The aim of this essay is to reflect on the 2015 APM Conference theme “What’s In a Name? Assessing Mission Studies Program Titles” in conversation with Hans W. Frei.¹ In the essay, I focus on Frei’s *Types of Christian Theology* to explore his understanding of theology as both Christian self-description and academic inquiry, which was informed substantially by his analysis of Friedrich Schleiermacher’s proposal to include theology as a professional school at the University of Berlin. It is fitting that Frei’s historical/methodological reflection on the case of Berlin is undertaken in examining metamorphoses of mission studies titles and programs as both cases involve analysis of the nature of its identity, internal dynamics and operations, and external impingements. The essay begins with a brief discussion of Paul Ricoeur’s notion of tradition as interplay between sedimentation and innovation to show that, as it was true in the case of Schleiermacher’s correlation of *Wissenschaft* and *Glaube*, in the larger context of the story of Christianity, examination of changes in mission studies programs and titles involves poetic imagination, especially the notion of experiment.² This analysis explores, first of all, Schleiermacher’s appeal to the theme of professionalization in his efforts to come to terms with the practical nature of theology related to the context of the church and other social ends.


Secondly, intricately related to professionalization, it attends to Schleiermacher’s handling of the problematic of irreducible Christian specificity of theology in the public of the academy by way of an embryonic understanding of the social sciences. Thirdly, it makes explicit the manner in which Schleiermacher correlated *Glaube* and *Wissenschaft* in an ad hoc, eclectic manner that sought to maintain them as autonomous equals in a dialectical resolution. And lastly, I will conclude with some reflections on the implications that arise from this investigation.

In recent years, some Christian institutions of higher learning have relinquished the birthright of traditional nomenclature of their mission studies programs and adopted names such as Intercultural Studies or World Christianity, and some have offered dual degrees in theology and other disciplines, such as social work. The changes in nomenclature and programs are complex phenomena with deep implications, so we raise the question “What’s in a name?” Consider as an example how at a micro-level personal names, though appearing to be a fairly straightforward appellation given to designate an individual, can capture and represent a multiplex of meanings: most obviously, parental blessings and affections, but also subtly or deliberately one’s identity in a family, tradition, and community, and even struggles between entrenchment of patriarchal clan ideology and women’s liberation and equality, contestation between indigenous culture and colonialist politics of knowledge, or clash between refusal of religious hegemony and absorption into religious orbits of beliefs and practices. There is a whole lot involved and so much at stake in adopting a name change, and for that matter keeping the same, whether one goes out on a limb venturing into a new world of discourse and practice or a further sharpening of one’s position but only intensifying and refining it to a greater degree.

To situate the phenomenon in the larger context of the Christian tradition, it is helpful to consider what Paul Ricoeur says about tradition as interplay between sedimentation and
innovation. Sedimentation results from the paradigms that constitute the typology of emplotment, which were originally born from the labor of the productive imagination itself, but through layers of history they culminate in existing forms. Innovation is correlative to sedimentation but functions as its counterpoint. Whereas the paradigmatic order in prefigured world of action is governed by rules leading to sedimentation, innovation is not servile to rules, though it is rule governed than being born from nothing, and makes calculated deviations. Its rule governed deformation deviates to contest sedimentation in order to create something new in configuration and refiguration. Understood within the larger context of the story of Christianity, nominal changes can be an ecstatic moment of poiesis that entails both hermeneutics of suspicion and restoration at all levels, including its title, curriculum, faculty hire, and student recruitment, even to the point of the death of the old and the birth of the new.

Nomenclature and program changes are ruled inscribed calculated deviations that suggests something about the present conditions, the actors, and the institutions involved that actualize the story of Christianity through productive judgment, manifesting interplay between sedimentation and innovation.\(^3\) It is poetic imagination at work in performative mimesis that is not a passive response to the experience of reality but a creative transfiguration of the field of action to achieve meaning and being in history. Administrators, faculty, students, and constituent religious and social institutions, analogous to the readers of a story, are not mechanistically fated and scripted to submissively follow a narrow plot, but critically and constructively enact the tradition, grasp its meaning, experience and express pleasure and/or displeasure, complete the holes and lacunae of indetermination in history. And as Ricoeur suggests, this interplay between sedimentation and innovation involves creative capacity for proliferation of divergences.

\(^3\) Ricoeur suggests that naming oneself is a poetic act of power to say or to do as an agent in the field of history. Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 52-55 and 143-148.
especially in art as ethical laboratory of experiments, which accord narratives subversive and dangerous qualities. To be underscored here is the notion of experiment involving risks of being subversive and dangerous inherent in prefiguration, configuration, and refiguration shaped by various teleological judgments.

To examine the experimental character of mission studies nomenclature and programs, it is illuminating to think with Hans Frei about mission studies as either Christian self-description or academic inquiry, or both, especially as they negotiate between internal norms and affairs and external impingements. As a brief overview, Frei’s thoughts on theology in the academy is deeply entangled with his hermeneutical proposals concerning the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ. Toward that end, his earlier work utilized literary theory, especially Erich Auerbach’s classic study of realism in Western literature in *Mimesis*, and Gilbert Ryle’s philosophical intention-action identity analysis, and his later work drew from Ludwig Wittgenstein and Clifford Geertz among others to articulate a Christology that reflects the socio-linguistic context of the church. It is important to note that his later turn toward the particular logic of Christian discourse and practice is not a sectarian, intratextual move but arises from a profound concern for the society as the realm of divine providential ordering of human history in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, and also a rigorous engagement of the academy and its critical conceptual tools to make intelligible the church’s self-description from the viewpoint of the agent. There is in Frei’s work a profound coming to terms with the three

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4 By internal commitments and affairs, I have in mind the church’s self-description of its norms, rules, and conventions that regulate its performative enactments, and by external impingements, I am referring to the effects of public spheres the academy and the society bearing on the church’s mission. There is a flow of current both ways from the church to the other public spheres and also the reverse as the phenomenon of nomenclature change illustrates.
public realms the church, society, and academy; this essay focuses on the relation between the church and the academy.  

Frei comes to terms with the academy most explicitly in his engagement of different types of modern and contemporary theologies concerning the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ in his posthumously published work *Types of Christian Theology*. Frei suggests that theology can be recalibrated as both Christian self-description and academic inquiry that entails a lively and rigorous engagement of scholarly discourses such as philosophy, history, literary theory, and the social sciences among others, rather than a retreat to a religious enclave of sectarian discourse.

In his own experiment of interplay between sedimentation and innovation in reconceiving theology, Frei engages Friedrich Schleiermacher in his essay “The Case of Berlin, 1810,” which is Appendix A of his essay “Theology in the University.” Frei’s choice of Schleiermacher as his interlocutor is logical not only because he finds his proposal “highly instructive” for his own construal of theology, but also because of Schleiermacher’s vital role in the establishment of theology faculty at the University of Berlin, which eventually became the prototypical German university and the model for many universities in Europe and North America. As the prototypical university, Berlin led the way in promoting the ideals of *Wissenschaft*, which was usually understood as science or theory of reason involving free exercise of rational inquiry into the universal, transcendental principles that encompasses all fields of inquiry and organizes them...
into systematic, intelligible totalities. Its signature mark was free, rational inquiry and this was clearly evident in how the philosophical faculty was considered to be the most important in the university in embodying the ideals of Wissenschaft.

