

Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.⁸⁴

Thomas' words of despair at the dying of the light contrast with the moving farewell of Norman Nicholson as he thinks of the times he has looked from his beloved Cumbrian coast at the sunset over the "Sea to the West."

Yet in that final stare when I
(Five times, perhaps, fifteen)
Creak protesting away-
The sea to the west,
The land darkening-
Let my eyes at the last be blinded
Not by the dark
But by dazzle.⁸⁵

By God's grace, I sometimes have caught a glimpse of "the many-splendoured thing" in the words and images of the poets, and my eyes were dazzled for a moment. Someday I shall see that greater light, a light that shall never fade, a light of which all our glimpses of glory are faint reflections, the light of the New Jerusalem, a city that has "no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb" (Rev. 21:23). In that light the problem of pain will disappear and sickness and suffering will be no more "for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4). The words of the poets will take physical shape and faith will become sight and what we love will never vanish. "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen" (Rev. 22:21).

DEACONS, DEACONESSES, AND DENOMINATIONAL DISCUSSIONS: ROMANS 16:1 AS A TEST CASE

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One need not be a prophet to discern that discussion of women's service in diaconal roles, and perhaps even their ordination to the office of deacon, will be a prominent feature of our denominational life together for some time to come. While this discussion will raise many questions about the nature of the office of deacon, the nature of ordination and church office, and the nature of authority and its proper exercise in the body of Christ, it is also likely to involve many assumptions. So that our discussion can be as exegetically careful and mutually beneficial as possible, this article seeks to shed light on several key assumptions by examining as a test case Paul's reference to Phoebe as a *οὐκὸνομος* of the church at Cenchrea (Romans 16:1).

Before proceeding, a few caveats are in order. First, this article is not targeted at any group or position in particular. For instance, rather than "aiming" at those who favor the ordination of women as deacons or at those who oppose it, the article will address tendencies that appear across our entire interpretive tradition, in the hopes of improving the way in which our denomination *as a whole* discusses such issues. Second, this article focuses primarily on lexical factors—that is, on what can be observed about and inferred from the use of *οὐκὸνομος* and related terms in Greek literature. Insights from church history and systematic theology (especially ecclesiology) are certainly relevant to our discussions about the office of deacon, but are beyond the scope of this article. Finally, lest the lexical arguments summarized below be misunderstood as special pleading, it is worth noting that they originated neither from an interest in reforming our understanding of the diaconate nor from a desire to debate the propriety of women's service as deacons. Rather, the lexical investigation summarized below was part of a larger study of what it

⁸⁴ Dylan Thomas, "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night," in *The Oxford Book of Twentieth-Century English Verse* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1973), 474.

⁸⁵ Norman Nicholson, "Sea to the West," in *Collected Poems*, 339. The closing lines of the poem are now on Nicholson's west-facing tombstone in the churchyard at Millom, the English Lake District town, where he had lived in the same small house for the whole of his seventy-three years.

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means to follow Jesus' pattern of servant-like self-humiliation!¹ Yet the results of that study have implications for other issues, implications that may be of benefit to our church as we discuss deacons, deaconesses, and related topics in days to come.

WAS PHOEBEA DEACON(ESS)?

Romans 16:1, with its reference to Phoebe as a *diakonos*, is certain to attract much attention in discussions regarding women's service in diaconal roles. This reference has typically been interpreted in one of four ways. Some see Phoebe as a "servant"² of the church, a layperson who carries out unspecified tasks for the good of the local body. Others argue-or, with increasing frequency, simply assert³-that she is a "deacon" (some use the term "deaconess"), an officer of the church whose role is identical to that of the "deacons" mentioned in other Pauline texts.⁴ Still others have argued that Phoebe is a "deaconess,"

¹ The starting point for the study was Luke 22:27, which twice employs the verb *diakoneo*: "For who is greater, the one reclining [at the table] or the one who is serving? Is it not the one who reclines? Yet I am among you like the one who serves" (emphasis added; unless otherwise indicated, all translations are the author's). Because the verb plays such a prominent role in this and other sayings of Jesus, an extensive lexical study was undertaken. See Clarence D. Agan III, "Like the One who Serves: Jesus, Servant-Likeness, and Self-Humiliation in the Gospel of Luke," Ph.D. dissertation (unpublished), University of Aberdeen, 1999.

² So Lawrence R. Farley, *The Epistle to the Romans: A Gospel for All*, The Orthodox Bible Study Companion Series (Ben Lomond, CA: Conciliar Press, 2002), 202; Leander E. Keck, *Romans*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 369; John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 226. William J. Dumbrell, *Romans: A New Covenant Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005), 141, takes the same view but prefers the term "helper." James M. Boice, *Romans, Volume 4: The New Humanity (Romans 12-16)* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 1912-1913, appears to take a similar view, though he alternates between the language of "servant" and "deaconess."

³ See, e.g., Charles H. Talbert, *Romans*, Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2002), 333; Ben Witherington III and Darlene Hyatt, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2004), 382; Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Romans* (2 vols.; London: SPCK, and Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 2:130, 134.

