

Diakonia as Servanthood in the Synoptics

A. W. SWAMIDOSS*

Introduction

In the New Testament *diakonein* group words are used predominantly in two ways—with reference to waiting at table and of service done to someone else quite generally.¹ What is *diakonia*? *Diakonia*, service, is not simply to take care of the physical needs of a person only. Neither is it to take care of the spiritual needs only. In fact there is no dichotomy. Service is meant to cater to the total person (See Mt. 9 : 35-10 : 15 and 25 : 31-46). This comes out very clearly in the Nazareth Manifesto (Lk. 4 : 16-21) where Luke delineates the purpose of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. There is another side to this aspect of *diakonia* which we may term the nature or characteristics of *diakonia*. While involved in serving others how should one conceive of himself or to put it in other words what should be one's attitude to the whole concept of service? The aim of this paper is to find this out, i.e., the nature of *diakonia* as seen in the Synoptics. For the sake of convenience we can divide the topic into four divisions: *diakonia* as seen in the Person of Christ, Work of Christ, teachings of Christ, and the relationship between *diakoneō* and *douleuō*.

1. Diakonia as seen in the Person of Christ

One of the roles in which the Synoptics see Jesus is that of the servant of Yahweh. There are four passages in Isaiah which are usually called Servant Songs—Isaiah 42 : 1-4 ; 49 : 1-6 ; 50 : 4-9 ; and 52 : 13—53 : 12. In these four passages a figure known as the *ebed Yahweh* is seen as the one who brings consolation to Israel which is undergoing severe hardships in exile. The identity of this servant is not clearly spelled out in Isaiah itself.

* Dr. Swamidoss teaches at Union Biblical Seminary, Pune (formerly at Yavatmal).

¹ See H. W. Beyer, '*diakoneō*', *TDNT*, Vol. II, pp. 84f. and K. Hess 'Serve' in C. Brown (ed.), *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, (*NIDNTT*) Exeter : The Paternoster Press, 1975-78, Vol. III, pp. 546 f.

However, the servant's characteristics and functions are spelled out. Very obvious are two of these which O. Cullmann points out thus :

The most important essential characteristic of the *ebed Yahweh* in these texts is that his vicarious representation is accomplished in suffering. The *ebed* is the *suffering* Servant of God. Through suffering he takes the place of the many who should suffer instead of him. A second essential characteristic of the *ebed Yahweh* is that his representative work *re-establishes the covenant* which God had made with his people²

The aspect of vicarious suffering and re-establishment of the covenant, both in the Person of Jesus, are seen in the Synoptics as well as in other New Testament literature, (Mt. 8 : 17 ; Mk. 10 : 45 ; Lk. 22 : 37 and Mk. 14 : 24 ; Lk. 22 : 19f (longer reading)). F. F. Bruce divides the subject nicely :³

- (a) Jesus spoke of himself as the ' Son of Man.'
- (b) He spoke of the ' suffering ' Son of Man.
- (c) He spoke of the Son of Man's suffering as something which was ' written.'
- (d) He spoke of the Son of Man's suffering as a ' ransom for many.'

The controversy in this area of study is well-known—the authenticity of the sayings of Jesus. Whether Jesus himself was conscious of his suffering servant role or whether the early church has credited these to the Lord is the crux of the matter. O. Cullmann has analysed the relevant passages : Mark 2 : 18ff, the issue of fasting while the bridegroom is present, Luke 13 : 31ff, a prophet not perishing away from Jerusalem, Matthew 12 : 39ff, the sign of the prophet Jonah, Mark 8 : 31 ; 9 : 31 ; 10 : 33f ; the prediction of Passion, Mark 12 : 1ff, the parable of the evil tenants, Mark 14 : 8, the anointing at Bethany, Luke 22:37, where Isaiah 53 : 12 is quoted, Mark 14 : 24 ; Matthew 26 : 28 ; Luke 22 : 20, 1 Corinthians 11 : 24, the institution of the Lord's Supper, Mark 10 : 45, the ransom saying, and Mark 1 : 11 and parallels, the voice from heaven during the baptism of Jesus. He concludes that the concept ' Jesus the *ebed Yahweh* ' has its origin with Jesus himself and that it did not arise from the early Church though Jesus did not designate himself by the title. For Cullmann such an *ebed* consciousness came to Jesus most probably during the time of his baptism.⁴

² O. Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, London : SCM Press, 1959, p. 55.