However, Frei points out that the birth of this university involved complications because the Prussian government, which had the right to regulate the temporal affairs of the church, employed theologians as members of the state bureaucracy with their right to non-interference as intellectuals but also as instructors of church professionals. It created an awkward situation in delegating the training of ministers to a university that had mixed thoughts about the compatibility of training clergy with its own Wissenschaftlich ideals. An intense debate ensued concerning “the public character of the understanding informing theology” in the university because of the challenge to do justice to both church training and Glaube as well as to Wissenschaftlich principles of general explanation that applied across all disciplines.

It is within this context of heated debate on “the public character of the understanding informing theology,” especially concerning the suitability of theological training in the university that Frei explores Schleiermacher’s understanding of academic theology. Schleiermacher’s proposal was not the only one on the table and came to butt heads with the rival alternative of Adolf von Harnack. He that theology must be both scientifically warranted by objective,

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7 Frei, “Theology in the University,” 98.
8 Frei provides a great deal of attention to the socio-political context in which the University of Berlin was founded. Frei, “Theology in the University,” 96-103.
9 For instance, Fichte responded to the question of the suitability of practical theological training in the university by arguing that any school which proscribes the use of reason and asserts itself a priori as an unfathomable mystery should be excluded from the university. This meant that for theology to be included in the university it had to abandon its claim to privileged knowledge of God and practical instruction in the ministerial arts. Frei comments that there is in Fichte “no hankering after the inclusion of praxis in his notion of theory.” Frei, “The Case of Berlin, 1810,” 106; idem, “Types of Academic Theology,” in Types, 118.
10 See Frei, “Types of Academic Theology,” 118, 126-127, and 132. That the concept of professionalization is crucial in Frei’s understanding of academic theology is demonstrated by the question he entertains, but does not answer: to what extent is the thought structure of theological types a function of theological professionalism?
scholarly investigation and continuous with the tradition of cultural ideals received from the past. He pressed further and argued for the inclusion of theology in the university curriculum because Christianity was understood as the perfection of the genre of religion, which is chiefly about intellectual or moral-spiritual essence, rather than as the distinctive kind of a complex social and cultural organism. On Harnack’s watch, theology as a specific phenomenon would be subsumed to general laws based on universal reason and the upshot would be neutralization of all tension between theology and the faculty of arts and sciences. Deflating tension can be good but Frei points out that under Harnack’s reductionistic framework, the priority of Wissenschafterlich theology exercises control over theology as genus over species so that the distinctiveness of theological studies is severely undermined. Furthermore, he could not accept Schleiermacher’s proposal to allow Glaube and Wissenschaft to coexist because Christianity cannot be the subject of hermeneutical inquiry in which the theologian share intellectually the world of discourse he or she is studying and also “take seriously the textuality of the text, whether written or enacted as a community, a culture” in a historical inquiry in the university. The issue facing the University of Berlin was the irreducible Christian specificity of theology in its curriculum.

In contrast to Harnack’s position, Schleiermacher’s vision for the university was to achieve a dialectical resolution of theology as both Wissenschaft and practical, distinctive activity of the church. Though not without difficulty, Schleiermacher sought to maintain the tension between theory and practice, theology as Wissenschaft and church training, state university and church, and between human culture and obedient Christian discipleship as two autonomous equals. His proposal was to mediate between the tension between Christianity as

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12 Frei, “Types of Academic Theology,” 117.
13 Frei, “Types of Academic Theology,” 118.
distinctive religious community, which is characterized by certain ritual forms and institutions, a
common scripture, and its memory of Jesus as the founder and the image of God, and
Christianity as an official institution in the general cultural network of social and intellectual
attitudes and arrangements. Both approaches to Christianity are considered not as necessarily in
conflict with each other but as distinct and autonomous realms that are to be brought together in
a non-reductionistic dialectical resolution.\textsuperscript{14}

To be sure, Schleiermacher was concerned about the question of truth but he rejected
pretentious philosophical proofs of truth and turned to the descriptive accounts of Christian truth-
claims and how they are proved in practice, such as by changed ways of living. He recognized
fully the preeminent place of philosophy among the university faculties and thought that the task
of the university is to teach the young to “regard everything from the point of view of
\textit{Wissenschaft}.”\textsuperscript{15} However, he was not only an academic but also “a full-blooded Christian
theologian” who would not accept the reduction of theology to philosophy, and made a complex
argument defending the rightful place of theology in the university by appeals to the traditions of
\textit{Weltanschauung}, \textit{Bildung}, and \textit{Kenntnisse}. The traditions of \textit{Weltanschauung} and \textit{Bildung} are
important in their own right in Schleiermacher’s argument for the citizenship of theological
faculty in the university, but I will focus on Frei’s discussion of Schleiermacher’s appeal to the
time-honored tradition of \textit{Kenntnisse} through which he envisions a union of \textit{Wissenschaftlich}
thetical inquiry with the professional, practical training of ministers in the church.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{14} Frei notes that Schleiermacher sought to maintain “genuine continuity with the church’s understanding of
scripture and to correlate external description and internal description in light of the culture despisers of religion.”
Frei, “Some Implications for Biblical Interpretation,” in \textit{Types}, 66

\textsuperscript{15} Frei, “The Case of Berlin, 1810,” 110.

\textsuperscript{16} Frei, “The Case of Berlin, 1810,” 107. The very structure of the German University reflected its
commitment to the \textit{Wissenschaftlich} studies as well as professional training. Unlike the British and French education
systems, the German University is an institution between the Academy of Sciences that specializes in pure research
and the professional school that concerns itself with instruction of special skills. This meant that in the end the
Schleiermacher argued for the importance of theology by advocating the legitimate inclusion of professional schools, i.e., theology, medicine, and law, in the university curriculum. He thought that instructions in professional schools stimulate students to make an intimate connection between theory and praxis in order that they may acquire both practical and conceptual skills that are necessary to master a field. The aim of such professional schools is not necessarily Wissenschaft but one of founding the socially indispensable practices through theory in the tradition of Kenntnisse, which is defined as “something like the ‘abilities’ or ‘cognitive skills’ requisite for carrying out the given practical work.” On that account, Schleiermacher argued that “Christian theology is … the compass of those skills [Kenntnisse, once again] and practical rules [Kunstregeln, rules that are the fruit of practical skill rather than theoretical deduction] without whose possession and use a cohesive direction of the Christian church, i.e., a church government, is not possible.” Professional schools do not bear an intrinsic relation to Wissenschaft, but because of the pragmatic, socially indispensable nature of their disciplines, university citizenship should be granted.

Frei here makes it explicit that Schleiermacher developed the practical character of theology in the tradition of Kenntnisse through the category of professionalization in order to confer theology citizenship in the University of Berlin. As Schleiermacher saw it, theology is a positive Wissenschaft which does not necessarily cohere with the idea of science but involves a

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18 Frei, “Theology in the University,” 113. Frei comments that in Brief Outline of the Study of Theology and Occasional Thoughts about Universities in the German Sense, Schleiermacher clearly develops his argument for theology as a practical skill, the aims of theological education, its methods, and its relationship to other fields within the university, but always from the perspective of theology as an integral discipline.
distinctive conceptual skill required for the professional solution of practical and social aims. Frei writes, Schleiermacher “based the right of theology to a place in the university on the status of the ministry as one of the professions in the modern sense.” His professional understanding of theology was reflective of the legal-institutional and cultural milieu of Germany during that period which viewed theologians as professionals whose expertise was deemed important by the governmental authority for the interest of the public domain. Theologians were not considered as divines but “simply professionals, just as we have intellectuals, novelists, licensed beauticians, and therapists today. There is a whole culture of professionalism, and in regard to theology, Berlin led the way.”