⁴ So Daniel C. Arichea, Jr., "Who Was Phoebe? Translating *diakonos* in Romans 16:1" (*Bible Translator* 39 [1988], 401-409), 409; Wendy Cotter, "Women's Authority Roles in Paul's Churches: Countercultural or Conventional?" (*Novum Testamentum* 36 [1994], 350-372), 354; C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary (2 vols.; Edinburgh: Clark, 1975-1979), 2:781; J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans*, Word Biblical Commentary 38A, 38B (2 vols.; Dallas: Word, 1988), 2:887 (with the

perhaps an officer of the church, but with duties more limited than those of male deacons.⁵ Finally, a small but growing minority, recognizing that Paul often uses the term *diakonos* with reference to his role as a preacher of the gospel, sees Phoebe as a "minister," perhaps even the *paroklos* of the church at Cenchrea.⁶ It is not difficult to see that one's views on gender, authority, and church office are likely to complicate discussions of the text. To avoid further muddying of these already murky waters, my plea is that we avoid certain key assumptions in discussing Phoebe's role in the church at Cenchrea, and the implications it may have for the church today.

First, it is obvious that we must avoid assuming what is meant by the term(s) a person uses to describe a woman who engages in activities

(caveat that church offices were not well-defined by this point in church history); Ernst Kasemann, *Commentary on Romans*, tr. and ed. G.W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 411; Otto Michel, *Der Brief an die Römer*, Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament 4 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1977), 473; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 914; Grant R. Osborne, *Romans*, IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL, and Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 402; Peter Richardson, "From Apostles to Virgins: Romans 16 and the Roles of Women in the Early Church," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 2 (1986), 232-31; Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer*, Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 6 (3 vols.; Zurich and Dusseldorf: Benziger, and Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1978-1987), 3:131; and others cited in Caroline F. Whelan, "Arnica Pauli: The Role of Phoebe in the Early Church" (*Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 49 [1993], 67-85), 69n6.

⁵ So John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, Calvin's Commentaries, tr. Ross Mackenzie, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprinted 1989-1991), 320-21; Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 704. Whelan, "Arnica Pauli," 67n1, cites several scholars who hold this view, including Kazimierz Romaniuk, "Was Phoebe in Romans 16,1 a Deaconess?" (*Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 81 [1990], 132-34), 133, who suggests that Paul uses the title "deaconess" as "a pleasant exaggeration." Illustrating the confusion surrounding the term is the comment of Kenneth Boa and William Kruidenier, *Romans*, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Holman, 2000), 458, that Phoebe's "designation as a servant ... probably implies a position of responsibility ... , perhaps that of deaconess."

⁶ See John B. Cobb Jr., and David J. Lull, *Romans* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2005), 183-84; Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, "Missionaries, Apostles, Coworkers: Romans 16 and the Reconstruction of Women's Early Christian History" (*Word and World* 6 [1986], 420-33), 425t.; John E. Toews, *Romans*, Believers [sic] Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA, and Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press, 2004), 357; and Whelan, "Arnica Pauli."

that have come to be associated with the office of deacon. The term "deaconess" illustrates the difficulty: while some use it to designate a female who holds the office of deacon, others apply the same term to women who hold an office parallel to *but more restricted in scope than* that of male deacons. A third use, more common in the life of the church than in scholarship, employs the term "deaconess" to refer to a woman who engages in diaconal activities, but is not herself an officer of the church. A similar breadth of use may be observed among those who prefer phrases such as "female deacon(s)" or "women deacons." In discussions of women and the diaconate, it is therefore key that we neither assume what others mean by "deaconess" or similar terms, nor assume that what we mean by those terms is clear to others. We cannot know whether we agree with someone who advocates "women's participation in diaconal roles" or "women's service as deacons" until we know what they mean by their terms. I would suggest, however, that since the word "deacon" has a technical place in the vocabulary of our denomination (and many others as well), it is not the clearest designation for a person who does not hold church office. Perhaps we can assist one another, as this article hopes to assist readers, by reserving the term "deacon" for church officers, regardless of who we believe might be biblically allowed to hold the office.

Second, and more importantly, it is imperative that we argue for, rather than assume, our interpretation of the word *oufikoVOr*; at Romans 16:1. It has been commonplace, for instance, to assume that since women cannot be church officers, Paul must intend us to understand that Phoebe is a "servant." Some who object to such an assumption respond—often without argument—by asserting that Phoebe is a "deacon" or, less frequently, a "minister." Thus the argument tends to develop around two poles: for instance, "Phoebe must be a deacon (or a minister), because she clearly isn't a mere servant"; or, "Phoebe must be a servant, because she clearly isn't a deacon (or a minister)." Either argument would be persuasive if the only categories for interpreting *oufikoVOr*; were "mere servant" and "technical title for church office." However, the lexical evidence—the evidence for how *OUXKOVOr*; and related terms were used in Greek when the New Testament was written, and in the New Testament itself—is less convenient.

This brings us to a third point: when discussing texts that employ *ou1Kovor*; and related terms, we must be willing to hear arguments for—and to formulate arguments against—a wider range of positions than we might have wished. The bulk of this article will therefore be devoted to considering lexical factors related to the interpretation of Romans 16:1.