³ F. F. Bruce, *This is That*, Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1968, p. 97.

⁴ Cullmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-82.

Fuller, who earlier recognised the influence of Isaiah 53 in the predictions of the Passion, is now of the opinion that Jesus did not understand himself as the atoning servant of the Lord in the line of Isaiah 53. In this he follows H. E. Todt and M. D. Hooker. He, however, sees in this an earlier Palestinian tradition.⁵

These are two examples to show how the *ebed Yahweh* concept in the Synoptics is attributed to Jesus on the one hand and to a later but still very rapid development within the early Church on the other hand. Men like Goppelt⁶ and Jeremias⁷ have traced the concept directly to Jesus himself.⁸ For Bultmann all the predictions of Passion are *vaticinia ex eventu*.⁹

However, our main concern here was not to come to grips with the issue of whether Jesus was conscious of a servant of Yahweh role in his earthly ministry. We have not analysed this issue at all. We have only referred to the two different ways in which scholars interpret the vicarious suffering of Jesus. Nevertheless the passages cited in connection with Cullmann's analysis are important for our study. From these we can assume that the Synoptics show that *ebed Yahweh* is one of the roles of Jesus if we want to think in the category of the Person of Jesus. Most scholars on both sides would agree to this, though at times even this is questioned.¹⁰

Admittedly the Synoptics do not use *doulos* as a title for Jesus. Similarly *ebed Yahweh* is not directly used to describe the role of Jesus. The title which the Synoptics use most to describe Jesus is 'Son of Man'. But to the figure seen in Daniel 7:13 Jesus consciously adds the aspect of suffering and hence the common description 'suffering Son of Man'. Since the Servant of Yahweh

⁵ R. H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology*, London: Lutterworth Press, 1959, pp. 115-119. His earlier essay is *The Mission and Achievement of Jesus* (1954).

⁶ L. Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981, Vol. I, pp. 187-199.

⁷ J. Jeremias, 'polloi', *TDNT*, Vol. VI, pp. 543 ff.

⁸ In my judgement, Jesus was aware of his role as the suffering Son of Man in line with the *ebed Yahweh* concept of Isaiah 53. See also the discussion in R. P. Martin, *Mark, Evangelist and Theologian*, Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1972, pp. 179-205.

⁹ R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, London: SCM Press, 1952, Vol. I, p. 29.

¹⁰ See, however, H. Anderson, *The Gospel of Mark*, New Century Bible, London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott 1981, p. 257. He thinks that the influence of Isaiah 53 in the Synoptic tradition is very peripheral. Following Hooker he discards the role of suffering servant to Jesus altogether. He attributes the ransom-saying with the Maccabean martyrs giving their lives. Against this see Martin, *Mark*, V. Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark*, London: Macmillan, 1955; pp. 44 f, and W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew*, Anchor Bible, New York: Doubleday, 1971, pp. 242-247.

was also a suffering Servant and since the Son of Man was also the suffering one, there is an obvious connection. Whether it is Jesus or the Synoptics, the fact remains that the suffering role of the servant is shadowed in Jesus. That the servant role is attributed to Jesus is seen from Luke 4 : 18-21 also. Jesus read Isaiah 61 : 1, 2 and said that that scripture was fulfilled in him that day. In the original context in Isaiah 61 : 1, 2 the prophet is conscious of his new role of bringing consolation to Zion. The language is reminiscent of the Servant songs, in particular Isaiah 42 : 1-4 and 49 : 1-6. Several of the expressions and concepts found in 61 : 1ff derive from these two passages¹¹. It is reasonable to assume that Isaiah 61 : 1ff. refers also to the Servant of Yahweh figure¹². Luke 4 : 21 points out that 'the functions of this Old Testament figure are now fulfilled in Jesus who has been anointed with the Spirit for this purpose.'¹³ The idea that Jesus took the form of a servant in the process of Incarnation does not rest on slender ground. Later the same idea is picked up by Paul in Philippians (2 : 7).¹⁴

Now, what is the implication of this Servant motif in the incarnation of Jesus? Obviously there is the role of suffering. Also in becoming a Servant the Lord has taken a humble form for himself which is evident from the nature of his birth itself. The king of kings was not born as a king. In his earthly ministry he served humanity as a humble servant. During his controversy with the religious leaders he was never arrogant and during his trial he was very passive. Thus the *diakonia* of Jesus was dominated by the concept of servanthood. His whole life was for the redemption of mankind.

