

Dealing with tensions in the Early Church-the example of Acts 6,1-7.

Ecclesiology has to include every aspect of the life of the church; thus it has to discuss also the way tension is dealt with in the church. Acts 6:1-7 can be studied from this perspective. This paper is based on the thesis of Martin Hengel that the Hellenists in the passage are Christians of Jewish origin whose main language was Greek. Acts 6 is not seen as a pointer to two separated – or even opposing – groups in early Christianity. Gerd Theissen's thesis is presented that the seven men in Acts 6 are elected as local leaders for the Jerusalem church. On the basis of these works and some further commentaries, five points are advanced that we can learn for our ecclesiology from the example of the first Christians: 1. Luke does not paint an ideal picture: he narrates that there were tensions in the early church. In this case, it was the growth of the early congregation that led to this tension: some people were neglected. 2. The early church wanted to care for one another, so when they failed to do so, they did not push aside this problem but they dealt with it in the fellowship of the congregation. 3. The Twelve played a leading role, but they gave freedom for the others as well. 4. There were three main elements of appointing ministers: the leaders should be led by the Spirit of God; other people should bear good testimony about them; wisdom is needed even in the matters of food distribution. 5. The problem of the widows was not solved on the surface level, but on a higher level: the structure of the congregation was clarified. To sum up, Acts 6,1-7 is not about enmity and contradiction in the early church; rather, it is a good example how to solve tensions.