OF SERVANTS AND SECRETARIES

Popular understanding of the office of deacon is grounded in lexical arguments, or arguments about the meaning of the word *OU1XOVOr*; and the reasons for its choice as a title for the office. An overview of the relevant biblical data explains why this is the case: with respect to the diaconate the New Testament gives us little else to go on. For instance, *OUXKOVOr*; and related terms are used in reference to church office only five times.⁷ The first of these is a passing reference to the "overseers and deacons" at Philippi (Phil. 1:1), and the other four (two instances of the noun *OUXKOVOr*; and two of the verb *OUXKOVW*) occur in Paul's discussion of the character requirements for elders and deacons in 1 Timothy 3:1-13. From the fact that elders and deacons are mentioned together, we may infer that the two offices were distinct yet compatible—but only the omission of "able to teach" from the requirements for deacons gives us a substantial clue to the functional difference between the offices. Acts 6 suggests how the offices may have been related in practice, yet even this text never refers to "deacons." Instead, it calls the daily distribution of food among widows a *ouXkovLa* (v. 1), and contrasts the Apostles' focus on the *ouWkovLa* of the word (v. 4) with "serving tables" (*blaKovlLv rpa7TE(aLr*, v. 2).⁸ Further complicating the interpretation of this text is the redemptive-historically unique setting of the events it describes; for example, just as there is not a one-to-one correspondence between Apostles and elders, there may not be such a correspondence between the Seven and deacons. Thus we search in vain for a detailed description of the duties of deacons, or for an explicit indication of why the term *OUXKOVOr*; was chosen as a title for the office. It is not surprising, then, that the church has turned to the use of *OUXKOVOr*; and cognates in other New Testament texts,⁹ and in related literature, to fill out the picture.

The lexical argument that has emerged as the consensus view may be summarized as follows: the basic meaning of *OUXKOVOr*; in secular Greek was "servant," one engaged in menial tasks, especially food service; the use of this and related terms by Jesus in the Gospels has invested them with new significance; and the Epistles have extended this new Christian usage to a wider range of activities in the life of the church. In light of the Gospels' use of the terms to refer to domestic and table attendance, and especially in light of certain key sayings by Jesus

⁷ This total excludes Rom. 16:1, which is a much-debated text.

⁸ A detailed discussion of this text is found in Agan, "Like the One who Serves," 139-49.

⁹ In addition to the eight examples mentioned above, the New Testament contains 81 instances of *OUXKOVOr* terminology: 22 in the Gospels, 7 in Acts, 46 in Paul's epistles, and 6 in the General Epistles.

(e.g., Mark 10:45),¹⁰ it has been assumed that *OUXKOVOr* was chosen as an ecclesiastical title because it suited well an office that involved practical deeds of service modelled on the servanthood of Jesus. Certainly we want to maintain that the self-sacrificial love of Jesus calls Christians, and especially church leaders, to care for those who are most needy and most likely to be neglected. And our world would be a place more honoring to our Savior if his words about servanthood were more constantly ringing in our ears. However, recent studies suggest that the consensus view outlined above may not be exegetically sound, arguing instead 1) that "servant" is only one of several meanings of the word *OUXKOVOr*, and cannot be said to represent its "basic meaning"; and 2) that New Testament usage of this and related terms seems not to radically reorient them but to take full advantage of their associations in secular Greek.¹¹

An English analogy may be helpful. Consider the word "secretary." Most modern English speakers never stop to think about the link between this word and the word "secret." To argue that the key qualification for a position such as Secretary of State or Secretary of Defense is one's ability to keep a secret would be absurd—many people who have never violated a confidence are utterly unqualified for these positions! Similarly, most English speakers are able to distinguish four major uses of the word: in some contexts it designates a piece of furniture used for writing; in others, an administrative assistant who handles routine clerical or business duties; in others, an official (usually elected) who handles correspondence and record-keeping for an organization; and in others, a mid- to high-level government official who directs activities in a specified area. While there are clear links among these uses, the different contexts in which they occur (known as "semantic domains" or fields of meaning) are so distinct that we rarely

¹⁰The Gospel text which seems to have most influenced the consensus understanding of the kinds of activities involved in *ααKovLa* is Matt. 25:44, where the verb *OLIXKOVEW* is used as shorthand for providing food and drink to the hungry and thirsty, extending hospitality to strangers, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, and visiting those in prison (see vv. 35-36). Ironically, however, within Jesus' parable the word is used not by the returning King, but by the wicked upon whom he pronounces judgment. It is therefore an oversimplification to suggest that this use of the verb reveals Jesus' understanding of "service."

¹¹ See, e.g., Sverre Aalen, "Versuch einer Analyse des Diakonia-Begriffes im neuen Testament," in *The New Testament Age, Volume 1*, ed. W. C. Weinrich, FS for Bo Reicke (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1984), 1-13; Agan, "'Like the One who Serves';" William Baird, "Letters of Recommendation: A Study of II Cor 3:1-3," *JBL* 80 (1961), 166-172; J. N. Collins, *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); and Dieter Georgi, *The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986).

have to clarify which use is in view: we don't usually confuse furniture with government officials, nor do we assume that a "Student Council Secretary" does the same kinds of things as a "church secretary." Even the fact that one use of the word is more common in daily discourse—the second, referring to an administrative assistant or clerical worker—doesn't keep us from recognizing when context requires a different sense.