Servanthood comes out very clearly in one of the sayings of Jesus concerning himself : Luke 22 : 27—'I am among you as one who serves'¹⁵. The parallel passages are Matthew 20 : 20-28, Mark 10 : 35-45 and Luke 22 : 24-27. The Markan and Matthean passages are very similar, but the Lukan passage differs from them quite considerably. Luke does not mention the names of the sons of Zebedee and the parable in Luke 22 : 27 is not seen in Mark or Matthew. Many have seen that Mark and Luke are related and suggested that Luke has modified Mark. It is possible, yet Mark 10 : 45b is absent in Luke and Luke 22 : 27a is absent in Mark. Marshall is right in his observation : 'the Markan passage

¹¹ C. Westermann, *Isaiah* 40-66, London : SCM Press, 1969, p. 365.

¹² See Bruce, *This is That*, pp. 84 f. and I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, Exeter : The Paternoster Press, 1979, p. 183.

¹³ Marshall, *Ibid.*

¹⁴ In this Christological hymn (Phil. 2 : 5-11) many scholars see pre-Pauline material. So the concept that Jesus took the form of a servant is earlier and in all probability from Jesus himself.

¹⁵ Our main concern is not the authenticity of the saying, but the meaning.

is more Semitic in style than Luke's form, but Luke's setting at table is more likely to be original, and Mark 10 : 45 is better explained as a separate saying from Luke 22 : 27.¹⁶ Thus though 'I am among you as one who serves' is related to 'the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve' in meaning, most probably they were separate sayings. In the former the Person of Christ is seen and in the latter the function or the Work of Christ is seen.

Can Luke 22 : 27 be classified as one among the 'I am'—sayings with a predicate that appear in John, for example, 'I am the good shepherd' (Jn. 10 : 11)? R. E. Brown does not see any parallel for such sayings in John in the Synoptics.¹⁷ Perhaps he does not consider Luke 22 : 27 in this category because the construction of the sentence is not exactly parallel. In the Johannine sayings of this group the predicate follows the *egō eimi* and the predicate is a noun. In Luke 22 : 27 there is the adverb *hōs* used as a comparative particle and the predicate is a participial construction. If the saying was 'I am a servant in the midst of you' then it would be an exact parallel. However the *hōs* is needed in Luke 22 : 27 because of the parable just preceding and in meaning the participle construction has the same force as the corresponding noun. Thus Luke 22 : 27 can be considered as one belonging to the category of the Johannine 'I am'—sayings with the predicate. If we can take it in this sense then Jesus is in effect saying that he is a servant amidst the disciples. Thus, who is Jesus? He is a servant *par excell. nce.*

What is the meaning of *ho diakonōn* in this verse? To bring out the meaning the Lord uses a parable: one is sitting at the table and another is serving him. Jesus asks a question, 'which one of the two is greater' and answers with an affirmative question that it is the one who sits at the table. Then follows the 'I am'—saying which points out that he has taken the role of a servant. This, however, does not mean that he is less important. Rather, the Lord means that with him there is a reversal of roles which is spelt out in verse 26c—let the leader become as one who serves, again *ho diakonōn*. Usually kings exercise lordship over the people and such people who exhibit authority are called benefactors. But with the followers of Christ the leader should become the servant. Verse 26a, 'not so with you,' is a strong contrast to verse 25. Thus *ho diakonōn* means the opposite of kings exercising lordship and benefactors exercising authority. The person called Jesus is then a servant who actually was somebody unique, a thought very close to Philippians 2 : 6, 7, though the

¹⁶ Marshall, *op. cit.*, p. 811.

¹⁷ R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, London : Geoffrey Chapman, 1971, Vol. I, p. 538.

word in Philippians 2:7 is *doulos*. Once again the person of Jesus brings out that diakonia is servanthood.

