

# THE HOMILETIC REVIEW

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## ◀ Editorial Comment ▶

MUCH hostile criticism has been printed concerning a recent address by Mr. Marshall. The point attacked is of sufficient importance to make it worth while to cite conclusive authorities upon the issue thus raised. Referring to the wide discontent at the unequal distribution of the advantages of the commonwealth between the very rich and the very poor, Mr. Marshall said that wealthy men talk of "both an inherent and a constitutional right to pass their property down from generation to generation." Hinting that this might not always be permitted by law as now, he said, "The right to inherit and the right to devise are neither inherent nor constitutional, but, on the contrary, they are simply privileges given by the State to its citizens." Saying that "nothing but a desire to arouse thoughtless rich men to a sense of their danger" induced him to suggest this, he counseled them to "hear what the people are saying about them, and not to dream that what has been forever will be." For this his critics have bitterly assailed him as "imprudent, if not reckless," and say that "sensible persons have been shocked by his foolish utterances." What have the highest authorities to say upon the issue thus joined? Professor Bowen, of Harvard, thus speaks for the science of political economy: "Nothing is more certain than that all inherited property is actually enjoyed by the gift of law and the consent of society; . . . its distribution . . . is regulated by considerations of expediency alone." Note that this was published in 1856, long before our present social problems reached their acute stage. In 1908 Professors Dewey of Columbia and Tufts of Chicago spoke thus for the science of ethics: "There is no absolute right to private property. . . . It has been estimated that a trust fund recently created for two grandchildren will exceed five billion dollars when handed over." Reference to the political as well as financial influence of such a sum leads them to remark: "Society will be obliged to ask how much power may safely be left to any individual." For our comment on the case, see Proverbs 15 : 2.

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ONE of the most mischievous forms of our religious inheritance from days when men held more naive conceptions of the human soul is the idea that young children may be "sinners," fully conscious of their violations of God's will, and therefore subject to all the conditions of repentance and conversion. This conception of the infant mind still crops out in various ways, both in the popular treatment of children religiously, and in theological discussions of the more orthodox circles. It may at once be granted that an occasional infant prodigy may be found in the order of religious consciousness, just as in the order of the musical or mathematical consciousness. But, just as in music

### Precocious Sin- Consciousness

## THE DEACONESS AS PASTOR'S ASSISTANT

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THE diaconate is properly a ministry of help to the congregation and its pastor. The deacon has always served as assistant to the presbyter. His most fruitful field of labor has been the parish. So far as his work is indispensable to the Church at the present day, it is that of a pastor's assistant. So also the modern deaconess finds in the parish her normal sphere of labor. It is as helper of the pastor that she most nearly fulfils the primitive ideals of her order.

The parochial type of deaconess was a natural development from the missionary type of the apostolic age. It remained the dominant type all through the period of organization; and even after the monastic movement had swept many deaconesses into the cloister, a large number continued to minister in parish churches, both in the East and in the West.

The ideals of the parish deaconess of the early Church are preserved in various forms; but in none so clearly as in the ancient *Didascalia*.

This church order belongs to the period when the parochial type of deaconess reached its highest development. It may well be taken as the standard of the parish deaconess of the modern Church. If she can but reach the ideals there set forth, she will speedily win recognition as an indispensable aid in the work of the pastorate.

The *Didascalia* (XVII) describes the deacon of either sex as "holding the place of Christ," and imitating him in his ministry of love; enduring all things; disdaining no work, not even that of a slave; spending self to the uttermost, even to the sacrifice of life; toiling as the servant, not of men, but of God; looking for reward to him alone, in the day of judgment. The deacon, man or woman, is "the Levite" of the Christian Church; the helper and fellow-laborer of the pastor, working with him on behalf of truth, righteousness, and eternal life, toiling under him and obedient to him in all things, one with him as his soul and his mind. This passage presents but one ideal for the order, making no distinction between the sexes; but elsewhere the bishop (pastor of the local church) is described as standing "in the place of Almighty God," his deacon as "standing in the place

of Christ," his deaconess as "in the place of the Holy Spirit."