WAITERS, SERVANTS, MESSENGERS, AND AGENTS

Similarly, both the New Testament and secular Greek sources evince several distinct uses of *OUI:KOVOr* and related terms across a variety of semantic domains.¹² In some instances, as the consensus view would suggest, the terms denote the preparation and service of food or drink, including related activities such as washing dishes, preparing lamps, mixing wine, and preparing libations. Thus Josephus can paraphrase the Septuagintal expression (part of Jonadab's advice to Amnon in 2 Samuel 13:5), "let her feed me and make bread in my sight," with the more efficient "serving him" (*auT4/OLaKOVt/OOμfvrw*).¹³ This use is clearly in view in such New Testament references as Matthew 22:13 (where the king in a parable addresses the "servants" at a wedding banquet); Luke 17:8 (where a master commands his slave to "serve" him while he eats and drinks); and Luke 22:27 (where Jesus contrasts the one who reclines at table with "the one who serves"),¹⁴

In other instances, however, a key semantic component—namely, the association with food or drink—is absent, and the terms embrace a wide variety of domestic activities, ranging from personal attendance on the bodily needs of a master to the routine discharge of household duties. For example, when Josephus has Balaam's ass complain for being beaten despite faithful performance of her past "duties" (*oLaKovi.aL*),¹⁵ he is not implying that the ass has waited on Balaam's table, but portraying the animal as a domestic slave. The terms are used similarly when Aristides refers to a *OLIXKOVOr*; whose duties include accompanying him as

¹² The following is adapted from Agan, "'Like the One who Serves,'" chapters 3 and 4.

¹³ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 7.165. The feminine participle refers to Tamar.

¹⁴ For other instances, see Matt. 4:11//Mark 1:13; Matt. 8:15//Mark 1:31//Luke 4:39; Matt. 27:55//Mark 15:41; Luke 8:3; 10:40; 12:37; John 2:5, 9; 12:2; Acts 6:1, 2. Note that many of these texts reflect the fact that table attendance was typically performed by slaves. We may compare Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses* 71.4, which recalls the familiarity of Homer's Odysseus with "such matters as cookery and wine-serving and all other departments of *oLIXKOVLa*," wherein "those of lower rank *OLIXKOVEL/aBaL* [in secular sources, the passive infinitive is often used with an active sense] nobles."

¹⁵ *Jewish Antiquities* 4.109.

he bathes,¹⁶ and when Strabo observes that the common people of Iberia are slaves of their king who "perform all the chores related to daily life [*JTavra oLaKovH/o8aL* Til: *JTPOr; TOV {3LOV}*]." ¹⁷ Texts like Mark 10:43-45 (and its parallel in Matthew 20:26-28) draw on this association of domestic attendance with the inferior status of slaves. Thus Jesus need not be describing himself as a table-waiter when he says he came "not to be served but to serve," since the verb *bLaKovEw* could connote the distance between "first" and "slave of all" even when food service was not in view. In Matthew 25:44, where the verb *oLaKovEw* is on the lips of the wicked within Jesus' parable, the implicit claim is that if they had ever seen Jesus in distress, they would have "attended" his every need like slaves in a royal household; the glorious Son of Man rejects the attempt at flattery, arguing that their treatment of his brothers reveals their true heart toward him. is

Our terms also function in the semantic domain of communication and delivery, where they designate the conveyance of a message (or, less frequently, an object) from one party, by a second, to a third. Thus Greek literature often employs *bLaKovOR;* as a synonym of words like "ambassador" (*JTpEo{3vr}*), "messenger" (*aYYEAOr;*), and "herald" (*KpypvO,19*). The verb is often used with a direct object to express the thing delivered, as in *Testament of Abraham* 9:3, where Abraham pleads with the archangel Michael to "deliver for me a message [*oLaKovijoaL μOL AOYOV*] to the Most High," or when Chariton informs us that a love-letter has fallen into the wrong hands through the negligence "of the one delivering the letter [*vw/bLaKovovμEVOV rTJV EJTLowArYV*]." ²⁰ Neither the syntax nor the context of such instances suggests that any metaphorical use of "servant" or "waiter" language is in view; rather, the terms are being used in a different sense altogether. This is confirmed by the frequent use of our terms to designate the delivery of messages from heaven to earth, as when the satirist Lucian has the newly-born Hermes, messenger of the gods, claim that he already desires *bLaKovH/o8aL-not* "to perform domestic duties" or "to wait tables," but "to serve as a courier" -for them.²¹ In fact, the New Testament epistles frequently employ *OUXKOVOR;*

¹⁶Aristides, *Sacred Tales* 1.9.

¹⁷Strabo, *Geography* 11.3.6.

¹⁸For further uses of the terms to designate domestic attendance, see Matt. 23:11//Mark 9:35; Luke 22:26; and John 12:26.

¹⁹Pollux, *Onomasticon* 8.137. See also Aristides, *Regarding Rome* 89; *A Letter to the Emperors Concerning Smyrna* 6; and *Funeral Address in Honor of Alexander* 10.

²⁰Chariton, *Chaerea and CaUirhoe* 8.8.5.