2. Diakonia as seen in the Work of Christ

In this section let us look at the miracles of Jesus, his mission during his ministry and the work exhibited in the Cross. There is no doubt that the miracles of Jesus are works that describe his personality: 'The miracles said to have been performed by Jesus are also a factor of Christology.'¹⁸ For Conzelmann, it is from them more than anything else that the self-understanding of Jesus can be grasped. He writes, 'Jesus sees his actions as signs of the coming kingdom of God. It is from them and not from the Christological titles, that his understanding of himself can be grasped—above all from his expelling of demons.'¹⁹

The miracles of Jesus are usually grouped into three categories—healings which include raising from the dead, exorcisms, and nature miracles. Obviously these were done during different times in the ministry of our Lord and the evangelists have arranged them. Form Criticism holds that these were circulating in the early Church as independent units. Thus discussions often centre around the authenticity of the miracles stories. However, this is not our main concern.

What is the purpose of the miracles of Jesus? Or, why did Jesus perform miracles? The answer comes out very clearly in the pericope of the Beelzebul controversy (Mt. 12:25-30 and Lk. 11:17-23). When some Pharisees said that Jesus was driving out demons through Beelzebul, the prince of demons, Jesus strongly disagreed with them and rejected their accusations. He said that it was by the Spirit of God that he drove out demons and because of this, the kingdom of God has come upon them. Luke uses 'finger of God' instead of 'Spirit of God' (Lk. 11:20). Essentially this also means the power of God. Thus miracles point out that the kingdom of God has come. This is how Jesus interprets them. They were not simply acts of magic. 'The kingly and saving power of God has drawn near to the hearers and is there for them to grasp; and the proof that it is near to them is that its power has been evidenced in the lives of other people, namely in the exorcisms.'²⁰

Some scholars think that the miracle stories arose in the early church following the pattern of the hellenistic divine man, the

¹⁸ H. Conzelmann, *An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament*, London: SCM Press, 1969, p. 137.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Marshall, *Luke*, p. 476.

theios aner motif.²¹ However, the miracles are better interpreted as a recognition of Jesus as the Messiah. Exorcisms, in particular, point this out.²² Demons are portrayed as recognising Jesus as the Son of God (e.g. Mk. 3 : 11, 5 : 7). The gospel writers do not use miracles as a sign to prove the divinity of Jesus. When Pharisees asked for a sign Jesus refused to give one (Mk. 8 : 11-13 and parallels).²³

On one occasion John the Baptist sent word through his disciples to find out whether Jesus was the coming one. Jesus answered them :

Go and tell John what you hear and see : the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is he who takes no offence at me (Mt. 11 : 4-6 parallel in Lk. 7 : 22, 23).

A list of such miracles occurs in Isaiah 35 : 5-7 which shows what will happen when God will come (v. 4). Thus these acts of Jesus imply that in and through him God is visiting humanity. Also, for John's question the answer of Jesus in Matthew 11 : 6 (parallel, Lk. 7 : 23) is that an acceptance of himself is equivalent to seeing God at work in him. Thus Jesus implies a positive answer to John's question whether Jesus was the Messiah. Both these passages point out that the miracles of Jesus are a Christological factor. They are mighty works of God in Jesus and reveal that he is the Messiah and in and through him the kingdom of God is ushering into humanity.

How, if at all, is Jesus' concept of *diakonia* linked with his miracles? By his miracles people were literally helped. Many diseases were healed. Particularly noticeable in the Markan summary in 2 : 32-34 are the words, 'all those who were sick', 'the whole city', 'many who were sick with various diseases', and 'cast out many demons' (see also Mt. 4 : 23-25). He never rejected anyone.²⁴ He also exhibited compassion. This is particularly noticeable in the feeding of the multitude (Mk. 6 : 34 ;

²¹ For example, see H. D. Betz, 'Jesus as Divine Man' in E. C. Colwell *Festschrift, Jesus and the Historian*, Philadelphia : 1968, pp. 114-33. See also P. J. Achtemeier, 'Toward the isolation of pre-Markan miracle catenae', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 89 (1970), pp. 265-91 in which the author sees that miracles of Jesus in their pre-Markan form function as proof of the divine nature of Jesus.

²² R. P. Martin, *Mark*, pp. 136-38.

²³ R. E. Brown writes, 'the miracle was not primarily an external guarantee of the coming of the kingdom ; it was one of the means by which the kingdom came' (*New Testament Essays*, p. 171).

²⁴ The story of the Syrochenean woman is not a denial of Jesus. It only indicates that during the earthly ministry of Jesus priority was given to Jews.