The pastoral work of the order is divided between the sexes. All that the deacon does for the men, the deaconess does for the women. Both visit among the people, find out those who are in any kind of trouble, report their need to the pastor, and give the help that is wanted. The sick, the aged, the poor, and the afflicted are their peculiar care. In all of these ministries the deaconess shares with the deacon; but a special charge is given to her (1) on behalf of women candidates for baptism, who are to be instructed by her both before and after the ceremony; (2) on behalf of the women of heathen households or communities, whom the pastor and his male assistants may not visit. The work of the deaconess is likened to that of Mary Magdalene and the other women who ministered to the Lord Jesus while he was on earth. It is conceived as a personal service to him, who still has need of ministering women.

This was the ideal of the parish deaconess in the early Church. It is far from being realized at the present day. The modern deaconess falls short of this standard. Yet she comes nearer to it than does the modern deacon. There is a real resemblance between her ministry and that of the deacon and deaconess of the *Didascalia*. But her position in the Church is altogether different. She may still serve in imitation of Christ, spending herself freely out of love, and seeking her reward in him alone. But she is no longer a "Levite of the Christian Church." Her ministry is no longer likened to that of the Holy Spirit; nor is she honored as "holding the place of Christ." Her consecration has ceased to be an ordination. She may serve as a deacon, but she does not rank as one. The difference between her and the deaconess of the *Didascalia* is threefold; respecting her place in the Church, her work, and the spirit in which she serves. With regard to her work the change is due largely to altered conditions of life. In her relation to Christ the difference is one of degree. In her relation to the Church and its ministry it is one of kind.

The present attitude of the Church toward the deaconess is largely due to

ignorance of her ministry, both in ancient and in modern times. Few are aware of the work that is being done by deaconesses in parish churches at the present day, or of the extent to which this primitive form of service has already been restored.

The Protestant Church suffered from the lack of the diaconal service of women, and attempts were made to restore the order as early as the sixteenth century. These failed, indeed, but chiefly because the parochial type was confused with the institutional type which prevailed during the middle ages.

The modern revival of the order has aimed to supply pastors' assistants. The leaders of the Kaiserswerth movement looked upon service in the parish as "the crown of all deaconess work." Unfortunately they received no support or encouragement from the ministry as a body, and were forced to revert to the more familiar institutional type of the ministering woman. For many decades no adequate provision was made for the training of parish-workers in any of the Kaiserswerth houses. But when the pastors at length began to call for women helpers, the demand was promptly met. At the present day the parish is second only to the hospital as a field of labor for the Kaiserswerth deaconess.

Six years ago a comparative study was made by a Swiss pastor of the reports from 18 of the 84 mother-houses of the Kaiserswerth alliance. These institutions were stationed in several different countries and represented as many different branches of the Protestant Church. Some were large, others small; some old, others recent foundations. They were chosen as representing the various kinds of houses united in the Kaiserswerth League. Of the six great houses of the alliance, whose membership ranged about that time between 650 and 1,250, the lesser ones of Stuttgart and Neuendettelsau alone were chosen. The latter house was then supplying 134 parish-workers and 183 nurses. In the house of Stuttgart the proportion was that of 2 to 3. Seven of the eighteen houses had more sisters stationed in parishes than in hospitals; an eighth had as many in the one field as in the other. The mother-houses of Karlsruhe, Neuendettelsau, Darmstadt, and Speyer were furnishing considerably more than a hundred parish deaconesses each: that of Stutt-

gart over two hundred. The whole number of parish-workers sent out by these eighteen institutions six years ago was 1,260 over against 1,984 hospital workers; but the nurses represented 378 fields of labor, the parish-workers 744. This statement as to the work of 18 of the Kaiserswerth houses on behalf of the parish six years ago must be magnified greatly to do justice to the work of the whole body of 84 houses at the present day. The report of the last General Conference, held nearly three years ago, represents the mother-house at Kaiserswerth as itself supplying nearly 300 parish deaconesses.