²¹Lucian, *Diaologi deorum* 11.3. Compare Plutarch, *De defectu oraculorum* 416F (demigods *apE fpuTVEImKor;* ... *KallhaKovLKor;*); Josephus, *Bellum Judaicum* 4.626 (Gosephus is released by Vespasian because he is a *OLIXKOVOR* of the voice of God); and Origen, *Contra Celsum* 7.21.26 (since divine truth was revealed to Paul, he had no need "of a human being to convey the word to him [*aVepW1TOV*]

and its cognates to designate the delivery of messages, whether the communication of the gospel by divinely-commissioned spokesmen, or the completion of errands on behalf of ministry colleagues or even of larger groups of believers.²² Thus when Paul refers to the church at Corinth as a "letter of Christ delivered [*bLaKov118H/oa*] by us" (2 Cor. 3:3), he is claiming to have faithfully delivered the gospel message on behalf of its divine author. Likewise, when Paul says that he and Apollos are *oLaKovOL* "through whom" the Corinthians believed (1 Cor. 3:5), he is not employing a household metaphor to suggest that he is merely a humble servant; rather, he is claiming to be a messenger of the gospel-no more, and no less. Surely Paul was humble, and his life displayed much of the servant-like quality for which Jesus' metaphors and parables called. But, just as we readily distinguish among various uses of "secretary," Greek readers would have known that in these contexts Paul was speaking of communication and delivery.

Finally, *oLaKovOR;* and its cognates function in a fourth field of meaning we may describe in terms of agency and instrumentality. Like those surveyed above, this use involves the notion of intermediary activity: the "waiter" mediates between kitchen and table; the "servant" between a domestic need (or master's command) and its accomplishment; the "messenger" between a sender and a recipient perhaps even between heaven and earth. Yet in this final semanti-

bLaKOVovμfVOV avrc./ rov ..loyOV").

²²The 53 New Testament instances of our terms in this sense may be categorized as follows:

1) References to apostles as messengers or spokesmen who convey divine truth: Acts 1:17, 25; 6:4; 20:24; 21:19; Rom. 11:13; 1 Cor. 3:5; 2 Cor. 3:3, 6-9; 4:1 5:18; 6:3, 4; Eph. 3:7; Col. 1:23, 25; 1 Tim. 1:12.

2) References to others as messengers or spokesmen who convey divine truth: Rom. 12:7 (those so gifted); 15:8 (Christ); Eph. 4:12 (apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers); Heb. 1:14 (angels); 1 Peter 1:12 (OT prophets).

3) References to false apostles as Satanic messengers: 2 Cor. 11:15, 23.

4) References to Paul's associates as messengers of Christ: Col. 1:1 (Epaphras); 4:17 (Archippus); 1 Thes. 3:2 *v.l.* (Timothy); 1 Tim. 4:6 (Timothy); 1 Tim. 4:2 (Archippus), 5 (Timothy).

5) References to Paul's associates as those who serve as his representative spokesmen and/or undertake "missions" or "errands" on his behalf: Acts 19:2 (Timothy and Erastus); Eph. 6:21 (Tychicus); Col. 4:7 (Tychicus); 2 Tim. 1:1 (Onesiphorus); 4:11 (Mark); Phlm. 13 (Onesimus).

6) References to Paul's undertaking (with others) a "mission" or "errand" at Jerusalem as a representative of Gentile churches: Acts 11:29; 12:25; Rom. 15:2: 31; 2 Cor. 8:4, 19, 20; 9:1, 12, 13.

7) References to a person's undertaking a particular "mission" or "errand" as a representative of others: 1 Cor. 16:15 (Stephanus, representing "the saints" at Corinth, to Paul); 2 Cor. 11:8 (Paul, representing God, to Corinth). It will be argued below that the reference to Phoebe at Rom. 16:1 belongs to this category.

domain our terms are at their most abstract, designating simply the effecting of another's will by an agent (if personal) or instrument (if impersonal), without reference to food and drink, to household duties, or to messages or objects to be delivered. Josephus, for example, frequently uses the construction *OLaKOVEL/v KEAEvµan/8dfµan* to express the carrying out of a command or the effecting of a desire. Thus in his retelling of 2 Kings 1, he has Ahaziah's third and most amicable captain protest to Elijah that he has come "not of his own volition but *OLaKOVWV 1Tpoarayµan* for the king" -meaning not that he is "waiting on," "serving," or "delivering" a command, but carrying it out.²³ The captain pleads for mercy as a man who has authority, but is acting at the behest of another. Appian similarly refers to a certain Pyrrhus who, incensed at the desecration of a temple, executes all those who advised, assented to, or "carried out the deed [1] *OLaKOVTOOaµfVOVr; Iā fpYOV*."²⁴ Such uses of the terms often involve a figure who is in *but under* authority: kings are *OLaKovoL* of the will (*YVWµT*) of philosophers, who truly rule; the helmsman of a ship may rule over the sailors, but he is the *btaKovor;* of the passengers, who determine where the ship sails; and the public executioner is *btaKovor;* of the jurors who hand down a verdict.²⁵ This use of our terms is reflected in New Testament texts such as Romans 13:4, which portrays the civil authority as God's "agent," carrying out his purposes; Galatians 2:17, where Paul denies that Christ is an "agent" of sin (i.e., one who promotes its purposes or interests); and 1 Peter 4:10, which exhorts those who have received a spiritual gift to "put it into effect [*aura oLaKovov/vrEr;*]" for others.²⁶ That this use of *OUXKoVOr;* best accounts for its choice as a title for the office of "deacon" is suggested by three factors: first, the contextual markers associated with other uses of the term are not present in texts referring to "deacons;" second, there are no clear indicators in such texts that the term is being used metaphorically; third, the pairing of "deacons" and "elders" at Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3 suggests that the *oLaKoVOr;* was one who served in authority over a congregation but under the authority of elders/overseers. Confirming this conclusion are various statements by early Christian authors like Ignatius, who compares the relationship between overseer and "deacons" to that between God's will and his "command" -that which puts his will into effect.²⁷

²³ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 9.25.

