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I.—LITERARY.

THE DEACON'S OFFICE AND WORK.

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It has been suggestively said by Prof. Witherow of Londonderry that, "all offices in the Christian church take origin from the Lord Jesus. He is Himself the author and embodiment of them all." Not only were they appointed by His authority; they were embodied in His person, and illustrated in His ministry. This follows as a corollary from the familiar New Testament doctrine that the church is the Body of Christ. The expression is not figurative, nor, as some would have it, anticipative; it is the statement of a real, present fact.

Two phrases occur in the New Testament which seem, at first sight, synonymous, but which are never used interchangeably. The one is the "Body of Jesus" or the "Lord's Body." This always has reference to that material body in which he tabernacled during his earthly ministry; which was nailed to the cross, laid in Joseph's tomb, raised from the dead and afterward received up into glory. The other is the "Body of Christ." This, if I mistake not, is always used to denote his Mystical Body, the church. The church is not simply likened to his body, but in a most real sense it is his body. It is the body of which he is the animating, guiding and ruling Head; in which he dwells by his Spirit; through which he perpetuates his presence among men, and carries on his work. In order that he might discharge his personal ministry as our

Redeemer a body was prepared for him; so, in order that he may accomplish his purposes for the world under this dispensation, a body has been prepared for him. The mystery of the Incarnation is thus crowned, and, in some manner, continued by that other mystery of the indwelling of Christ by the spirit in his redeemed church.

This being true, the claim is natural and just that we are to find in the personal ministry of Christ the type and model of his church's ministry. Since the same spirit which dwelt in him without measure dwells also in his church, and since the need of mankind remains unchanged, it is natural to expect that his gracious energy will, in both cases, be put forth along the same lines, and according to similar methods. It is true for believers, not only as individuals, but in their corporate character as well, that he has left us an example that we should follow his steps.

When we turn to the personal ministry of Christ as it is portrayed in the four gospels, we find that the fulness of grace and truth which dwelt in him flowed out to men through two main channels viz.: his *words* and his *works*; his *teaching* and his *doing*. With significant frequency these two things are named as an exhaustive classification of all his gracious activity. He "went about all the cities and villages teaching and preaching the gospel of the kingdom:" He also "went about doing good," "healing every sickness and every disease among the people." (Matt. 9: 3, Acts 10: 38). Grace flowed out through his lips and through his hands. The people wondered at the "gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth," and also at the gracious deeds that were wrought by his hands. Luke, in the first verse of the Acts, refers back to his gospel narrative as a record "of all that Jesus began both *to do and teach*." And our Lord himself, when John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to ask him if he was indeed the Messiah, replied, "Go and show John again those things which ye do *hear and see*"—pointing in proof of his Messiahship both to his teaching and doing.

Now he himself tells us that as the Father sent him into the world, so he has sent his church into the world. (John 20: 21). She has not been commissioned to inaugurate a new work, but to continue the work of doing and teaching which he began. Her mission like his is two-fold. At one time it is set forth in words like these: "That ye may be blameless and harmless,

the sons of God without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation among whom ye shine as lights in the world, *holding forth the word of life.*" (Phil. 2: 15, 16). At another time in words like these: "Let your light so shine before men that they may *see your good works*, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven." (Matt. 5: 16). The grace of Christ dwelling in his church, "which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all," (Eph. 1: 23), is to find expression, first, through a faithful holding forth of the word of life, and, second, through loving, Christlike deeds. Her love is to be shown, as John says, not simply "in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth." (1 John 3: 18). She is called to minister not only in spiritual things to the souls of men, but also, as she has opportunity, in material things to their bodies. "If a brother or sister be naked and destitute of daily food," it is not enough to speak unto them comfortable words; we must also give them "those things which are needful to the body." (James 2: 15, 16). Thus it is that the church is to stand forth among men as the faithful, full-orbed witness and representative of her absent Lord.

In her early history this was fully appreciated. "From the beginning," says Uhlhorn, "from the days of the church of Jerusalem, the practice of charity was as necessary an activity of church life as the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments; and for the one as well as for the others the church provided organs and ordinances." It was this feature, more than any other, that astonished the heathen and compelled their attention. They saw in the church an institution whose vocation was to exercise compassion, and it was a new thing in the world. As the water-lily lifts its beautiful face out of the midst of surrounding stagnation and corruption, so did christian charity bloom out in human society, and it extorted the significant testimony, "Behold how these christians love one another!"