The importance of parochial work for the deaconess is recognized in the Lutheran Church of America. At the conferences held periodically by the pastors in charge of the mother-houses the parish deaconess has been described as most like the deaconess of the early Church and as "at the very summit of the deaconess calling and of its labors." "In this work the deaconess movement will find its richest and fullest fruition." "The time will soon come when no city church can afford to be without a deaconess."

The Lutheran Church, in common with the various European churches represented in the Kaiserswerth alliance, has never given official recognition to the deaconess as a real tho subordinate member of the ordained ministry of the church; yet this is the ideal which has long been urged by the leaders of the movement in this country. They declare that the deaconess "is not merely an assistant of the pastor, engaged for the purpose of relieving him of some of his varied and arduous duties," she is "a minister of the Church to which she is called." "There can be no true diaconate, male or female, unless organically associated with the Church, in its nature gaining its power and authority from the Church, in its work subordinate to the Church, and in its results serving the Church." The deaconess has "a call to a scripturally established and churchly office." Her consecration "should be regarded as corresponding to ordination." "In the general estimation of the people, her service and position will rank next to that of the minister of the Word, or the pastor or pastors; her position is one of honor and of great responsibility." These are the utterances of several Lutheran pastors at meetings of the Deaconess Conference in different years. They

embody an ideal which has not yet been attained in any branch of the Church; but they testify to the new advance that is being made in the Kaiserswerth alliance toward a restoration of the primitive type of parish deaconess.

In the Episcopal and Presbyterian bodies of the United States and of Great Britain, the parochial type of deaconess has reached a higher stage of development, yet the growth has been retarded by a similar confusion of types.

In the Church of England the great majority of the deaconesses are members of religious communities. A confusion of the deaconess with the "sister" has been the inevitable result. The relation of the deaconess to the Church and its ordained ministers has been obscured, and the growth of the order greatly retarded. And yet the parish deaconess is winning a permanent place for herself in the Anglican Church. The bishop of London has recently called attention to one advantage in the community system. The deaconess belonging to a sisterhood can "work in the poorest parishes, where no adequate stipend could be raised for an ordinary paid worker." He adds:

"I have found it an immense strength to me as a bishop to have there fifty or sixty trained women on whom I could depend for help. I have had many worries and anxieties since I became bishop, but I have had no worry and no complaints about my deaconesses. From the point of view of the parish priest they are the greatest possible help and strength. . . . There is only one complaint to be made, that there are not more of them."

The Protestant Episcopal Church of America in its *canon* on deaconesses declares that "the duty of a deaconess is to assist the minister in the care of the poor and sick, the religious training of the young and others, and the work of moral reformation." Many of the deaconesses of this communion are at work in missions and institutions, but the *canon* describes the service of the majority. None of them are members of sisterhoods, and all are subject to the bishop, working under his subordinate clergy, or under his direct oversight. The deaconess houses, unlike the Anglican houses or those of Kaiserswerth, are not community houses, but training-schools. There are no deaconesses in residence save those in charge. The consecration service is a setting apart to an office by the

laying on of hands. And yet it is not an ordination; the office is not that of the historic diaconate, but an "appointment" that is "vacated by marriage," and an office that may be "resigned at any time."

In the Presbyterian bodies of Great Britain the influence of Kaiserswerth was felt from the beginning, yet less strongly than in the Church of England. The deaconesses of the Church of Scotland are consecrated by the kirk session with the approval of the Presbytery. Their order is regarded as a "branch of Church organization." In their work they resemble the deaconesses of other churches. In their position they are more firmly established within their own communion. Yet they share in many of the disadvantages under which the deaconess labors everywhere at the present day. This is still more the case with those branches of the Presbyterian and Reformed bodies of Great Britain and America, in which the revival of the order is a recent development. In them all there is a confusion of types, and a misapprehension of the aims, the work, and the position of the deaconess.