²⁴ Appian, *Roman History* 3.12.2.

²⁵ Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses* 49.8; and Aristides, *To Plato in Defense of Oratory* 364 and 225, respectively.

²⁶ Also belonging to this category may be 1 Cor. 12:5; Heb. 6:10; and Rev. 2:19.

²⁷ Ignatius, *Epistle to the Trallians* 3:1.

The examples given above are few, but they hopefully suffice both to demonstrate that *btaKovor;* and its cognates functioned in multiple semantic domains in Greek literature, and to account for the variety of uses we see in the NT. The following table summarizes the results of a fuller study, a survey of 770 uses of the terms in secular, Jewish, and Christian sources from the sixth century Bc to the early third century AD. The middle column offers suggestions for how the terms should be translated within each semantic domain; the final column suggests the kinds of contextual clues that might indicate which domain is in view, and therefore which use of the terms is operative in a particular context.

<i>Domain/Use</i>	<i>Translations</i>	<i>Contextual Markers</i>
<i>Communication/ Delivery</i> the delivery of a message or object by one party to another, on behalf of a third	<i>OLUKOVEV</i> : to deliver a message; to intercede, act as a liaison; to deliver, act as a courier <i>OLaKOVta</i> : commission, mission, errand <i>OLi;KOVOC</i> : messenger, envoy, emissary, spokesman, courier	representation (i.e., speaking, or traveling to perform a task, on behalf of another); verbal exchange (frequently between heaven and earth); travel; transport
<i>Agency/ Instrumentality</i> the activity whereby an agent or instrument effects the will of another (typically a superior)	<i>OLaKovEw</i> : to effect, carry out; to act on behalf of, act in the name of <i>OLUKovtU</i> : a task; performance, execution (of a task) <i>OLi;KOVOC</i> : agent, instrument, means	contrast between acting of one's own accord and effecting the intentions of another; subordination of the agent/ instrument; authority/ability to carry out an appointed task
<i>Domestic Attendance</i> the performance of household duties (most often by slaves), ranging from personal attendance on a master to the routine performance of various chores	<i>OLUKOVEV</i> : to serve, attend, wait on, perform chores <i>OLUKovtU</i> : service, attendance, duty <i>OLIZKOVOC</i> : servant, attendant	reference to a household context; reference to particular tasks associated with the functioning of a household or attendance on a superior; reference to masters/slaves and associated concepts (e.g., the social inferiority of slaves, the luxury

		inherent in being served, or the contrast between slavery and freedom)
<i>Table Attendance</i> the handling, preparation, and/or distribution of food or drink	<i>IlLaKovEw:</i> to serve (food or drink), attend (at table), wait on (a diner); to supply (food or drink) <i>IlLaKOVta:</i> service, attendance; meal-service (as a whole) <i>OLIKOVOI:</i> servant, attendant, waiter	reference to food, drink, or activities and objects related to their handling; reference to meals or activities and objects related to their preparation; reference to a kitchen, table, or banquet setting; differentiation between servants and diners, typically accompanied by assumption of or reference to the inferior social status of the former

It is worth noting that the entries for our terms in the latest edition of the Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich *Lexicon*, while not always making careful distinctions among the four uses identified here, do reflect the existence of each.²⁸ Thus while it is not likely that the brief summary given here will convince every reader, it is evident that the conclusions represented above are beginning to be recognized in the wider world of New Testament scholarship.²⁹

²⁸Thus we encounter phrases such as "attention at meals," "engagement in preparation for a social event, such as a meal" (=Table Attendance); "delivery of a message," "delivery of an object," "embassy," "errand," "assignment," "courier," those "charged with [the] transmission" of *lithe* divine message" (=Communication/Delivery); "agent," and, designating "an administrative function, service as attendant, aide, or assistant" (=Agency/Instrumentality). Uses we have classified under Domestic Attendance are often included under generic headings such as "to perform obligations ... of unspecified services"; the reluctance to associate the terms with domestic service suggests an over-correction to the consensus view, apparently due to the work of J. N. Collins (*Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources* [New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990]), which our own seeks to balance. See William Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., rev. and ed. Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000), 229-31. Entries for our terms in the previous (1979) edition of the same lexicon employ only the categories of meal attendance, a broad sense of service/help, and service in the office of deacon.