In order that the church may discharge this dual ministry she has been equipped by her Lord with two sets of officers, Elders and Deacons. There is not a trace in the New Testament of any other ecclesiastical office. No other is needed.

To the one, have been entrusted the ministry of the Word and the spiritual oversight of the flock; to the other, has been entrusted the ministry of charitable deeds. One has the care of souls, the other the care of bodies. The one represents

Christ in his teaching, the other represents him in his doing. The two ministries may closely approximate each other, or even be united in the same person, as in the case of Stephen or Philip, nevertheless they are distinct. Just as two colors of the rainbow may shade imperceptibly into each other along their line of contact, while on their outer border they are not only distinct, but contrasted. They are the two arms of the body of Christ; and only as both of them are kept in vigorous and healthy exercise, does the church come up to the full measure of the power. Let the first be neglected, and she is exposed to the inroads of ignorance and superstition, and all those things which are "contrary to sound doctrine." Some such state of things as we find in the Church of Rome inevitably results. Let the second be neglected, and she is invaded by selfishness and covetousness. Her heart is congested. In her ministrations to the need of mankind, she becomes like Jacob when he fed Isaac upon savoury meat. The voice was the smooth, soft voice of Jacob, but the hands were the rough hands of Esau. It was an unhappy combination, and aroused the suspicion even of the aged, dim-sighted Isaac.

Neither office is to be exalted at the expense of the other. Both have their appointment from Christ; both were illustrated in his personal ministry. As he was the model Teacher and Shepherd of souls, so was he the model Deacon. "He came not to be ministered unto, but to *minister*." (Mark 10:45).

He was among men 'as one that *served*.' (Luke 22:27). As he left an example for every teacher when he sat in the synagogue, or on the mountain side, or by Jacob's well, and spoke words of grace and truth; so he left an example for every deacon as he bent over the pallet of the sick man at the pool of Bethesda, as he fed the hungry multitude in the desert place, or, as in the upper chamber he girded himself with a towel and washed his disciples' feet. Both offices are designed to interpret his mind and heart—the one through word, the other through act. Both are channels of his grace. The deacon as well as the elder is a steward of the grace of God. He ministers, it is true, in carnal things, but his ministry is not carnal but spiritual. It is no less sacred and essential than the ministry of him who labors in the word and doctrine.

Now, I venture to suggest, that just here has been a conspicuous weakness in our church—not to speak of other protestant bodies. She has proceeded too much upon the theory

that the sole function of the church is to proclaim the gospel through word. She has magnified the teaching office as, perhaps, no other church has done. Her voice has been clear, and has given forth no uncertain sound. We are glad of it. We glory in her steadfast adherence to sound doctrine; in her matchless creed, her educated ministry, her schools of learning, and her splendid contributions to the religious education of the world. But, must we not admit, that she has not in like measure, been "*rich in good works?*" She has not, according to her ability, ministered to men of "those things which are needful to the body," with the soft, gentle hands of sympathy and love. Her life has been expressed, not too much, but too exclusively, through schools and colleges and books and sermons, and too little through charitable institutions, hospitals, houses of refuge, and other like agencies for relieving the sick and afflicted, the aged, the fatherless, and those who have no helper.

In short, the deacon's ministry has been neglected, and that side of church life which it represents has not been developed. Instead of using both of the official arms with which her Lord has equipped her, the church has allowed this one to fall into almost entire disuse. Dr. Magill has aptly described a multitude of Presbyterian churches as having "all sorts of elders, and no sort of deacons," Even where the office is recognized, it is, in many instances, practically a sinecure; and the churches are few indeed in which the scriptural ideal is realized or even approximated. Already we have suffered, and are suffering from this neglect. But as our civilization becomes more and more complicated; as our population, in an ever-increasing degree becomes massed in great cities; and as grave social problems press more and more urgently upon us for solution, a continuance of this policy must be scarcely less than disastrous in its results. It seems to me that a correct understanding of the times in which we live would indicate that one of the first things which our modern Israel ought to do is to magnify the office of deacon, and to exalt it to its true scriptural place—as the *official channel through which the love of Christ, dwelling in his church, is to flow out in compassionate and charitable ministrations to the bodily needs of men—especially such as are "of the household of faith."*

It is of the last importance that the church should, in all

respects, be fashioned after the pattern which has been shown us in the Mount. We cannot depart from that model without suffering loss. "The spirit of a man," says Dr. Thornwell, "needs the body of a man, and so the spirit of the church needs the true body and organism of the church for its complete and perfect action."

