclude the mono-episcopacy. In both cases, the context in which *episkopoi* appear in this plural form is not that of one community with potentially more than one *episkopoi*: the context is indeed formed by the eschatological church within which *some episkopoi* are squared stones for the building and *some others* are sheltering trees on a mountain. I would then suggest that the *Shepherd of Hermas* can only be used as argument for building the case for the lack of monoepiscopacy in the first half of the second century with great caution: the text does not say that there are churches with more than one *episkopos*, it simply does not say anything on this matter, and although this silence allows for speculation, the discussion of this matter should perhaps remain in the realm of speculation.

In two instances throughout the *Shepherd* the term *presbyteros* seems to be relevant for the present discussion. In the second vision – *vis.* 2,4,2-3(8) – Hermas is supposed to postpone handling the revealed book to the *presbyteroi* in order to ‘add some word’. After the book has been completed it is to be read by Hermas, in his city, with the *presbyteroi* who lead the church. In the next vision – *vis.* 3,1,8(9) – when invited to sit down Hermas would rather not do it before the *presbyteroi*. The first instance might perhaps suggest some degree of involvement in liturgy or teaching for them, but then again, they are only mentioned as being present, and this can equally be said of the whole present community.

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<sup>15</sup> See, for example, J.J. Jeffers, *Conflict at Rome: Social Order and Hierarchy in Early Christianity*, Minneapolis 1991, p. 176: « The difficulty that Roman Christian leaders experienced in developing a monoepiscopacy and effective control over all the congregations in Rome is illustrated by the *Shepherd* and underlies 1 *Clement's* concern for order ».

*Ignatius of Antioch's Letters.*

Ignatius is one of the two Apostolic Fathers of whom it is largely accepted we have some certain knowledge<sup>16</sup> – the other being Polycarp. Ignatius was the bishop of Antioch and we do know he wrote his letters on his way to Rome towards martyrdom, perhaps « at some stage in the second quarter of the second century, i.e. 125-50 ».<sup>17</sup> It is well known that Ignatius has a sharp opinion about how a church should be structured and also that his constant redefining it throughout the letters admittedly reflects certain diversity on this matter in the second century Eastern Mediterranean Christianity.<sup>18</sup> The model he advocates is presented in the letter to the Magnesians (*Magn.* 6,1): the *episkopos* is « presiding in the place of God, and the presbyters in the place of the council of the apostles, and the deacons [ ... ] entrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ ».<sup>19</sup> « Apart from these a gathering cannot be called a church »,<sup>20</sup> says the author in the epistle to the Trallians (*Trall.* 2,2).

Ignatius generally advocates respect for and subjection to these members of the community and speaks rather rarely of their

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<sup>16</sup> For a discussion challenging both the authenticity and the consensus on the date of the letters of Ignatius see R.M. Hübner, *Thesen zur Echtheit und Datierung der sieben Briefe des Ignatius von Antiochen*, in *ZAC* 1(1997), pp. 44-72, and Th. Lechner, *Ignatius adversus Valentinianos? Chronologische und theologieggeschichtliche Studien zu den Briefen des Ignatius von Antiochien*, [Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 47], Leiden – Boston 1999. For a number of responses see: A. Lindeman, *Antwort auf die Thesen zur Echtheit und Datierung der sieben Briefe des Ignatius von Antiochien*, in *ZAC* 1(1997), pp. 185-194; G. Schölgén, *Die Ignatianen als pseudoepigraphisches Briefcorpus: Anmerkung zu den Thesen von Reinhard M. Hübner*, in *ZAC* 2(1998), pp. 16-25; M.J. Edwards, *Ignatius and the Second Century: An Answer to R. Hübner* in *ZAC* 2(1998), pp. 214-226; H.J. Vogt, *Bemerkungen zur Echtheit der Ignatiusbriefe*, in *ZAC* 3 (1999), pp. 50-63.

<sup>17</sup> P. Foster, *The Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch (Part 1)*, in *The Expository Times* 117(2006), pp. 487-495, esp. 490-492.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. P. Foster, *The Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch (Part 2)*, in *The Expository Times* 118(2006), pp. 2-11, esp. 2.

<sup>19</sup> *The Apostolic Fathers...*, vol. I, p. 247. On the comparisons with the divine persons see W.R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, [Hermeneia], Philadelphia 1985, pp. 112-114.

<sup>20</sup> *The Apostolic Fathers...*, vol. I, p. 259.

activities.<sup>21</sup> We will restrain our inquiry to the fragments hinting to the latter, that is, to the activities of the *episkopos*, *presbyteroi* and *diakonoi*.