What Frei finds appealing is that Schleiermacher did not disown the importance of theology as an academic discipline but firmly recognized that the institutional aim of the church and its professional character are part and parcel of the content to be understood, not merely a practical byproduct or a basically distinct context. His argument for the place of theology in the university is not made on systematic philosophical grounds but on legal-institutional and cultural grounds.

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19 Frei, “The Case of Berlin, 1810,” 113. Elsewhere, Frei writes, “This does not, of course, question the fact that it is also a scientific enterprise.” Frei, “Barth and Schleiermacher,” 192.

20 Frei, “The Case of Berlin, 1810,” 112. He defines professionalization as “expertise over a given field, through governance of the information pertinent to it, and even more through the distinctive methods of understanding and dealing with that information.” Frei, “The Case of Berlin, 1810,” 115.

21 Frei, “The Case of Berlin, 1810,” 110. With regard to academic curriculum, the clerical paradigm not only provided a pedagogical structure but the very essence of theology. Frei, “Barth and Schleiermacher,” 189.

22 Frei, “The Case of Berlin, 1810,” 115. Moreover, Frei adds that Schleiermacher was a feisty political liberal and wanted to dignify the professional status of the clergy, even characterizing the clerical church leader as a prince of the church, in order to guard the distinctive status and dignity of the profession against the state and the king.

23 Frei adds that the distinctive hermeneutical or conceptual dimension and the social-scientific analysis, in particular the culture of professionalism surrounding theology, in the description of the religion are closely linked. Frei, “Types of Academic Theology,” 132.
Correlative to the theme of professionalization of theology is its irreducible Christian specificity. In his essay “Barth and Schleiermacher: Divergence and Convergence,” Frei recalls Schleiermacher’s position that the three professional schools have “their original raison d’être prior to or outside the university” and that they are special schools that the state has established with distinct privileges because of the essential needs they serve in the public domain. Frei writes, “Theology is a practical discipline as a whole and not merely a theoretical or scientific enterprise—either of a transcendental or of an empirical character—with an, as it were, external aim.” Professionalization of theology, more specifically, training of parsons for ministry, with a theoretical foundation in Kenntnisse is inextricably linked to external social and practical aims related to the church as a cultural-religious tradition and community. We see here a socio-linguistic turn to the church.

Frei goes on to note that Schleiermacher’s understanding of theory in professional faculties of theology, law, and medicine is not about the high-powered explanation of the conditions for the possibility of the practice, but “more like the grammatical remarks that further us in the use and informal reflection on the rules of the use of a language we are learning, to appropriate the language of the later Wittgenstein and his little flock.” Theology is viewed as a positive enterprise that does not inherently cohere as an intrinsic part of a universal philosophical foundation, e.g., transcendental philosophy, but involves “the acquisition and impartation of the


25 According to Frei, Schleiermacher maintained that theology is “unified by the social situation of clerical praxis external to the university and the faculty of theology.” Frei, “Barth and Schleiermacher,” 192. See also Frei’s assessment of Barth’s 1923-1924 lectures which neglected Schleiermacher’s emphasis on the practical and ecclesiastical aim of theological training. Frei, “Barth and Schleiermacher,” 185-186. Frei points out that Barth’s own theology became kirchlich rather than christlich, and he understood theological concepts as ecclesiastical and social skills, thus resembling Schleiermacher’s model.

26 As quoted in Frei, “Barth and Schleiermacher,” 189.

continuing tradition of a community—an ecclesiastical culture, if you will—by means of the
proper use of its language under conditions of cultic continuity and social change.”

This understanding of theology is informed deeply by a sense of its own history, a continuity of
language and custom commonly understood as tradition. Simply stated, theology is Christian
self-description, though not without mediation, at least, ad hoc correlation.

Without denying the importance of Wissenshaftlich approach to theology,
Schleiermacher stressed theology as part of “the heritable social currency of a specific religious
community, the Christian church. Theology is a self-critical inquiry into the use of its language
under a norm furnished within that pious linguistic community, especially “the constant
transition from the Christian religious affections to their kerygmatic, poetic, rhetorical, and
finally their descriptively didactic linguistic shape.” He identified “the irreducible specificity of
Christianity at the primary level of a ‘mode of faith,’ a cultural-religious tradition, and a
linguistic community,” and second, “he claimed it as the second level of the language of the

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28 Frei, “The Case of Berlin, 1810,” 112. This is continuous with how theology initially developed in the
particular history and shape of Christian community to preserve the wisdom of the fathers, which distinguished truth
from error, and passed on to the future generations. Frei, “The Case of Berlin, 1810,” 112; idem, “Barth and
Schleiermacher,” 191.

29 Theology is then for Schleiermacher not found on general principles or specific method with a universal
philosophical foundation that unequivocally sets the criteria for meaning, meaningfulness, and truth of theological
statements. He argued, “Any purely formal, universal canon of reason which adjudicates the coherence, consistency,
and intelligibility of the ‘method’ governing a particular field of study cannot do so in this case,” and “there cannot
be a priority to theology of any specific (material) philosophical scheme…. In short, neither formally nor materially
can philosophy be a foundational discipline for theology.” What he is concerned about is that philosophical proofs
of truth and a priori generalization about the meaning of Christian claims would result in a reduction of Christianity
to the general ideal of humane culture. Under such a scheme, theology becomes a straightforward application of
logically prior philosophical and historical theological insights to logically subsequent and practical matters of the

30 Frei, “Barth and Schleiermacher,” 191. For Schleiermacher, the material unity in theology is provided by
the distinctive essence of Christianity circulating in the Christian church.
community in expert hands for the practical aim of organizing the skills of governance." Frei writes:

Theology … is a practical discipline; it is in effect part of learning the grammar of a linguistic symbol system; it is Christian self-description under some norm for its specific language use. No matter what it may entail logically in matters of theory, it is part of the praxis, the ruled practice of culture, part of social tradition enacted by a participant, an agent who knows how to use the language in its appropriate context. The formulations of the Christian confessions and their interpretations may be taken that way.

This is helpful in understanding how Schleiermacher’s understanding of theology as religion specific informed the connections he made between the philosophical, historical, and dogmatic aspects of theology and the practical aim of theology oriented toward worship, preaching, instruction, and pastoral care. It was a strategic move that created space for Schleiermacher to distinguish theology from other areas of culture and their study, and granted the faculty and the students permission to develop “internal or participative access” to its historical shape, reality, and its truth-claims as a universal reality in one particular cultural form.