8 : 2). It is the concern for the hunger of the people that made him feed the crowd. Thus the miracles exhibit the *diakonia* of Jesus. We may put the whole thing thus : Miracles—the 'why' of it is Christology and the 'how' of it is *diakonia*. But is this *diakonia* in any way servanthood? The concept of servanthood does not come out directly through the miracles. However, it must be stated that Jesus never performed miracles in order to lord over the people. It was always to help the helpless.

Matthew 9 : 36, 'when he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd,' is paralleled in Mark 6 : 34 except for 'because they were harassed and helpless.' Matthew places this saying in the context of the mission of the Twelve and Mark places this in the context of the feeding of the five thousand. With a deep concern he feeds the crowd and similarly with deep concern he sends out the Twelve for the preaching ministry. Concern and compassion are the motivating factors for his *diakonia*, meeting the physical as well as the spiritual need of the people. The Greek word for compassion, *splagnizomai*, 'is only used of Jesus, apart from three occasions on which it occurs on his lips with reference to figures in parables that have a close connection with himself (Mt. 18 : 27 ; Lk. 10 : 33, 15 : 20). It denotes not a mere sentiment, but a pity which expresses itself in active assistance.'²⁵ The compassion of Jesus is magnified by the contrast shown in the helplessness of the people. The word for 'harassed' in Matthew 9 : 36 can mean, 'being flayed, being concerned, vexed, bewildered, despondent.'²⁶ Similarly, the word for 'helpless' literally means 'being thrown down on the ground.' 'Sheep without a shepherd' has as Old Testament background and describes despair.²⁷ One thing comes out very sharply : Jesus felt for the people. Dire need moved him to action. The compassion of Jesus is a pointer to the fact that his *diakonia* was unique.

We cannot leave this section without touching on the Work of Christ on the Cross. Earlier in the first part of the paper we have referred to Jesus being the suffering Son of Man and the Servant of Yahweh while discussing the Person of Jesus. Suffice it to mention here the love of Christ that is seen in the Cross. Jesus was arrested and he never reacted violently. During his trial he was beaten and insulted by the soldiers. The high priest was arrogant towards him. Yet he was humble, polite and his answers were minimal and to the point. What does the Cross point out ?

²⁵ C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel according to St. Mark*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1959, p. 216.

²⁶ Albright and Mann, *Matthew*, p. 114.

²⁷ See I Kings 22 : 17 ; II Chronicles 18 : 16 ; Ezekiel 34 : 5.

It points out the selfless service of Christ and his love for humanity which are seen in the atoning sacrifice of himself. The salvation of the entire human race hung on the Cross.

Jesus was never seeking greatness in his earthly ministry. His way is the way of the Cross. He ushered in the kingdom of God. His exorcisms were pointers to this fact. He had compassion for the depressed and the downtrodden of society and healed the sick and the sinful. The Pharisees questioned him for healing on the Sabbath, for violating the traditions. They could not understand his heart and his feelings for the needy. He dined with sinners and tax collectors and this too was disliked by them. The Pharisees thought that Jesus was violating the law and the Sadducees thought that he was disturbing the *status quo*. In all these things his function was that of a servant. When the sons of Zebedee aspired for the places next to Jesus in the future kingdom, Jesus advised the Twelve concerning greatness and said that 'the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.' An aspect of the work of Christ comes out very clearly: Jesus came into the world to serve and not to be served by others. Thus in all the activities of Jesus *diakonia*, service in contrast to being served, comes to the foreground. *Diakonia* becomes servanthood because of the contrast.

3. *Diakonia* as seen in the Teachings of Christ

What does Jesus teach about *diakonia*? The teaching comes foremost in the pericope of the sons of Zebedee and greatness (Mk. 10 : 35-45, Lk. 22 : 24-27 and Mt. 20 : 20-28) which has been touched upon in the earlier two sections of our paper.

The prediction of his passion by Jesus is systematically presented by Mark. Jesus was travelling from the north towards Jerusalem and he foretells the ensuing Passion at three different places, at Caesarea Philippi (8 : 31-33), while passing through Galilee (9 : 30-32) and on the road going up to Jerusalem (10 : 32-34). Immediately following these predictions Mark gives important teachings of Jesus which are either misunderstood by the disciples or not understood by them at all, on discipleship on the first occasion and on greatness/servanthood on the next two occasions. Unavoidably there is a link between the Passion and these concepts in the thoughts of Jesus. If we credit only Mark for the arrangement of the material, the link exists at least as far as the evangelist is concerned. Like the master, the follower must pay a price to be a disciple and exhibit greatness through suffering and servanthood, since true greatness lies in being a servant/slave of all.