Ignatius only mentions *diakonia* four times: on three occasions the term applies to *diakonoi* – *Magn.* 6,1; *Philad.* 10,2; *Smyrn.* 12,1 – and one time to an *episkopos* – *Philad.* 1,1. The latter occurrence – in the letter to the Philadelphians (*Philad.* 1,1) – concerns an *episkopos* who seems to face some authority problems by being silent while seemingly expected not to be so; whether he is expected to deliver sermons or teachings, the text does not say. The emphasis comes thus on his gentleness and on the fact that his ministry (*diakonia*) was not from himself, nor through humans, nor according to pure vanity, but by the love of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>22</sup> Suffice to notice that here – for Ignatius at least – the silence of the bishop is not contradictory to his office.

The *Letter to the Magnesians* (*Magn.* 6,1) simply legitimizes the office (*diakonia*) of the *diakonoi* as the ministry of Jesus Christ, while in the remaining two occurrences of *diakonia* Ignatius only mentions *diakonoi* entrusted with ambassadorial duties (cf. *Philad.* 10,2) and of carrying correspondence (cf. *Smyrn.* 12,1).

The *diakonoi* are mentioned as such on less than twenty occasions.<sup>23</sup> Some of these are fragments where *diakonoi* are simply legitimized as resembling Christ and in their relation with *episkopoi* and *presbyteroi*; no hint of their function is given.<sup>24</sup> Among the remaining instances, a *diakonos* Burrhus, of the Ephesian church, is attending on Ignatius (cf. *Eph.* 2,1) and eventually carries his letter to the Smyranean church.<sup>25</sup> In a different context, a certain Zotion is,

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<sup>21</sup> See W.R. Schoedel, p. 141.

<sup>22</sup> « Through his silence he can do more than those who speak idle thoughts »: *The Apostolic Fathers...*, vol. I, p. 285. Schoedel suggests that the unusual emphasis on the office (*diakonia*) of the *episkopos* aims to counterbalance the apparent lack of control of the bishop's charismatic authority alone (p. 196).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *Eph.* 2,1; *Magn.* 2; 6,1; 13,1; *Trall.* 2,3 (x2); 3,1; 7,2; *Philad.* 4; 7,1; 10,1-2; 11,1; *Smyrn.* 8,1; 10,1; *Polyc.* 6,1.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Trall.* 3,1; 7,2; *Philad.* 4; 7,1; *Smyrn.* 8,1; 10,1. See W.R. Schoedel, pp. 112-114.

<sup>25</sup> The same Burrhus is carrying letters for Ignatius in *Philad.* 11,2 and *Smyrn.* 12,1. See W.R. Schoedel, p. 45.

on the one hand Ignatius' " fellow slave, " <sup>26</sup> and, on the other hand, as deacon, subject to the bishop as to the grace of God, and to the presbytery as to the law of Jesus Christ (*Magn.* 2).<sup>27</sup> Another Philo, a *diakonos* from Cilicia, is mentioned to be a messenger and an ambassador (*Philad.* 11,1; *Smyrn.* 10,1). In the same way, in the letter to the Philadelphians, Ignatius writes that a *diakonos* should be sent as an ambassador in Antioch and adds that other churches have sent *presbyteroi* and even *episkopoi* (*Philad.* 10,1-2).

In a rather singular fragment, the letter to the Trallians reads that the *diakonoi* should be pleasing to all people: it is not only food and drink they deal with; and they should guard against accusations (*Trall.* 2,3).<sup>28</sup>

There are thus largely two activities Ignatius mentions with regard to the *diakonoi*; on the one hand they are said to be acting as messengers and ambassadors, and on the other hand they seem to serve, probably to the poor. The latter activity seems have developed sufficiently to call for regulation and allow for complaints. Of the first two, the emphasis on the role of messenger might emerge from, or at least be related to, Ignatius' main yet particular activity: keeping correspondence. The emphasis on the ambassadorial task of certain *diakonoi* from one church to another is however less likely to be dependent on Ignatius' epistolary context.

As far as the *presbyteroi* are concerned, they are mentioned nine times;<sup>29</sup> there is also a general term for their assembly, *presbyterion*,

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<sup>26</sup> On the difficulty of Ignatius self-identification with a deacon see W.R. Schoedel, p. 107: « To take this literally and to regard Ignatius as a deacon, however, involves denying the authenticity of *Romans*, which contains the one passage (*Rom.* 2.2) in which Ignatius calls himself bishop. [...] It is more likely that Ignatius is taking cognizance of unusual difficulties and temptations affecting the office of deacon ».