²⁹While fuller discussion is beyond the scope of the present article, we may at least name two implications that follow for the office of deacon if the conclusions summarized above are correct. First, it seems that the ecclesiastical

PHOEBE AS "ENVOY" OF CENCHREA IN ROME

From this overview of *οὐκκωβορ* and related terms as used in Greek literature, we return to Romans 16:1. As observed earlier, contemporary discussion of this verse tends to revolve around two poles, depending on whether one views *οὐκκωβορ* here as a title for church office or as a designation for "servant." However, these are not our only options; as we have argued above, when Paul refers to Phoebe as a *οὐκκωβορ*, he could be employing the term in any of four senses:

1. *Table Attendance*: possibly in reference to a special role played by Phoebe in caring for those facing poverty, and therefore hunger; or, if metaphorical, in reference to the humble status associated with "waiters."
2. *Domestic Attendance*: possibly in reference to Phoebe's work in attending to the needs of the church or its members; or, if metaphorical, in reference to the humble status associated with "servants."
3. *Communication/Delivery*: possibly in reference to Phoebe's functioning as a spokesperson, messenger, or representative on behalf of the church.
4. *Agency/Instrumentality*: possibly in reference to Phoebe as an "agent" who carried out the will of or acted in the name of the church (or its elders), in which case Paul would most likely intend that she held the office of deacon.

Whatever we conclude, it is evident that we cannot simply assume that "deacon means deacon" or "servant means servant." Rather, we must ask which of the various meanings of the term *οὐκκωβορ* is in view *in this text*. This in turn requires that we pay careful attention to the presence or absence of the kinds of contextual markers indicated in the table above. To return to our earlier analogy, we know as English speakers not to say that "secretary means secretary," nor to assume that a given instance of the word "secretary" *must* mean "a piece of furniture used for writing" simply because the word *may* mean this. Rather, we base reasoned interpretive judgments on what we know of the word and its various

title *οὐκκωβορ* was chosen not because of its associations with the service rendered by domestic or table attendants, but because it well suited an arrangement in which "deacons" functioned as "agents" in authority over the congregation and *under* the authority of the elders, at whose behest they carried out a variety of tasks. Second, if deacons were such "agents," we should not speak of the office as one which was (or is) devoid of authority.

uses on the one hand, and of the context in which a particular instance occurs on the other.

My own consideration of lexical and contextual factors persuades me that Phoebe was neither a "servant" nor a "deacon" of the church at Cenchrea, but its "emissary," "envoy," or "spokesman." Contextual markers provide the primary evidence for this conclusion; for example, there is nothing in Romans 16:1 or its immediate context to suggest that Paul is using the language of Table or Domestic Attendance, whether figuratively or literally, or that he is discussing church office. What the text does indicate, through the exhortation to "receive her in the Lord, worthily of the saints" (Rom. 16:2), is that Phoebe will be traveling from Cenchrea to Rome. Since reference to travel frequently marks contexts in which *οὐκκovoρ*; designates Communication/Delivery, and since the contextual markers associated with other uses of the term are absent,³⁰ we must consider the possibility that Phoebe serves as a travelling representative of her home church when she journeys to Rome.³¹ While the text does not explicitly indicate the reason for her journey, it is possible that while in Rome, whether or not it is other business that takes her there, she represents the church(es) at Cenchrea/Corinth by urging the Roman church to support Paul's mission to Spain (Rom. 15:17-24, 28).³² In this case, she would be speaking not simply her private opinion, nor expressing her viewpoint as an individual supporter of Paul (the emphasis of 16:2), but communicating as a representative of her church as a whole. Perhaps she might represent her church in some other way (for example, in an exchange of greetings; see 16:3-16, esp. 16b), but it is difficult to imagine that a believer travelling from the place where Romans was written to the church it addressed would have nothing to say in favor of the main purpose of the letter. In terms of the contemporary church, we may compare this scenario to a female seminarian's urging a church in the U.S. to support the work of her home church in another country; to having a female member of a congregation speak as a representative of that congregation to another church's session; or to having a woman from one church encourage another

³⁰See the table above.

³¹So Collins, *Diakonia*, 224-25. The possibility that Phoebe is "sent on a mission on behalf of Paul or the Corinthian church" is acknowledged by Arichea, "Who Was Phoebe?", 408.

³²Similar is the view of Luke T. Johnson, *Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2001), 233, who sees Phoebe as "something like Paul's 'financial agent' in his negotiations with the Roman church" in preparation for the mission to Spain; see also Robert Jewett, "Paul, Phoebe, and the Spanish Mission," in *The Social World of Formative Christianity and Judaism*, ed. J. Neusner et al., *Festschrift for H. C. Kee* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 142-61).

church (or presbytery) to embrace a ministry that has begun to flourish in her own congregation.³³

Strongly in favor of this interpretation is the fact that Paul employs a related term in the same sense at Romans 15:25 and 31. In the former verse, Paul explains that he cannot immediately come through Rome because he is going "to Jerusalem *οὐκκovoρ* the saints;" in the latter, he asks the Romans to pray that his *&aKovLa* to Jerusalem might be pleasing to the saints." While these verses are often interpreted in terms of Paul's charitable act of "serving/service to" the Jerusalem church, New Testament scholarship is beginning to recognize that when Paul (or Luke, in Acts) refers to the delivery of a collection to the Jerusalem church on behalf of Gentile churches, he uses *OLaKovLa* to designate "a mission to deliver something for a delegating authority."³⁴ In other words, rather than metaphorically comparing a financial gift for fellow believers to an act of domestic or table attendance, Paul is drawing on the category of Communication/Delivery. The accuracy of this interpretation of Romans 15:25 and 31 may be confirmed by observing the presence and absence of relevant contextual markers (see column 3 of the table above), and by observing that at v. 31 a few manuscripts substitute for *OLaKovLa* the term *owpoφopLa*—the "bringing of gifts." While we need not deny that practical, love-motivated benefit to others is present at a *conceptual* level in these verses, it does not appear to be present at the *lexical* level, since in this context the term *&aKovLa* appears to have less to do with *what* is delivered (i.e., practical provision for a material need) or *why* (i.e., as an act of service, motivated by concern for others) than with *how* it is sent—namely, by means of authorized representatives travelling on a "mission."³⁵