The sons of Zebedee ask for positions next to Jesus in the coming kingdom. After some initial comments the Lord cites

the practice among the Gentiles, where greatness is ascribed to the one in authority. Jesus says that it should not be like that among his followers. He tells them, 'Whoever would be great among you must be your servant and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all' (Mk. 10 : 43, 44 parallels in Mt. 20 : 26, 27 and Lk. 22 : 26). Matthew and Mark are almost similar. Luke has 'let the greatest among you become as the youngest and the leader as one who serves.' *Diakoneō* in the participle form is used in Luke but Mark has used *diakonos* in verse 43 and *doulos* in verse 44. In the place of Mark's *diakonos* there is *ho neōteros* in Luke. Also, Mark refers to those who wish to be great while Luke speaks of those who are great.

Greatness should not be measured by worldly standards. This is made very plain : 'It should not be so among you.' (Mk. 10 : 43 ; Mt. 20 : 26 ; Lk. 20 : 26). In fact the opposite is true. Whoever wants to be great must be a *diakonos* and a *doulos*. Thus there is a reversal of the normal understandings of the concept. The one who wishes to be great or first must serve others and be a slave. We do not have to differentiate between 'whoever would be great' and 'whoever would be first' since the wording is simply Jewish parallelism.²⁸ This is a revolutionary thought. Greatness is conceived in terms of servanthood. The greater one wants to be, the more one should exhibit servanthood. More servanthood means more greatness and less servanthood means less greatness. Mathematically speaking servanthood and greatness are in direct proportion. *Diakonia* attains a new dimension here. It is not simply service but it instils in man the quality of greatness. Also, *diakonia* is nothing but servanthood. The followers of Jesus especially the disciples, those who are in ministry, do not boss others around since they are servants, i.e., their role is to serve.

Luke's wording (22 : 26), 'Let the greatest among you,' refers to those who are great. Perhaps later developments in the church in which there were leaders for the community has influenced Luke in the change of the wording.²⁹ If it is so, this phrase can mean the leaders of the community. Or this could mean 'whoever thinks that he is the greatest among you,' in which case the meaning is closer to the Markan version. If we take the phrase, 'let the greatest among you' in the absolute sense, we do not know which particular person Jesus has in mind especially in view of Luke 9 : 48 and parallels. For actual greatness is like the virtue humility. It disappears the moment one thinks that he is great (see also Mt. 23 : 11, 12). Most probably the second

²⁸ Anderson, *Mark*, p. 234.

²⁹ Marshall, *Luke*, p. 813.

interpretation is preferable. This will also be applicable to Mat. 23 : 11, 'he who is greatest among you.'

Neōteros, 'the youngest,' in Luke 22 : 26, is used in Acts 5 : 6 ; I Timothy 5 : 1 ; Titus 2 : 6 ; I Peter 5 : 5. It indicates a particular group in the church who, it seems, performed lowliest service.³⁰ Similarly the word used for leaders, *hēgeomai*, is used of church leaders also.³¹ The point is that whoever considers himself great should serve others like the youngest would do. Luke includes a brief parable (22 : 27) in which again the reversal of roles of the master and the servant comes to the fore.

The theme of greatness/servanthood, as we have pointed out earlier is a repeated theme in the Synoptics. Let us look at the other pericope in connection with the second prediction of the Passion in Mark (Mk. 9 : 33-37 ; Mt. 18 : 1-5 and Lk. 9 : 46-48). A discussion arose among the disciples concerning who was the greatest. Jesus then told them, 'If any one would be first he must be last of all and servant of all.' The word for servant here is *diakonos*. This saying is very similar to Mark 10 : 43,44. It has another qualification added to it, 'last of all.' The word 'first,' here may mean an ambition to be the first in everything. Jesus means that he who wants to be the first must be the last. Again a reversal of the common concepts of first and last is used to describe the theme of greatness/servanthood.