Let us now pass on to notice how the deacon's office, if so developed and used, would stand related to the life and work of the church.

1. It would express, and, by expressing, cultivate the Communion of saints. In his admirable essay on the deacon's office, the lamented Dr. Peck, with his usual clearness and fidelity to scripture, shows that "the prime aspect of the office of deacon is that of a representative of the communion of saints." That communion is chiefly exhibited through two ordinances, which are frequently denominated by the same word, the Lord's Supper, and Giving to the necessities of the saints. Of this latter exercise the deacon is the appointed organ. His office is the connecting medium between the church's wealth and her want. It is the divinely ordained channel through which the abundance of some members of the body is conveyed to the need of others. Through it the unity of the whole body is to be realized and exhibited. However widely the various members may differ as to their earthly circumstances, they are, through the ministrations of the Diaconate, held in close, sympathetic relations with each other; they are shown to be, and made to feel that they are all one in Christ Jesus. When one member suffers the whole body suffers with it, and responds to its relief. This communion is not confined to a particular congregation; but, as the "Confession of Faith" teaches, "is to be extended as God offereth opportunity, unto all those who, in every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus." (Ch. 2, Par. 2). The deacon then is not merely a local officer. He sustains an important relation to the church at large. His functions are co-extensive with the operations of the whole church. The church is to realize her unity through the Diaconate as well as through the Presbyterate. Wherever, in any of her borders, or in any department of her work, she has need in "outward things," that need is to be met through the ministry of her deacons. A failure to recognize this principle, and consistently to act upon it, has, in my judgment, been a most serious

defect in the working of our church, and one of the most formidable obstacles in the way of her progress. In all her operations she is crippled by a lack of money. Work that legitimately belongs to us we are leaving untouched, and much of that which we have in hand we are doing in a sadly imperfect manner, simply because we haven't the means to carry it on vigorously. One chief explanation of this state of things is to be found in the fact that we have neglected the very agency which God has appointed for supplying the church's lack in "outward things." The ministry of those who "serve tables" is practically an undeveloped ministry.

In a neighborhood where I once lived was a mill, which was popularly known as "*The Dry Mill*." The name puzzled me, until one day, an old resident gave me the explanation of it. The mill was built on the side of a hill some distance from the stream which was expected to furnish its motive power. After its completion it remained for several months perched on the hillside with no connection with the stream; and during that interval the *sobriquet* which I have mentioned, was given it in derision. But in course of time the owner cut a race from a favorable point up the stream down to his mill, conveying the water to its wheel; then it was no longer a dry mill but became a source of blessing to the community.

Corresponding to that stream is the wealth which God has so abundantly given to his church in these last days. Corresponding to that mill are the various "Benevolent Causes" which the church has erected, viz., Sustentation, Education, Church Erection, Foreign Missions, etc. They are just so many pieces of ecclesiastical machinery. Too often, alas! they are "dry mills." They grind slowly, or stand stock-still, because they lack the necessary motive-power. What we need is an intelligent, trained, consecrated, well organized, co-operating deaconship to serve as an open channel of communication between the heart of the church and these different branches of her work. Give us such a deaconship and I confidently believe our church machinery would run at a speed that has never yet been attained.

2. Again, if this conception of the deacon's office were realized, it would greatly promote the church's efficiency in reaching those that are without. When the first deacons had been set apart by prayer and the imposition of hands, the inspired record significantly adds: "And the word of God increased,