In this turn toward the practical and irreducible Christian specificity, Schleiermacher has conferred upon modern theology an understanding of theology that is affiliated with ethics or philosophy of religion in his day or commonly known today as the social sciences, especially social anthropology, which Frei sees as a natural cognate discipline to theology. Theology understood as second-level descriptive and critical appraisals of its own first-level language and actions under a norm internal to the community itself resembles social science more than philosophy. Frei writes,

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32 Frei, “Types of Academic Theology,” 126.
33 Frei, “Barth and Schleiermacher,” 189.
34 Frei, “Types of Academic Theology,” 127.
Theology is as intimately and basically explained by a sociology of knowledge as by a philosophy of the knowledge of reality. In fact, to the extent that Schleiermacher advocated the primacy of the partial aim of theology within the Church, the nearest discipline to it is a social science that describes, and in describing explains, the way theological language functions as a part of the web of relations constituting the community of which it is a part.35

It is important to note here that theology as Christian self-description is also academic inquiry by way of the social sciences along with other disciplines.36

To further elucidate the significance of social-scientific approach to religion that preserves the practical and distinctive character of the Christian socio-linguistic community, Frei discusses how a sacred text is utilized in instruction by groups to define the distinctive elements of that religion as a semiotic system.37 Theological concepts are taken as practical, problem-solving devices in the common quest of living together in coherent groups, such as the church.38 As such theological concepts are not secret mental events behind their public manifestations, but shared conventions under common rules which we call symbol systems.39 Theology in this sense resembles the practice of Midrash in which the ultimate recipient of instruction is the community

35 Frei, “Theology in the University,” 114-115.

36 Frei is wary of general conceptual tools becoming a supertheory that overwhells Christian specificity, so he suggests that the relation between theology and the social sciences must be kept external is so that the use of a social-scientific explanation in theology can remain a flexible and open-ended thought experiment, rather than functioning as an aspect of philosophy as general explanatory theory—Wissenschaftstheorie—which becomes a much more basic outlook. Another chief concern in keeping the relation between theology and the social sciences external is to protect the role of intentional agency. For Frei’s further discussion on the relation between intentional action and social structure, including his discussion of Peter Winch, Clifford Geertz, Marxist structuralists, and Habermas, see Frei, “Types of Academic Theology,” 128-129.

37 Frei, “Types of Academic Theology,” 126.

38 Frei writes, “The task of Christian theology is simply to talk about the way Christian language is used, by Christians, and to ask if it is being used faithfully…. That is what theology is about.” The criterion of faithfulness is similar to the criterion of appropriateness set out by David Tracy. For further discussion on Frei’s understanding of theology as an inquiry into the internal logic of the Christian community’s language, the rules and conventions exhibited in its ideas and speech, see Mike Higton, Christ, Providence and History: Hans W. Frei’s Public Theology (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 189-192.

39 Frei writes, “The rules governing these networks of communication are for the most part implicit … because they are context dependent and vary in accordance with the uses that they illustrate. The substance of the rules is the illustration rather than an independent explanatory power inherent in them.” Frei, “Types of Academic Theology,” 128.
which sanctions the mode of instructional activity in the service of the tradition.\textsuperscript{40} It is oriented toward defining and learning the grammar, internal logic, or the first-level statements of Christian linguistic symbol system kept alive in the church. It also involves second-level appraisal, both descriptive and critical, of its first-level language and actions under a norm internal to the community.\textsuperscript{41} Thus, Frei suggests that theology understood to resemble social science more than philosophy is more apt to affirm a strong relation of theory to practice, of language to social structure, and of explanation to socio-linguistic custom of the church.

Therefore, what is at stake in the social scientific approach is the irreducible specificity of the Christian socio-linguistic community. Each religion is understood as a distinct social structure and its depth grammar which has a language of its own that cannot be reduced to an aspect of a general religious language (e.g., the sacred), though there may be overlapping features among religious institutions such as ritual, forms of verbal symbolization, authority structure, and interpretative procedure. Christianity is a social organism, a community “held together by constantly changing, yet enduring structures, practices, and institutions, as other religious communities are…. All of these components are, for social scientist and theologian, not the signs or manifestations of the religion; they constitute it in complex and changing

\textsuperscript{40} Frei, “Types of Academic Theology,” 123-126. See William Young III, “The Identity of the Literal Sense: Midrash in the Work of Hans Frei,” in The Journal of Religion 85, no. 4 (October 2005): 609-633. There is some sort of convergence between Frei and Derrida here in their agreement on the useful character of Midrash. See Frei, “Introduction,” in Types, 17. However, Frei points out that the literal sense is unlike Midrash in Jewish tradition in that a similar primacy of the literal reading is more nearly a syntactical and lexicographical exercise than a literary one. See Frei, “The Encounter of Jesus with the German Academy,” in Types, 141.

\textsuperscript{41} As an instance of first- and second-level statements in theology, Frei discusses the Chalcedonian affirmation, which states that Jesus Christ is a single, unitary person in whom are united perfectly two complete, unabridged natures, human and divine. As a first-level statement it is an assertion that this is so and as a second-level statement it describes the internal logic of first-order statements. The implicit logic or the depth grammar of the Chalcedonian affirmation is that the subject-accident metaphysics is in the service of the subject-predicate description of the identity of Jesus Christ. Understood as such Chalcedon is a derivative interpretation of the gospel portrait of Jesus. Frei, “Types of Academic Theology,” 123-127.
coherence.” Hence, the primary task of theological redescription and academic external
description is to illuminate the distinctiveness of norms, conventions and patterns that mark such
enduring structures, practices, and institutions, as given by sociologists of religion or cultural
anthropologists.

To complete the story of the experiment at the University of Berlin, in the end it turned
out that the University was in actuality eclectic rather than embodying a single coherent
Wissenshaftlich idea, and it embraced the task of training students for the public professions
such as theology which could claim an equal right to that of Wissenschaft in a university along
with the arts and sciences. Frei expresses that this result is startling because the conception of the
University of Berlin was deeply influenced by the idealist philosophical system, but was unable
to embody that ideal. Instead the university produced an orderly eclecticism, combining the idea
of intellectual unity and supremacy of Wissenschaft with the actual diversity of an institution of
higher learning that included theology as a practical discipline. Frei comments, “It was a triumph
of orderly eclecticism over system by a leading systematician.” It was not perfect but it enabled
the preservation and development of the irreducible specificity of Christian self-description and
professional development in academic theology, and at the same time a correlation between
theology and Wissenschaft under an embryonic understanding of social science.

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42 Frei, “Theology, Philosophy, and Christian Self-Description,” in Types, 22.

43 Frei, “Types of Academic Theology,” 131. Frei explains that while there is a kinship between internal
and external description, they are ambiguously related to each other concerning truth-claims and theories of
explanation.

44 Frei, “The Case of Berlin, 1810,” 112. Schleiermacher’s strategy was a nonreductionistic dialectical
relation between descriptive and explanatory modes in the science of ethics—culture and history—which would do
justice to “the nonrepeatability and individuality of phenomena and to the distinctiveness of their description from
the agent’s or experiencer’s point of view, while at the same time permitting not only appeal to patterns of similarity
but to lawlike causal connections between sequential human events and social structures.” Frei, “Theology in the
University,” 114.