<sup>27</sup> Schoedel (p. 107), warns « against thinking that the details of comparison may tell us something about the responsibilities of these offices », due to the variety of things divine resembled to the offices in such comparisons throughout the epistolary.

<sup>28</sup> W.R. Schoedel, p. 141, who suggests that there may be an alternate understanding of the mentioned ministry of the deacons, with the distributed food and drink as the Eucharist, « since deacons are soon found distributing the bread and wine (*Justin Apol.* 1.65.7; 1.67.5) ».

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *Magn.* 2; 3,2; 6,1; 7,1; *Trall.* 3,1; 12,2; *Philad.* *pr.*; 10,2; *Polyc.* 6,1.



employed twelve times,<sup>30</sup> but they are only mentioned as part of the model church along with the *episkopoi* and *diakonoi*, and, at best, in relation to the bishop, as in the letter to the Ephesians, where they are attuned to the bishop as strings to a lyre (cf. *Eph.* 4,1), or in a comparison where the Gospel symbolizes the flesh of Jesus and the presbytery the apostles (cf. *Philad.* 5,1). Only once *presbyteroi* are mentioned as possible ambassadors, along with *diakonoi* and, as the text has it, ‘even *episkopoi*’ – this being also the only instance where *episkopoi* are mentioned as ambassadors to other churches, although the context suggests that it is rather unusual for them (cf. *Philad.* 10,2).

Turning hence to *episkopos*, the word is employed a little more than fifty times. Yet, the information we can gather from these instances is at best comparable with that about *diakonoi*, as most of these texts – except two instances – either state the bishop’s authority or advise strongly against doing anything apart from him.<sup>31</sup> On one occasion Ignatius sides with a bishop Damas who probably experiences some authority problems within his community due to his youth; on other two occasions concerning different bishops he mentions that a bishop may well be silent (cf. *Eph.* 6,1; *Philad.* 1,1). Whether this is silence as opposed to teaching, preaching or something else, is unclear.<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps the most relevant fragments for this particular point of discussion are to be found in the letter to the Smyrneans and in that to their bishop Polycarp. The former reads: «Let no one do anything involving the church without the bishop. Let the Eucharist be considered valid that occurs under the bishop or the one to whom he entrusts it» (*Smyrn.* 8,1) and, moreover, «it is not possible to baptize or to hold a love feast without the bishop. But whatever

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Eph.* 2,2; 4,1; 20,2; *Magn.* 13,1; *Trall.* 2,2; 7,2; 13,2; *Philad.* 4; 5,1; 7,1; *Smyrn.* 8,1; 12,1.

<sup>31</sup> So *Magn.* 7,1; *Trall.* 2,2; 7,2 and *Smyrn.* 8,1; 9,1.

<sup>32</sup> Alistair Stewart-Sykes argues, concerning the silence in *Eph.* 6,1, that «whatever the competence of the Ignatian bishop, his role did not extend to teaching in the assembly» in *Prophecy and Patronage: The Relationship between Charismatic Functionaries and Household Officers in Early Christianity, in Trajectories Through the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers*, eds. A. Gregory – Ch. Tuckett, Oxford 2005, pp. 165-189, esp. 173.

he approves (*dokimase*) is acceptable to God » (*Smyrn.* 8,2).<sup>33</sup> It is not all that clear whether these imply that the mentioned activities are actually performed by the bishop or only under his authority. There is a fair chance that the bishop approves more that he performs, again, as far as Ignatius' text is concerned. Similarly, in the letter to Polycarp, Ignatius states that the marriage should have the consent of the bishop (*gnomes tou episkopou – Polyc.* 5,2).

This particular letter is, however, relevant for the proposed topic, as it is addressed to a bishop, Polycarp, and does contain, among other items, a number of monitions to the latter; although, apart from the fragment mentioned above which is explicitly linking an activity to the authority of the bishop, the rest of them may well address particular issues of that particular church. As such, they may express either usual activities of an *episkopos*, or simple particular matters concerning the community – not necessarily assigned to the office of an *episkopos* – that Ignatius simply addressed to his collocutor from that community.

Bearing this in mind, Ignatius' first practical advice envisages guiding with love towards salvation not only good disciples, but also the pestiferous ones (cf. *Polyc.* 2,1). This may be regarded as pointing to a current activity of the *episkopos* that would involve some exercise of authority towards disciples (*mathetas*). Nevertheless it does not state anything explicit concerning the responsibilities of the bishop in this respect.<sup>34</sup>

A second piece of advice is to remain firm when persons who are otherwise trustworthy deliver dubious teachings (cf. *Polyc.* 3,1), yet this hardly points to a bishop's regular activity.