If this interpretation of Romans 15:25 and 31 is accurate, it becomes even more likely that Paul wants readers to view Phoebe as an "envoy," "emissary," or "spokesman" at 16:1. Along with the contextual markers of travel (from Cenchrea to Rome) and third-party communication (to

³³I experienced this recently as a woman from one St. Louis area church encouraged a group from my own congregation to engage in ministry to children and adults with special needs. While she had no official designation as "spokesman" or "envoy," she often used first-person plural language ("we, us") to refer to her congregation's changing views of the importance of this ministry over time. The result was exactly what needed to happen: our church was exhorted not by a single, passionate individual, but by the attitudes and example of another congregation. This sister was functioning as a faithful *οὐκκovoρ*; (representative, spokesman, envoy) of her congregation to our own.

³⁴Collins, *Diakonia*, 218.

³⁵This is, in fact, how the NIV and NRSV translate *&aKovLa* at Acts 12:25. See also Barclay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on the Acts of the Apostles*, UBS Helps for Translators 12 (London: United Bible Societies, 1972), 241.

the church at Rome, from the church at Cenchrea, via Phoebe), the use of similar terminology (the verb *OWKOVEW* at 15:25, the noun *r5LaKOVLa* at v. 31) in the immediate context has prepared the reader to apply the category of Communication/Delivery when interpreting the term *OuxKoVOr;* at 16:1. There is little in Romans 16:1 to suggest that the reader should apply a different interpretive category here, and the use of the phrase "of the church" does not seem sufficiently strong by itself to warrant translating *OLIXKOVOr;* in a sense different than that employed in chapter 15.³⁶

While no one of these arguments is definitive, the cumulative evidence points toward Phoebe's being neither a "deacon" nor a "servant," but what we today might call a "representative." If this is the case, Romans 16:1 does not shed direct light on the question of women as deacons, though it does give us significant insight into women's involvement in contact between churches in the New Testament era.

CONCLUSION

Again, I do not anticipate that in so brief a space I will convince every reader to embrace the view of Romans 16:1 presented here, but I hope that I have at least demonstrated the need to avoid assumptions in the discussion of this text. It is neither safe to assume that Phoebe is a "deacon," nor that she is a "servant"; lexical evidence allows for more options, and a choice among the options must be argued rather than merely asserted. Along these lines, it should also be noted that my argument above is no definitive proof that women did not (or could not) serve as deacons. Even if his reference to Phoebe as a *OufKoVOr;* does not prove that Paul would have favored women's holding the office of deacon, it is possible to argue the point *on other grounds*. Thus it is not only inappropriate to assume a particular interpretation of Romans 16:1, it is also inappropriate to assume that a person's view of this verse indicates his or her position on the larger issue. Rather than assumption and the uncritical adoption of "litmus tests," our discussion of women and the diaconate-as should our discussion of any issue-must display clarity, charity, and patient persuasion.

³⁶ No other early Christian text uses the precise phrase "*OLIKOVO;* of the church," though Ignatius refers to "deacons of the church of God" (*Epistle to the Ephesians* 2:1), and to a deacon named Burrhus as "your deacon [lit., deacon of you]" (*Epistle to the Trallians* 2:3). The closest Pauline parallel is in Col. 24-25 ("... the church, of which I became *OUIKOVO;* . . ."), but here the word "church" does not refer to a local congregation, and the context explicitly refers to Paul's divine commission as a messenger of the gospel. It is also worth noting that Paul's tendency is to employ titles ("elder," "overseer," "deacon") to refer to officers or to groups of officers, but not to individual officers.

SHORT CONTRIBUTION

A LIBRARIAN'S COMMENTS ON COMMENTARIES:26 Revelation

James C. Pakala*

"The Apocalypse's success in hiding its own meaning has been at least partially compensated for by its ability to reveal so much about the character of its interpreters."1 Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, wrote in the third century that already prior to his time some had "rejected and altogether impugned the book" of Revelation, "declaring it to be unintelligible and illogical, and its title false," but he demurred:

For though I do not understand, yet I suspect that some deeper sense is enveloped in the words, and these I do not measure and judge by my private reason; but allowing more to faith, I have regarded them as too lofty to be comprehended by me, and those things which I do not understand, I do not reject, but I wonder the more that I cannot comprehend.²

More would do well to be as modest! In this article the aim is to present something of the historical sweep of commentary on Revelation and then, as usual, to list some of the best recent works.

Revelation may well have enjoyed initial distribution and recognition exceeding that of any other New Testament book.³ Although its title of "Apocalypse" signifies unveiling or revelation, it is

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¹ *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press, 1992), xii.

² Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 7.25 [I used the Loeb ed. and Collins (nLO below)].

³ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 21. See also Ned Bernard Stonehouse, *The Apocalypse in the Ancient Church* (Goes, Holland: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1929).