45 Frei, “Theology in the University,” 113. Under Schleiermacher’s adjudication, there is no supertheory by
which to mediate between external descriptions and Christian self-descriptions; they are correlated directly from
To cull some basic insights from this investigation, there are questions worth considering. First of all, whether situated in a Christian institution or a university setting, how do mission studies program account for the irreducible Christian specificity of the enterprise? This question may not be avoidable whether the faculty is carrying out participatory internal Christian self-description or external social scientific description. It may be the case that the former uses distinctive concepts that inform the Christian community and while using them she also describes them; the latter describes the concepts without using them; and the difference between the two is one of practice and judgment. If we grant Christianity to be in the first place a socio-linguistic culture of a religious community with informal, practical rules and conventions that govern the semiotic system, one way to conduct mission studies is as a native who has learned to use its grammar as in a language game, and another is as an outside social anthropologist giving voice to the agent’s point of view in empirically minded ethnographies. In either case, mission studies entail providing thick descriptions that explains the publicly instantiated internal logic of communal language and action concerning its mission, such as missio Dei or the reign of God.

their own autonomous base. There is a direct correlation of internal and external descriptions of the essence of Christianity, the first-order religious discourse about the self-consciousness of Jesus in relation to the feeling of absolute dependence, in which they mutually illuminate the semantic convergences but without surrendering their distinctions under a totalizing theoretical account that mediates as a supertheory. This direct method of correlation is maintained in the relation between theology and philosophy. Schleiermacher thought that moral philosophy and metaphysical reflection led to an idea of a transcendent ground of all being and action, to which we are immediately related in the experience of ourselves as absolutely dependent, but this inevitable idea is elusive and not simply made explicit in general and without attention to particular human communities. So, there is a real reciprocal relationship between theology and philosophy, but clearly philosophy does not function as a foundational discipline. For further discussion on Schleiermacher’s understanding of the exact nature of the relation between internal and external descriptions, see Frei’s discussion on the essence of Christianity through borrowed propositions from ethics, philosophy of religion, and apologetics. Frei, “Introduction,” 12-14. Elsewhere he writes, “Christianity is a religion, a social organism. Its self-description marks it typically as a religion in a way similar to those descriptions given by sociologists of religion or cultural anthropologists.” Frei, “Theology, Philosophy, and Christian Self-Description,” in Types. 22. See also Frei, “Proposal for a Project,” in Types. 3. On Geertz’s understanding of culture as a semiotic system, see Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Books), 5-30.

Frei, “The Encounter of Jesus with the German Academy,” 135. Frei quotes Geertz, “As interworked systems of construable signs … culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviors, institutions or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly—that is,
Secondly, whether or not one undertakes mission studies as an internal, participatory process, it cannot be reduced to Christian self-description leading to a sectarian retreat precisely because of its citizenship in the academy. It must simultaneously maintain Christian self-description and academic inquiry that correlates between theology and Wissenschaft. There may be some truth to Frei saying that “despite qualifications and caveats, the problematic and the span of theological possibilities represented by Schleiermacher’s so-called mediating theology … are our concern.” And taking up mediating theology would mean doing constructive theology in an ad hoc, eclectic mode of bricolage that maintains theology as both Christian self-description and academic inquiry. As shown above, Schleiermacher opted for a position that is clearly related to the universe of thought and discourse under general rules of coherence, meaningfulness, and faith, but it is also a conceptual skill governed by practical aims in a specific context, such as the church. There is an attempt to follow both the general rules of intelligibility and the intelligent agent’s social aim. Just as he had eclectically organized the disciplines of the university, the relation between Wissenschaft and theology is understood as one of direct correlation rather than strict identification.

Thirdly, what exactly is the nature of the relation between mission studies in the academy and external institutional-cultural aims of the church and society that are practical and social in

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48 Frei observes different configurations, such as between two autonomous, distinctive discourses, or by recognizing the rightful status of one through the priority of the other, or even determining that the two are in principle absolutely different and there can be no real contact between them.” Frei, “Types of Academic Theology,” 118.

49 Frei, “Types of Academic Theology,” 120.

50 Frei, “Theology in the University,” 114.
character? Coming to terms with professionalization in mission studies would mean defining clearly the nature of the relation between the practical/professional character of Christian missions and its curriculum, faculty selection, and students’ employment in the public domain. Depending on the identity of the school, mission studies program may or may not be closely aligned with the practical/professional understanding of Christian missions nurturing its ties to the church, mission agencies, and non-profit organizations. In programs with such close institutional ties, the issue would, at least, be partially resolved by articulating how it trains its students as professionals in the modern sense to integrate theory and praxis in order that they acquire the requisite skills and competencies for carrying out practical work in mission related institutions. In such cases, it would do well to nurture those distinctive conceptual skills needed for the professional response to practical and social challenges in varying contexts. On that account, Schleiermacher’s proposal in the University of Berlin to include theology as a professional discipline training church personnel on institutional and cultural grounds, though not legal, is informative. This would mean paying close attention to the original *raison d’être* outside the academy by identifying essential institutional needs. Furthermore, it involves imparting and acquiring “the grammar, internal logic, or the first-level statements kept alive in the church” attuned to both the continuities and changes in its norms, patterns, and conventions, and providing second-level descriptive and critical appraisals of its first-level language and practices. And further still, it may also accompany the art of expressing Christian affections in kerygmatic, poetic, and rhetorical forms as well as demonstrating the skills of governance.

And lastly, one of the critical implications of following a social scientific approach to mission studies is orienting one’s program to the socio-linguistic community called the church and especially the missional practices of ordinary Christians in the public sphere society.
Attention to the real, concrete world of ordinary Christians in the public world permeates Frei’s entire work, and toward the end of his career, he sought to do social history from pew-level of the masses of ordinary churchgoers. His turn toward ordinary lives of Christians can also be seen in his work with Marxist criticism to deepen the link between the subject and the socio-political realities of the public world. Frei wrote, “Marx understood far more clearly than Feuerbach that man (including his thinking) exists both as the moving, dialectical relation of individual and society and as the conjunction of culture with material nature.” This Marxist insight into the dialectical interplay between the character and social structures reinforced his understanding of the public character of religion in the realm of concrete history of ordinary people where Jesus identified with the poor, the undeserving, the spiritual and economic underclass.

In that light, the question “What’s in a name?” is perhaps best answered by another familiar question “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus answered the question using a parable that stirred the hearts and minds of the listeners about the other and the different. Likewise, we fire up our poetic imagination to experiment with mission studies titles and programs to bear the imprint of our neighbors, regardless of their race, class, and gender, whom we may not prize but they are God’s treasures.

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51 Mike Higton, *Christ, Providence and History: Hans W. Frei’s Public Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 185-186. Frei writes, “I would very much like to look at archives in two parishes so that I can get at least a feeling for the ways in which religion functioned in the lives of some ordinary people in the early eighteenth century.” Letter to Owen Chadwick (1981g).

52 Frei, “Feuerbach and Theology,” in *Theology and Narrative*, 250-256.

53 H. Richard Niebuhr writes, “The self we loved is not the self God loves, the neighbors we did not prize are his treasures, the truth we ignored is the truth he maintains, the justice which we sought because it was our own is not the justice that his love desires.” H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 99.
Diakonia and Mission: Charting the Ambiguity

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The paper seeks to chart out the nature of the ambiguity in the use of the term *diakonia* so that it can be carefully considered in the APM’s 2015 assessment of mission studies program titles. In German and Scandinavian countries there exist training programs of both a practical and academic nature for the study of religiously motivated social welfare work (*diakonie* in German). While not always described as mission training programs per se, to the extent that religiously motivated social welfare is part of God’s mission these programs warrant consideration by the APM. This paper provides an overview of the multi-layered meaning behind the Greek term *diakonia* which inspires these training programs.

Linguistic research published twenty-five years ago on *diakonia* by Roman Catholic biblical scholar John N. Collins has caused the term and – by extension – these training programs to become more contested and, for some, more ambiguous. The promise of Collins’s research efforts, however, have yet to be fully appreciated by missiologists.

