

## My way:

Bengt Ingmar Kilström invited me to collaborate on his book about Christian charitable work in the Nordic countries (B.I. Kilström: "Kyrka och diakoni I-II," 1987). Following that publication, I was tasked with researching perspectives on Christian charitable work from priests, diaconal workers, and some laypeople within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland (Ryökäs: "Diakonianäkemyksemme," 1990). The findings revealed three or four distinct understandings of the parish's work, known in German as "Diakonie."

Years later, I noted that Anders Bäckström had obtained almost identical results (spanning four categories) in Sweden (A. Bäckström et al.: "För att tjäna," 1994), prompting the question: why? I had the opportunity to delve deeper into the education of deaconesses and deacons in Finland (E. Ryökäs: "Oppiiko diakonian?," 2000). However, education alone did not clarify the reasons for these varied interpretations. Contrarily, students also struggled to grasp the concept of "Diakonie."

Seeking deeper understanding, I analyzed the dogmatic elements relevant to this discussion (E. Ryökäs: "Kokonaisdiakonia," 2006), identifying about 20 dogmatic topics, none of which elucidated the diversity of views.

Inspired by Sven-Erik Brodd, I turned to John N. Collins' "Diakonia. Re-interpreting ancient sources" (1990), which encouraged me to pose different questions. A critical text by Theodor Fliedner on the origins of "diakonie" in ancient texts led to a verification process, revealing that only a few citations were accurate (E. Ryökäs: "Zur Begründung der Diakonie bei Theodor Fliedner, Diakonische Einblicke," DWI, 2011). This exploration provided insights into the varied interpretations of diakonia.

Further testing my hypothesis through the analysis of additional sources confirmed a common tendency for authors to project their own views of diakonia onto ancient texts. I critiqued works by Paul Philippi (Diakonia - A Make-Believe Which Continues? [Diakonia. Journal for the Study of Christian Social Practice.](#)) and numerous 20th-century Finnish authors ([Aikaan sidottu diakonia-käsitys](#), 2019), noting a discrepancy between modern interpretations and ancient narratives. This led me to a thorough investigation of early Christian texts on deacons and diakonia: [Deacons and Diakonia in Early Christianity](#) and [Deacons and Diakonia in Late Antiquity](#).