The Methodist and Wesleyan churches have sought to combine the parochial and the missionary types of deaconess with considerable success. The growth of the order in these communions is without parallel in other churches, and can be compared only with the spread of the Kaiserswerth movement in the middle of the last century. The number of these deaconesses falls far short of the total membership of the Kaiserswerth houses, yet it exceeds by many hundreds the whole number of deaconesses in any of the churches outside of the Kaiserswerth alliance. But in spite of this rapid growth, the deaconess of these episcopal bodies is, like her sisters, a composite. She does not fulfil the primitive ideal. She lacks the position and authority of the parish deaconess of the early church; the continuous training, guidance, and protection of the medieval and modern institutional deaconess. She enjoys more liberty than her sisters, but she has not attained to the freedom and spiritual power which characterized the ministry of all degrees in the prophetic age.

The most remarkable attempt to restore the primitive ministry of the deaconess has been that of the Diaconal Congress of Lille held by the Protestant churches of France in 1902. This convention called for the

restoration of the historic diaconate of both men and women, and while recognizing the need of deaconesses for mission fields and institutions, yet emphasized the "re-establishment under the immediate direction of the pastors of the ministry of the parish deaconess." Testimony was given by pastors who had already introduced women deacons into their own congregations. One pastor confessed:

"I would not have believed, before having experienced it, that the presence of a deaconess could be of such inestimable aid to the pastoral ministry." Another declared: "After an experience of more than fifteen years in a popular parish, I find that I can no longer dispense with the help of a deaconess. If I were to lose her, it would be necessary for me, in one way or another, to replace her." The president of the consistory of Paris wrote as follows: "How often have I secretly blest the Council of Deaconesses for having attached to St. Mary's parish deaconesses. If these deaconesses did not exist, it would be necessary to create them. How could they be replaced? What activity could replace their activity? We have deacons, very devoted and very active. They render us great service. But the deaconesses on their side do a work that the deacons know not how to do. They are the most reliable and the best auxiliary of the pastors. . . . In our immense city, with the dispersion of our Protestant population, with our masses of working people, parish deaconesses are indispensable." In the address before the congress from which these citations are taken, Pastor Hoffet concluded these testimonies by saying: "I could add still more observations from many other colleagues, who all agree in recognizing the usefulness of this ministry which I have sought to describe to you. One pastor said to one some days ago: 'My parish deaconess is my right arm and the half of my left arm. . . . Let us hope, Messieurs, that our churches, after having recognized the usefulness of the parish deaconess, will end by comprehending the necessity of her.'"

The consistory of Paris has earnest and efficient male deacons; yet, according to the report made to the Convention, the work of the men and women deacons in that consistory is quite unequal.

"The deacons, at least in our parishes, can give to the poor only a portion of their time. They have work which absorbs them all day long. One can not ask them to neglect the care of their own family to care for the families of the needy. The deaconess devotes her entire self. The quarter which is assigned to her becomes her diocese. Free from every other kind of work she can and does respond to all calls—God's messenger, as such is she welcomed in all homes."

Again it was claimed that:

"the presence of a Christian woman free from all the ties created by ordinary life, entirely consecrated to the work of God, and who counts upon serving in a given parish, who is on the spot, who has the same Christian preoccupations, the same consecrated ambition as the pastor, on whom he knows that he can always depend, is for him an inestimable power and for the whole church a great boon."