Around the world individual local churches, denominations, seminaries, training institutes, and even governments struggle with the meaning of *diakonia* and its cognates (*diakonein, diakonos*, etc.). As a term translated as “ministry” in English Bibles, its relevance to our 2015 APM conference theme is obvious. In large part the ambiguity of *diakonia* is due to the usage of the term outside of its New Testament context, for example, as *diakonie* in the German language to express religiously motivated social work. The word’s assumed connotation of “lowly, humble, service” has influenced ecclesial discourse in ways which have not always been positive. I see this, for example, in my own denomination’s (the United Methodist Church) ubiquitous use of “servant leadership” language in its discussion of ministry. Our APM colleague Bill Burrows pointed out years ago the problem of reductionism in this move away from the rich spiritual depth of ministry (seen perhaps most poignantly in ordination rites) to ministry as mere ethical commitment to be humble and morally earnest. I see “servant leadership” rhetoric as engaging in such reductionism. Recent interpretations of *diakonia* in the

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New Testament by Roman Catholic scholar John N. Collins have made the matter even more complex as I illustrate below.

The field of missiology has struggled with diakonia in several ways, but perhaps most directly in our definitional concerns about how ministry and mission are interrelated. Is ministry (diakonia) a subset of activity done by specifically or generally commissioned persons on behalf of the community which, as a whole, participates in the broader missio Dei, or is mission a subset of activity – “mission in the dimension of difference” with ministry being just about everything individuals or the church does? I see John N. Collins and Paul Avis representing the “ministry-as-subset-of mission” view and Titus Presler representing the “mission-as-subset-of ministry” view. My own view probably comes closest to that expressed by Paul Avis. He simultaneously refers to mission as a broad concept and also a concept more limited to “cutting edge” activities. For Avis, “[m]ission is the whole Church bringing the whole Christ to the whole world. In this holistic concept of mission, mission is seen as the cutting edge of the total life of the Church.”

For missiologists what is at stake here is also related to the decades-long debate (now somewhat muted or taking a different shape in an ethos of anti-institutional attitudes) between the interrelationship of ecclesiology with missiology. In the 1960s this was simplistically expressed in the contrast between “God-church-world” and “God-world-church” framing of how the mission Dei ought best be understood. (The debate between Hoekendijk and McGavran on this does not need to be pointed out for this audience.) How one conceptualizes ministry (diakonia) as either a subset of mission

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3 Avis, 1.
or as the more encompassing term than mission reflexively influences and is influenced by one’s ecclesiology.

For this paper my intent is not to rehearse the missiological debates around so-called ecclesiocentrism and liberal expressions of the missio Dei of the early to mid-20th century (expressed, respectively, at Tambaram in 1938 and Uppsala in 1968) or even to wade into the debate about how mission and ministry ought best be defined. Rather, I want to focus on the ambiguity surrounding diakonia specifically. This debate is reasonably well known by theologians and church leaders in Europe and northern-European influenced denominations and federations; Lutheran World Federation and Porvoo Agreement denominations know this debate best.4 The debate around diakonia is almost entirely unknown by American evangelicals. Roman Catholics, United Methodists, and Anglicans have scholars who have addressed the matter extensively, but the extent to which their ideas have influenced others is difficult to tell.5

To be clear, my contribution in this paper is not particularly constructive but rather dialogical in nature. I believe the field of missiology has insights to contribute in this debate even though many people in our scholarly guild are not even familiar that a debate exists. I simply want to raise our awareness of the ambiguity surrounding diakonia and hopefully engage in conversation with people

who are trying to make sense of recent shifts in the meaning of *diakonia* (discussed below) and discuss whether and how the field of missiology can engage such training centers as the Diakoniewissenschaftliches Institut in Heidelberg or similar institutes which exist in other European countries (Norway, Czech Republic, Finland). (How these institutes affect mission work among the poor or disabled outside Europe is not entirely clear to me.) This issue is most programatically related to our conference theme; how we talk about *diakonia* makes a difference in whether and how missiologists build partnerships with denominations and training institutes that use the term *diakonia* as a constitutive dimension of God’s mission. I believe missiology has an especially important gift to offer these regions where the church seeks to be faithful in addressing its “asymmetrical burden” in the midst of European secularity. Understanding *diakonia* is integral to being faithful in that context.  

How we think about *diakonia* makes a difference in other context as well. It influences how we talk to Europeans about what they call *diakonia* and what American evangelicals (mostly) call “holistic ministry.” Our understanding of *diakonia* also influences the ministry of deacons in our churches, a ministry which Paul Avis describes as “at the same time the most problematic and the most promising of all the ministries of the Church.”

I look forward to hearing from conference participants about how you are navigating the terrain around the term *diakonia* in the contexts in which you serve. How are you experiencing – if at all – the ambiguity which surround this term in your own academic programs or denominations? (In my own institution we have just barely begun to grapple with this problem. Briefly discuss Palmer Theological Seminary “Open Seminary” program’s *theologia, koinonia, kerygma,... diakonia* structure.) Is this a

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6 The term “asymmetrical burden” with regard to the church in the midst of secularity was coined (I believe) by Jurgen Habermas and has been used by Robert Schreiter and many others. See Schreiter in *Mission after Christendom* text. **Full citation needed.**

7 Paul Avis, “Editorial: Wrestling with the Diaconate,” *Ecclesiology* 5(2009): 3. In this paper, when I refer to “the diaconate” in the United Methodist Church my intent is to be inclusive of deaconesses, home missioners and ordained (permanent) deacons in the UMC.
problem primarily for Lutheran and Lutheran-influenced groups? In my own denomination of the United Methodist Church I seem to be serving in a kind of mediating role between two different understandings of diakonia and have been trying to negotiate those differences for almost twenty years. As mostly a historian of mission the only explicitly theological articles I have written in the last 15 years have been focused on this question.\(^8\)

Conceptually, the ambiguity surrounding the meaning and practice of diakonia might be best characterized as an ellipse which – for the geometrically uninitiated – is defined as an elongated circle with two gravitational centers. The various sorts of discourse about diakonia could be seen as constituting the various orbital paths one could take in lesser or greater relationship with the two gravitational centers. The gravitational centers are the caritative and the emissarial dimensions of meaning for diakonia.

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\(^8\) This has been personally important to me as my calling as a permanent deacon in God’s church is a calling that resonates as deeply as my missionary vocation. Interestingly and somewhat self-critically, my reflections on the diaconate have not always informed my missiological thinking (and visa versa) as much as I think they could have or perhaps should have. My writing and teaching on the history of poverty alleviation efforts in the U.S. and internationally is, however, a direct expression of my diaconal vocation. Benjamin L. Hartley, "Deacons as Emissary-Servants: A Liturgical Theology," Quarterly Review, (1999); Benjamin L. Hartley, "An Empirical Look at the Ecumenical Diaconate in the United States," ed. North American Association for the Diaconate (Providence, RI: North American Association for the Diaconate, 2003); Hartley, "Connected and Sent Out: Implications of New Biblical Research for the United Methodist Diaconate."; Ben L. Hartley and Paul Van Buren, The Deacon: Ministry through Words of Faith and Acts of Love (Nashville: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 1999). I have most recently addressed these questions in a paper for the United Methodist Office of Deaconess and Home Missioner Conference on Lay Order held in Nashville, TN on September 26-28 2014. That paper was entitled “What’s in a Word: Diakonia and Deacons in the Bible and Today.”


Caritative

For most northern European Christians today the term *diakonia* mostly brings to mind the field of meaning which in German is called *diakonie* or religiously-motivated social welfare work – the caritative gravitational center in the figure above. The genesis for this understanding of *diakonia* mostly comes from biblical interpretation of the choosing of the seven in Acts 6 and the tendency of deacons (who were not known as such in Acts 6) by the fourth century to be associated – at least sometimes – with the imagery of the basin and towel.\(^9\) The understanding of deacons’ vocation to be focused on humble, loving service found expression in Luther’s and Calvin’s ecclesiology as well.\(^10\) In the nineteenth century the association between deacons and social welfare work was strengthened further by the work of Theodor Fliedner and Johann Wichern in their work among the poor which Wichern famously called the church’s “Inner Mission.”