Jesus took a little child in his arms and told the disciples, 'whoever receives one such child in my name receives me ; and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me' (Mk. 9 : 37). The connection between greatness and receiving 'one such child' is not very obvious. Also there are certain other problems : (i) the Matthean parallel (18 : 4) has a different saying concerning the child, which includes two motifs—becoming like children entering into the kingdom of heaven and humble like the child greatest in the kingdom, of which the former motif is paralleled elsewhere in Mark and Luke (Mk. 10 : 15 and Lk. 18 : 17) ; (ii) the Lukan parallel has the Markan motif but the connection is made obvious by 'who is least of you all is the one who is great' (9 : 48) ; (iii) the Markan motif comes in a slightly different form³² in connection with the sending of the Twelve in Matthew (10 : 40) and the Seventy in Luke (10 : 16). These factors suggest that these sayings probably existed independently and were put to-

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ See F. Büchsel, '*hēgeomai*', *TDNT*, Vol. II, pp. 907 f.

³² 'He who receives *you* receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me (Matt. 10 : 40)' and 'he who hears *you* hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me (Lk. 10 : 16).'

gether either by the evangelists or by their communities. Mark is directly dealing with rivalry among the disciples and the connection between the child and greatness is only implied. Luke avoids the embarrassing question, 'What were you discussing on the way?' and the comment by the evangelist which is a judgement upon the disciples (Mk. 33b, 34a) but at the end makes the connection explicit. Matthew, on the other hand, is concentrating 'on the question of rank in the kingdom'.³³

What does the Lord mean by the object lesson of the child? The aspect of the qualities of the child is not the main concern here in Mark and Luke.³⁴ It is 'the attitude of others toward him'³⁵ that matters. In view of Mark 9 : 41 'the child' could mean any lowly follower of Jesus. Also the phrase 'in my name' is a pointer towards that direction.³⁶ Even otherwise 'child' would mean the neglected and the despised group in ancient Palestine. So the connection of thought can be summarised along the following lines : Anybody who wishes to be great must be a servant and serve the lowly and the despised. Whoever serves such a group actually serves Jesus and whoever serves Jesus serves God. Thus true greatness lies in serving the downtrodden.

In the Lukan parallel (9 : 48) the evangelist includes 'for he who is least among you all is the one who is great.' Who is this 'least among you all?' I. H. Marshall thinks that this refers to the child and explaining the connection thus, 'the disciples should forget their desire for pre-eminence and be content' to serve the lowly (the child) who are truly great in the eyes of God.'³⁷ However, a better connection can be maintained: 'in serving the lowly you become the least in the eyes of men. But you are actually serving me and in turn God. Thus you are great.' Jesus is talking about greatness and an identification of the least with the child misses the whole point. The most important thing is that 'the clause is concerned not with *becoming* great by acting as a servant but with being great.'³⁸ Thus a new dimension in greatness/servanthood is seen. It is in serving the despised, that one is great. It is not achieving something but it is like being transformed.

There is another saying which is closer to this in meaning : 'Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles

³³ D. Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New Century Bible, London : Oliphants, 1972, p. 273.

³⁴ Matthew, however, has that concept in this context. This concept comes in different contexts in Mark and Luke. Compare Matthew 18 : 3, Mark 10 : 15 and Luke 18 : 17.

³⁵ Anderson, *Mark*, p. 234.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Marshall, *Luke*, p. 398.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

himself will be exalted' (Lk. 14 : 11 parallel in 18 : 14 and Mt. 23 : 12). The basic meaning of *hupsoō* is 'to exalt' i.e., 'to consider oneself better than others' (Arndt and Gingrich). This is closer to being great.³⁹ In effect this saying conveys the idea that humility is greatness. The moment some one considers himself great the virtue is lost. Matthew (18 : 4) directly links humility with greatness. Placing all these side by side we may say that true greatness is to be humble and to serve others.

In Mark 9 : 37 (parallel Lk. 9 : 48) there is another important point : 'Whoever receives the child receives me.' Jesus is identifying himself with the despised and the lowly. Whatever service done to them is done to Jesus. Such an identification is also seen between Jesus and his disciples as shown in Matthew 10 : 40 and Luke 10 : 16. This in fact is the secret of the transformation, the new dimension in the concept of greatness. In serving the despised and in serving the disciples, *diakonia* attains its highest form because it is equivalent to serving Christ. No one can say that he would serve Christ and yet neglect the service of the needy and the poor.