Ignatius is perhaps responding to a particular situation when he advises that the widows should not be neglected (cf. *Polyc.* 4,1). This particular requirement is more likely to presuppose an activity of an *episkopos*, as the following reads: « After the Lord, it is you who must be mindful of them ». This activity is expected to be of a financially administrative nature, as moreover is the next practical advice: while slaves should be respected, their freedom should not be gained using church's money (cf. *Polyc.* 4,3).

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<sup>33</sup> *The Apostolic Fathers...*, vol. II, p. 305.

<sup>34</sup> So A. Stewart-Sykes, *Prophecy and Patronage...*, p. 173.

Polycarp is subsequently encouraged to discuss (*homilian poiou*) evil arts (cf. *Polyc.* 5,1). This may advocate that a preaching side to bishop's activity is meant. Nevertheless it has been convincingly argued that here *homilia* is not a sermon but a conversation.<sup>35</sup>

Polycarp is also advised to instruct the wives and their husbands (cf. *Polyc.* 5,1), with the particularity that in starting the marriage they should have the consent of the *episkopos* (cf. *Polyc.* 5,2). The latter advice may point to episcopal authority<sup>36</sup> but also to an administrative task.<sup>37</sup> Finally, he is advised to call a council with the purpose of electing an ambassador to Syria (cf. *Polyc.* 7,2).

### *Conclusions.*

On the count of *diakonia* the two texts seem to stand on fairly different grounds: while in Ignatius' letters the word applies to *diaconoi* three times and only once to others – in this case, to an *episkopos* – the *Shepherd of Hermas* assigns *diakonia* to *diaconoi* only one time out of seven. Hermas' diaconate seems administratively directed towards assisting the less fortunate; the agent may well be a deacon, a bishop or a better-off member of the community. No instances of *diakonia* in Ignatius' letters parallels this, yet here the word is perhaps more settled in abstractly expressing the office as such.

Hermas' *diaconoi* are entrusted with the ministry of taking care of the weak – widows and orphans – and *diakonia* in general bears a strong emphasis on this, even if the text rarely nominates the ministers as *diaconoi*. Ignatius' *diaconoi* are mainly ambassadors and messengers – and this is largely related to author's ongoing activity –

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. A. Stewart-Sykes, *From Prophecy to Preaching. A Search for the Origins of the Christian Homily*, [Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 59], Leiden 2001, pp. 75-77. He also offers a list of previous authors who understand here a sermon (p. 20, n. 69).

<sup>36</sup> So Schoedel, who adds: « It is impossible to tell how deeply the bishop was involved » (p. 273).

<sup>37</sup> Stewart-Sykes suggests that the bishop's consent on marriage is to be « bound up with the question of dowry and the disposition of funds », just as is – apart from not allowing the neglecting of the widows – the above mentioned manumission which is not to be purchased from the church's funds. His conclusion about the activity of the bishop as is depicted by this letter is that the *episkopos*' « principal concern is therefore with the financial management of the church » (*Prophecy and Patronage...*, pp. 173-174).

but are also, on one occasion, definitely entrusted with serving in the community. It is possible that Ignatius' *diakonoï* are administering the provided Eucharistic gifts in the assembly as the specific place at which charity is exercised, rather than being similar to Hermas' more general agents of charity.

Hermas' has very little to say about the *presbyteroi*: they are present and respected, yet nothing is said about their activity. Ignatius' *presbyteroi*, on the other hand, are more present, as they are constantly mentioned distinctly from yet in relation to the bishop and the deacons and there is even a general term for their congregation, *presbyterion*; nevertheless, their responsibilities are never mentioned.

The word *episkopoi* is only twice used by Hermas in contexts that do not allow us to say much about them, save that on one occasion their function seems to intersect that of the *diakonoï* on the account of assisting those in need. Ignatius' letters, present a larger image of what an *episkopos* should be. Notably enough, no such intersection with the office of the *diakonoï* is here possible. Their presence is distinct from that of their colleagues, deacons and presbyters, and they generally seem to assume a managerial position.

As expected, the two texts offer different and rather composite images of what the proposed terms might denote. They both seem to agree that the offices are entrusted with administrative rather than sacerdotal tasks, yet they remain in variance about what each of these terms stand for.

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#### ABSTRACT

The collection of texts we read today under the name of Apostolic Fathers has proved to be a very productive source for surveys of the second century Christianity. Due to its heterogeneity, it is hardly a surprise that the question of *diakonia*, in this corpus, forms a composite image. The aim of this paper is to reassess on comparative basis the material on *diakonoï*, *episkopoi* and *presbyteroi* in the *Shepherd of Hermas* and Ignatius of Antioch's *Letters*.