A one-to-one correspondence developed between deacon’s work and loving, humble service such that biblical terms for ministry (*diakonia*, *diakonos*, etc.) similarly took on a strong caritative meaning in German and other European languages. During World War II the diaconal movement in Germany largely acquiesced to the demands of the Nazi party; diaconal workers were, by definition, humble servants after all. Friedrich von Bodelschwingh (1877-1946) was a noteworthy exception to this in his work to save the aged and mentally ill from being classified as “Lebensunwerteslebens” (life unworthy of life) and killed by the Hitler regime. (My own great-grandmother was so classified and

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\(^10\) Jeanine E. Olson, *One Ministry Many Roles: Deacons and Deaconesses through the Centuries* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1992), 99-118.
killed.)\(^{11}\) By the last few decades of the twentieth century a more or less subservient understanding of \textit{diakonia} in northern European languages began to be modified somewhat around the concept of “prophetic diakonia” and an understanding of diakonia that sought to infuse a stronger ecclesial dimension into the understanding and practice of diakonia.\(^ {12}\) Juergen Moltmann was one prominent theologian who engaged in theological reflection around the concept of diakonia in this period and sought to apply insights from liberation theology to it.\(^ {13}\)

Prominent centers of study around diakonia mostly understood in this caritative dimension have been established in a number of European countries. The Diakoniewissenschaftliches Institut in Heidelberg is perhaps one of the most long-standing and influential of these institutes. Some of these institutes have master’s level degree programs which acquaint students with the debate surrounding \textit{diakonia} but do not appear to be explicitly missiological in the scholarly resources which they utilize even if their program’s description seems to encapsulate much of what the APM encourages. The Norwegian Diakonhjemmet University College describes its master’s degree in Diakonia and Christian Social Practice as follows:

\begin{quote}
After completing the programme you will have...

Obtained the knowledge of the theory and practice of diakonia, as well as the professional competence required to function within congregations, institutions and organizations. This knowledge includes a basic understanding of Christian theology.
\end{quote}

\(^{11}\) The diaconal movement’s acquiescence in the face of the Nazi regime has been discussed by Professor Theodor Strohm who led the Diakoniewissenschaftliches Institut in Heidelberg from 1986 to 2000. See Theodor Strohm, \textit{Diakonie im ‘Dritten Reich’} (Heidelberg: Heidelberger Verlaganstalt, 1990).


Acquired an integrated and professional understanding of diaconal approaches and methods that express international and ecumenical awareness, interdisciplinary perspectives, perspectives of participation and gender awareness in relation to diaconal practice.

Gained competency in facing the major contemporary challenges within diaconal action related to the struggle for justice, stewardship of Creation, building inclusive fellowships, and expressing love for one’s neighbour.

Developed his/her competence in applying acquired knowledge related to understanding, methods and problem solving – in new and unfamiliar environments.\(^{14}\)

In this program description the term “missiological” or “missional” could readily be inserted in place of diaconal. It is worth considering why it is not.

\textit{Emissarial}

The renegotiating of the concept of \textit{diakonia} to be more liberative and prophetic in the 1980s was even more strongly called into question by the landmark linguistic study of \textit{diakonia} and its cognates in the New Testament by John N. Collins’s \textit{Diakonia: Reinterpreting the Ancient Sources} (OUP, 1990). In the twenty-five years since its publication it has prompted considerable re-evaluation of \textit{diakonia} by biblical scholars. To my knowledge no one has brought forth evidence which seriously counters the claims made by Collins in his 1990 publication. The differences between the older understanding of \textit{diakon}-words and the newer interpretation may be succinctly expressed by comparing the definitions of the term in Bauer’s Greek-English Lexicon in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} edition (sometimes denoted by the initials of its authors as BAGD, 1979) with the 3\textsuperscript{rd} edition (BDAG, 2000).

Comparison of Definitions of *diakoneo* in the New Testament in Bauer’s Greek-English lexicon\(^{15}\)

<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Wait on someone at table</td>
<td>1) To function as an intermediary, act as a go-between/agent, be at one’s service with intermediary function either expressed or implied.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Serve generally, of services of any kind</td>
<td>2) To perform obligations, without focus on intermediary function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Care for, take care of</td>
<td>3) To meet an immediate need, help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Help, support someone</td>
<td>4) To carry out official duties, minister. Rendering of specific assistance, aid, support (Acts 6:1); send someone something for support (Acts 11:29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Of the ecclesiastical office serve as deacon</td>
<td>5) Acts 6:2 poses a special problem: care for, take care of... “look after tables” can be understood of serving food at tables... but it is improbable that some widows would be deprived of food at a communal meal. The term <em>diakonia</em> (verse 1) more probably refers to administrative responsibility, one of whose aspects is concern for widows without specifying the kind of assistance that is allotted.</td>
</tr>
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There are three insights which are critical in this shift of *diakon-* word definitions in the New Testament.\(^{16}\) First, there has been a significant change in understanding these terms for ministry such that their field of meaning is increasingly focused on intermediary or emissarial relationships of persons and less on the caring, ethical, nature of the acts performed, such as in taking care of or helping someone.\(^{17}\) It is the relationship with and to the church that is critical to recover here not the officious status which may be associated with terms such as emissary or ambassador. Ministry is something that is given to someone by the church; calling something “my ministry” is thus, strictly speaking, an oxymoron.\(^{18}\) Ministry is something which the Church may give to an individual (whether lay or ordained) as a public expression of the Church’s mission in the world. Something could be designated a ministry through an informal public approval or through a service of ordination; the point is that the work is in some way accountable to the Church. For missiologists this understanding of ministry carries with it the long history of missionary orders which may be especially useful in infusing strength in what has sometimes become a rather anemic understanding of ministry.

Second, as already suggested, the revised definition of *diakon-* terms introduces a greater focus on the missionary meaning of the term such that *diakonos* (minister) is more closely related to *apostolos* (messenger) than our previous understanding of *diakon-*terms have tended to permit with its focus on

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\(^{17}\) I have only included the verb *diakoneo* in the table above but similar contrasts are evident in related terms *diakonos* and *diakonia*.

lowly, humble, service. Paula Gooder has underscored that the *diakon-* terms still maintain a sense of menial service in some New Testament passages. However, even when menial service is emphasized as part of a minister’s vocation it is still very much related to the minister’s emissarial relationship to an authority – and ultimately to Christ as his missionary. At a personal level, a more apostolic understanding of a minister’s vocation may further guard against an unhealthy victim complex whereby one perceives oneself as a burned-out servant of the people more than a sent emissary of God. I believe that the old understanding of *diakonia* and (for United Methodists) the attendant ubiquitous “servant leader” language in the *Book of Discipline* is especially vulnerable to such a distortion of ministry – especially if it is left ambiguous whose servant one is. Instead, what is emphasized in the revised understanding of *diakonia* – and, of course, elsewhere in the New Testament – is that one can be radically free to perform menial and self-sacrificial missionary service precisely because of the “high calling” and close emissarial relationship and friendship one may have as a *diakonos* or minister of Jesus.