To these testimonies from French pastors may be added that of a Lutheran of this country, who declares:

"No one man, called upon to fill the office of preacher to a congregation of even ordinary intelligence and at the same time of pastor to a congregation of ordinary size, can begin to meet the demands. He is bound to fail somewhere. . . . (1) There is need of special provision for material ministrations. . . . We are sometimes led to feel that we have made more ample provision for the heathen, and for the general poor and for the orphan, than for the poor and suffering in the homes of our congregations. Again and again the pastor is made to feel this, as he comes into the homes of poverty and need, or of distress and sorrow. Time and strength are not his to minister to the need. Godly men and women there are, but he can not call upon them to give time for such work, and only very rarely would they be fitted for it. (2) There is need of provision for spiritual ministrations. Perhaps in no respect does the faithful pastor's sense of failure become more oppressive than when he feels his inability, amidst the multitude of duties, to reach and minister in a personal way to the spiritual need of every individual. The general ministrations of the sanctuary do not begin to fit every case. Personal ministrations, even, to all those manifestly in need are out of the question. Neither can he commit so sacred a work to untrained hands. Where is the pastor that has not felt his inability to meet this everlasting need? (3) Then there is need of what I might properly call rescue work in every congregation. There are always men and women going astray. And there are multitudes of children upon whom the pastor can not lay his hands. They drift out of the church and are lost. (4) And there is always need of house to house visitations. The people of the church need visitation and spiritual ministrations in the home. (5) Now all this work must be done by some one in an official way. Mere irresponsible and promiscuous religious work is not unto edification or to the spiritual health of a congregation. This soon becomes apparent to any pastor who attempts to delegate his work to any person who may have leisure. The deaconess is specially qualified for this work. The deaconess movement, if properly guided and rightly developed, has capabilities to meet the deficiencies in the present con-

gregational work such as no other movement affords and such as can be supplied by no other agency."\*

This testimony is based like the others upon personal knowledge and experience of the work of the parish deaconess. There is no need or witnesses from the Methodist, the Wesleyan, the Scotch, or the Protestant Episcopal bodies. The fact that they have given to the deaconess a semi-official position in the ministry, and are employing a large proportion of the members of her order as parish-workers, is sufficient evidence in her favor. There can be no doubt that the deaconess has won for herself a permanent place in the Church as pastor's assistant. And yet she does not fulfil the ideal of the parish deaconess.

1. With regard to her work she enjoys in some respects a larger liberty than ever before. She is not limited to her own sex as was the deaconess of the *Didascalia*. This change is due in part to the fact that in most of the divisions of the Protestant Church, and in the great majority of congregations in all communions, the deacon does little or no pastoral work for the men. But it is, also, due in part to the breaking down of the barrier of sex to a large extent in the modern world, and to practical experience of the peculiar power of consecrated womanhood over members of either sex. There is an artless charm in the unspoiled woman, that is independent of youth and good looks. It is a gift of nature, and not of art. It grows stronger with advancing years. At Lille it was given as one of the chief reasons for the existence of women deacons. It has enabled the deaconess to help both men and women beyond the reach of the male clergy, and to render service that could not have been offered by a man without offense.

The opening of universities and professional schools to women, and their service in many of the fields of work formerly monopolized by men, has led to a general recognition of their right to do any work that may be needed for which they can prove themselves competent. Many doors once closed to women are now open to the deaconess. Moreover the growth of various benevolent and educational enterprises; the founding of Sunday-schools, church settlements, church missions, clubs, classes, and societies of every

description, has greatly increased the number and variety of diaconal activities within the local church.

And yet the work of the deaconess is less responsible than it used to be, according to the *Didascalia* and other records of the early Church. In those days the deacon and the deaconess were associated with their pastor as representing to the congregation the Triune God, in whose name, and by whose power and authority they ministered. To their pastor the deacons of either sex were as his mind and his soul, thinking and feeling with him and for him, enabling him to multiply his presence and minister in person to all the individual members of his flock. The deaconess held a post of peculiar responsibility, in that she represented the pastor in dwellings which he might not enter and to persons with whom he might not speak. The unconverted and newly converted women were her peculiar charge. In their conversion, their preparation for baptism, and their practical training in the Christian life they were dependent not upon the pastor, but upon his delegate the woman deacon. No such responsibility rests upon the deaconess to-day, nor does she stand in any such vital relation to the pastor or to the congregation.