This thought comes out very strongly in Matthew 25 : 31-46. *Diakonia* is linked with eschatological judgement. This is a Matthean special section and the episode has been described graphically. There were people who in their earthly life ministered to the wants of the needy. They fed the hungry ; gave drink to the thirsty ; welcomed the strangers ; clothed the naked ; visited the sick ; and came to see the prisoners. In so doing they were actually serving the Son of Man. In fact they were unaware of this. There were others who did not involve themselves in such activities and they were judged for their lack in serving others while the first group was rewarded for their action.⁴⁰ Two lessons come out : service is rewarded and service done to fellowmen is service done to Christ.

A caution must be voiced at this point. Any attempt to meet the physical needs of humanity alone is one-sided. A proper balance of meeting the physical as well as the spiritual needs must be kept. When Martha complained to Jesus of overwork because of serving alone while Mary went off, Jesus' reply was in favour of Mary who actually spent her time listening to Jesus' teaching (Lk. 10 : 38-42). The words used in verse 40 are *diakonia* and *diakonein*.

³⁹ See G. Bertram, 'huphoō', *TDNT*, Vol. VIII, pp. 608 f.

⁴⁰ Some commentators tend to regard this as a parable (e.g. Albright and Mann, *Matthew*, pp. 306-10). However, the illustration of the shepherd separating the sheep from the goats is incidental to the main scene and it is better understood as the description of the last judgement and not as a parable (F. V. Filson, *Matthew*, London : A. & C. Black, 1960, p. 266).

There are other places in the teachings of Jesus which point out the concept of *diakonia* rather indirectly. Mark places teachings on discipleship next to the first prediction of Jesus in 8 : 34-38. Here again denying oneself to the point of losing his life is stressed as true discipleship. This is definitely linked with the concept of *diakonia* which is 'slave of all.'

In answering the question of the rich young ruler concerning his neighbour, Jesus tells him the 'Good Samaritan' story and points out that to go out of the way and help the suffering and the needy is the mark of a neighbour. Again service is the key note. In the Sermon on the Mount, loving the enemy and going the second mile are also extensions of the theme of servanthood.

Thus one of the key thoughts in the teachings of Jesus is *diakonia* and servanthood.

4. *Diakonia* as seen in the relationship between *diakoneō* and *douleō*

'The verb *diakonein* is used both in a narrow sense, with reference to waiting at table or attending to someone's bodily needs, and also in a broad sense, of service rendered to another person quite generally, while the cognates *diakonia* and *diakonos* are used to denote, respectively, the action of *diakonein* and the person who performs it.'⁴¹

The basic meaning for *diakonein* is to serve, to wait on someone. This we can call the general meaning. In this sense the word-group is used in Mark 1 : 31, Peter's mother-in-law serving Jesus, Luke 10 : 40, Martha serving Jesus. Then the word is used with theological depth in Mark 10 : 45, 9 : 35, Luke 22 : 27, etc. which we have seen already.⁴²

The meaning of *douleō* is 'to be subjected to serve' (Arndt and Gingrich). In this the element of obligation is seen. One who is a slave to the master does not have any freedom of his own. He does whatever the master wants him to do.⁴³ The New Testament has transformed the word by making people slaves of Christ.

The concepts of *diakoneō* and *douleō* are combined in the Synoptics primarily in Mark 9 : 35 and parallels. Thus an ana-

⁴¹ C. E. B. Cranfield, 'Diakonia in the New Testament', *Service in Christ* edited by J. I. McCord and T. H. L. Parker, (Grand Rapids : Eerdmans 1966), p. 37.

⁴² See H. W. Beyer, '*diakoneō*', *TDNT*, Vol. II, pp. 81-93 and K. Hess, 'serve', *NIDNTT*, Vol. III, pp. 544-49.

⁴³ See K. H. Rengstorf, '*doulos*', *TDNT*, Vol. II, pp. 261-80 and R. Tuente, 'slave', *NIDNTT*, Vol. III, pp. 592-98.

ysis of both words point out that true *diakonia* is servanthood
or slavery.

Conclusion

We may conclude the paper in one sentence : The Synoptics breathe the atmosphere of *diakonia* both in the Person and Work of Christ and in his teachings, and this *diakonia* is couched in the language of servanthood.