In a similar way, the older definition of *diakonia* has contributed to wider problematic ecclesial self-understandings. The missionary impulse of the reign of God does not consist in a timid humility of a “let the world set the agenda” variety as the World Council of Churches proclaimed in 1968. In this appeal the WCC was motivated in part by a well-intentioned desire to correct the abuses of

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21 There are, of course, other problems with the ubiquitous “servant leadership” language introduced in the 1996 *Book of Discipline* which would require another paper to discuss more thoroughly. The weaknesses of the Church as Servant model and, by extension, “servant leadership” rhetoric have been discussed by theologians as well as leadership theorists. See, for example, Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, Expanded ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1987). 98-100; Mitch McCrimmon, "Why servant leadership is a bad idea," management-issues.com, http://www.management-issues.com/opinion/6015/why-servant-leadership-is-a-bad-idea/. Accessed on 19 July 2014.
ecclesiastical hubris. The diaconate was seen as a vehicle to accomplish this in the Church.\textsuperscript{22} Indeed, ecclesiastical hubris must be rejected, but in doing so one must not be dismissive of the Church.\textsuperscript{23} An embrace of a revised definition for \textit{diakon}- terms, while of course not refuting true Christian humility, may help the diaconate (and the Church as a whole) embrace the radical missionary values of God’s reign whereby the whole Church brings the whole Christ to the whole world.\textsuperscript{24} Deacons, deaconesses, and missioners cross boundaries with and for the Gospel; \textsuperscript{25} they do not follow an ambiguous or secular “world” which calls the shots for its lowly servants.\textsuperscript{26}

A third insight which may be garnered from this new definition of \textit{diakon}- terms is best framed in a negative way: Ministry is not synonymous with activities of Christian discipleship. There has been a

\textsuperscript{22} The early initiatives to restore the permanent diaconate in the Roman Catholic Church are expressions of this motive. Margret Morche tells the moving story of how ideas for a post-war church took shape in cell block 26 of the Dachau concentration camp. See Margret Morche, \textit{Zur Erneuerung des Ständigen Diakonats: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Arbeit des Internationalen Diakonatszentrums in seiner Verbindung zum Deutschen Caritasverband} (Freiburg im Breisgau: Lambertus Verlag, 1996). 28-29.


\textsuperscript{24} Of course, in a very important sense it is not the Church that brings Christ to places and people where he is totally absent. Nor is it the case that the Church is equated with God’s reign. The Church participates in God’s mission through Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. And yet Christians affirm that the Church is also far from being merely incidental in accomplishing God’s mission in the world.

\textsuperscript{25} I am exceedingly conscious of the fact that such language of “boundary crossing” is received by some persons as linguistic remnants of a colonialist enterprise. I disagree even though I also believe that much theological discourse about boundaries and mission needs to be reframed in light of insights gained from postcolonial theory and other sources. I have found David Bosch’s essay on the “vulnerability of mission” to be especially useful in my teaching in this regard. Bosch notes that “the activities of adherents of \textit{any} religion which holds that it has a message of universal validity will invoke images of paternalism. And since the Christian faith, as I have suggested, is intrinsically missionary, it will often \textit{be experienced as paternalistic} even where it is not. This is, if you wish, simply an “occupational hazard” of Christian missionaries.” David J. Bosch, ”The Vulnerability of Mission,” in \textit{New Directions in Mission and Evangelization 2: Theological Foundations}, ed. James A. Scherer and Stephen B. Bevans (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 83. Among United Methodists, Hendrik Pieterse provides a helpful discussion of the way our denomination uses theological language as a worldwide church. With regard to “boundaries,” for example, he argues they ought to be seen “as gift, not threat – as sites of fresh theological insight and spaces of transformative encounter with God in the neighbor.” Hendrik R. Pieterse, “A Worldwide United Methodist Church? Soundings toward a Connectional Theological Imagination” \textit{Methodist Review} 5 (2013), 17.

\textsuperscript{26} Paul’s description of himself and others as slaves (\textit{doulos}) of Christ highlights an honorific element alongside the menial in a similar way to the revised definition of \textit{diakon}- terms. Dale Martin, \textit{Slavery as Salvation: The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).
rather widespread ecumenical tendency since the 1950s to expand the meaning of ministry to the
service of all baptized believers.\textsuperscript{27} This resulted in nearly everything being identified as a ministry with
little left to be considered a matter of Christian discipleship. Loving one’s neighbor, caring for the poor,
and proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ are activities all Christians ought to do as a matter of their
discipleship and are not necessarily ministries \textit{– although they could be}. As Paul Avis argues, all baptized
Christians are potential ministers even if not all Christians are, by virtue of their baptism, ministers.\textsuperscript{28} As
ecclesially accountable leaders missionaries and others are called to encourage and support the serious
discipleship of others whether their activities are recognized by the Church (and therefore ministry) or
not.

I believe the new interpretive direction opened up by John N. Collins is rich with missiological
opportunity. This is perhaps most strikingly expressed in Collins’s paraphrased interpretation of the
choosing of the seven in Acts 6.

The Greek-speaking members of the community complained against those who spoke Aramaic
that their housebound widows were being overlooked in the great preaching (\textit{diakonia}) that was
going on day by day in the environs of the Temple. So the Twelve summoned the whole
complement of the disciples and said: ‘We cannot possibly break off our public proclamation
before the huge crowds in the Temple to carry out a ministry (\textit{diakonein}) in the households of
these Greek-speaking widows. Brothers, you will have to choose seven men from your own
ethnic group who are fully respected, empowered by the Spirit, and
equipped for the task. We
will then appoint them to the role that needs to be filled. That will mean that the Twelve can
get on with attending to worship in the Temple and to our apostolic ministry (\textit{diakonia}) of
proclaiming the Word there.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{27} For a helpful review of the ecumenical shift which took place with regard to the use of the term \textit{diakonia} see Collins, "Theology of Ministry in the Twentieth Century: Ongoing Problems or New Orientations." For an example of the expansive use of the term \textit{diakonia} see Klaus Poser, ed. \textit{Diakonia 2000: Called to be Neighbours, Official Report, WCC World Consultation Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service, Larnaca, 1986} (Geneva: WCC Publicsations, 1987).
\textsuperscript{28} Avis, \textit{A Ministry Shaped by Mission}: 52.
\textsuperscript{29} Collins, \textit{Deacons and the Church: Making Connections between Old and New}: 58.
Even though I think Collins’s interpretation of Act 6 and other passages hold a great deal of promise, it is also true that *diakonia* understood in this new way is vulnerable to being misunderstood. Collins’s interpretation of *diakonia* in no way calls for retrenchment to “take back” ministry from laypersons and give it exclusively to those who have been ordained. Accountability – a key dimension of a go-between’s or emissary’s calling – can take many different forms and can be informal or formal in nature.

**Conclusion**

Our current intellectual context with regard to the understanding and practice of *diakonia* (understood both as religiously motivated social work and as a Greek term in the New Testament for ministry) does not seem to be moving very quickly toward resolving the ambiguity of this word’s usage. We seem to be at different places on our ellipse trying to make sense of one another’s orbital paths as best we can. Whether this ambiguity will soon be resolved is impossible to predict. Until then, it is important for missiologists and especially professors of mission to at least be aware that there is ambiguity here so that institutional partnerships, ecumenical relationships, and even personal relationships might be initiated or strengthened and not side-tracked by misunderstanding. It would be a tragically ironic thing indeed for ministry to be stymied because of confusion over *diakonia*. 