2. The position of the deaconess has changed far more than her work. In the early Church she served as the mate of the deacon, and as member of an order which was then indispensable to the work of the Church, and had been an essential part of its organism since apostolic times. At the present day the diaconate is no longer indispensable. The deacon is neglecting his own work for that of the presbyter, or holds an office that is little more than nominal. The deaconess does much of the work of the order, but is not recognized as an ordained minister in the rank of the diaconate. Her position in every branch of the Church lacks stability and honor. She stands in need of protection from clergy and people.

Only one of the Protestant churches provides against unjust procedure on the part of her superiors. The Protestant Episcopal Church has ordained that a deaconess "may not be suspended or removed from office except by the bishop for cause, with the consent of the Standing Committee, and after a hearing before the bishop and the Standing Committee." This regulation secures to the

\* W. H. Dunbar, in *Report of First Conference of Lutheran Deaconess Mother-houses*, 1896.

accused a form of trial, and prevents condemnation by the bishop without the cooperation of the Standing Committee.

The Church of England makes no such provision, but the majority of its deaconesses belong to religious communities subject to some extent to the bishop, yet practically controlled by their own superiors. These women are therefore protected in a measure from injustice at the hands of the clergy under whom they serve by their mother-house to which both parties are accountable in case of trouble.

This necessity of satisfying the mother-house of the justice of any complaint against one of its members is emphasized by the Kaiserswerth League, which has ordained that the pastor in charge of the mother-house shall "remain the pastor in fact of sisters in out-stations, especially in all matters pertaining to themselves and the sisterhood." Deaconesses may be "sent to outside stations only after a contract has been made with the authorities"; and "in their supervision of the work of sisters in out-stations the authorities of the same must not go beyond the instructions given the sisters by the mother-house."

The convention of Lutheran mother-houses in this country approved the statement that "the rector and the sister superior are bound to watch over the interests of the sisters in the out-stations, and to protect them against all unreasonable claims and demands, in conflict with contract agreed upon, as well as against harmful influences that may come from the surroundings in which they are temporarily placed." The United Brethren provide protection in a different way. They make the deaconess a member of the quarterly conference to which she is accountable. The Methodists admit her to the quarterly conference of the Church in which she serves, but not to either of the deaconess boards, which have charge of the work of the order in this communion.

None of these safeguards are adequate. The community affords the best protection against external tyranny; but where is one of its members to find defense against that internal despotism which is the great peril in

all such institutions? The deaconess subject only to the clergy suffers less from favoritism and petty tyranny, but more from excessive demands upon her time and strength.

That which identifies the modern deaconess most clearly with the woman deacon of the ancient Church is the spirit in which she labors. In the parish her work is of the same general character. And it is done with something of the same self-devotion. Therefore the denial of her official rank has not involved the loss of her ancient ministerial title. The great body of parish deaconesses is still characterized by personal devotion to Jesus Christ, by readiness to serve at the beck and call of his ministers, and by the practical wisdom and spiritual power required for the work of the diaconate. Individual workers have indeed proved unfaithful. Some have lacked the necessary qualifications. Others have become disheartened. And some have sought their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. The work is hard, the position lonely, and in this world there is no reward.

But this only means that the modern Church has need of heroic women, who are prepared to give themselves to the uttermost in a service that has been too long neglected, the work of the historic diaconate. A great cry is going up all over the world on behalf of suffering humanity. The Church has been slow in responding to that cry. Her ministers are already overworked. They can not meet the demand. They may not neglect "the ministry of the Word" for that of "tables." It is therefore necessary for the Church to restore the ancient service of the diaconate. She acknowledges the universal brotherhood of man; but she bases that brotherhood not only upon the Fatherhood of God, but also upon the universal lordship of Christ. Her ministers are accountable to him for their neglect of his poor.

In the parish the deaconess has peculiar opportunities for glorifying Christ in the present age. She may serve the Church and the world as a living witness to him who on earth "went about doing good" and is "the same yesterday, to-day, and forever."