and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly." They became a mighty factor in the work of evangelization. Their ministry re-inforced and forwarded the ministry of those who labored in the word and doctrine. It prepared the way for the preached word, and gained access for it into the homes and hearts of the people. So it should always be, and so it would be if the office of deacon were used well. We hear much in these last days of the alienation of the masses from the church. That such alienation exists it is idle to deny. The sad fact cannot be blinked that in our great cities, at least, the Protestant church has, in large measure, lost hold upon the multitudes who toil for their daily bread. Not only is there alienation; in many cases there is downright antagonism. It is boldly charged that the church is not the friend of the laboring classes; that she is not possessed of the spirit of Christ; that she is seeking her own things; that she is in the world not to minister, but to be ministered unto; that she courts and flatters the rich for the sake of their patronage. No one can be more keenly sensible than I am of the injustice that is done the church by such representations. She is grievously misunderstood. But must we not admit that, to a considerable extent, she is herself responsible for the misunderstanding? She has not interpreted the mind of her Master fully, and in his appointed way. In her organized character she has too generally shown her love in "*word only*," and not "*in deed*." Bishop Taylor tells a story of an African chief who was visited by a christian missionary. After some preliminary palaver the chief asked his visitor if he had brought him a blanket. "No," was the reply, "but I have brought you something better." Then he proceeded to tell him the gospel story; how our Father in Heaven had so loved the world as to give his son to save it, and how he and his co-workers had come across the sea to bring the news to him and his people. "Well," he replied, "if your Father is so loving as you say, and you are anything like him, I think you would give me a blanket." That old savage spoke out what is in the hearts of multitudes in Christendom towards the church. I do not forget that now, as in the days of Christ, there are many who would follow him only for the sake of the loaves and fishes, and that we, following his example, must give no encouragement to such a spirit. But the stubborn fact remains that people are honestly distrustful of our

professed concern for their spiritual and eternal welfare, so long as we are apparently indifferent to the present, bodily needs which oppress and gall them. Here again we find our remedy in the work of the deacon. An active, consecrated deaconship is the surest connecting link between the church and the masses. Alas! it is a missing link. Let the link be restored. Let the love of the church, like the love of her Lord, take hold upon the whole man—his bodily as well as his spiritual part—and express itself both through word and through work; let the charity of Christian people be exercised under church auspices, and through church channels; let consecrated men and women be trained, and set apart to the deacon's office for the whole of their time; let them go to the homes of the poor, and the cots of the sick in the name of Christ, and the church, and minister of those things that are needful for the body, and the gospel will be interpreted in a language which all can understand; it will be made manifest through a logic which none can resist that the same mind which was in Christ dwells also in his church. And then may we not hope that it will be said of her, as it was said of her Lord, that the common people hear her gladly?

3. The office, if so developed and used, would likewise promote the efficiency of the church in her Foreign Missionary work. If, as we have seen, the deacon is not merely a local officer, but sustains a relation to the whole church, and has a ministry which is co-extensive with the church's activity, then I ask why should not the church make use of him in the regions beyond? Why should she not stretch out her Diaconal as well as her Presbyterian arm to the ends of the earth? It is a significant fact that in every commission which Christ ever gave for the propagation of his gospel he includes a ministry to the bodies of men along with a proclamation of the truth. When he sent out the twelve he said, "as ye go preach, saying, the kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, etc." (Matt. 10 : 7, 8). Afterward when the seventy were sent out he commanded them, "Into whatever city ye enter, and they receive you, heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you." (Luke 10 : 9). And the great commission, as recorded by Mark, closes with the words, "and they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover." (Mark 16 : 18).

The early church was endowed with the gift of miraculous

healing for the discharge of this part of her ministry. That gift we believe to have been extraordinary and temporary just as the gift of tongues was. But, as we try to carry on the work of preaching, although we can lay no claim to the gift of tongues, so we are to carry on the work of healing, although the miraculous gift has been withdrawn. And the wonderful advance of medical science throughout Christendom has made it possible for the church to do this work in a way that to heathen eyes seems well nigh miraculous. In late years the different denominations of Protestantism, responding to the distressing need that confronts them in heathen lands, and following the Christian instinct of compassion, have established Medical Missions as a permanent branch of their foreign work; and with blessed results. No agency has done so much to break down prejudice, and open up the way for the preached Gospel. A Medical Missionary in southern China was at first called by the natives a "foreign devil." But, after he had lived a few years among them they began to call him the "angelic healer from beyond the sea."

The Prime Minister of China is reported to have said: "We do not fear your preachers; but we do fear your women for they enter our homes, and your physicians for they steal our hearts." One of our own missionaries writes that on several occasions when preaching in a new place, and met by hostile demonstrations from the crowd, some man who had been treated for disease in a Christian hospital has stood up for his defense and vouched for his sincerity and goodwill, thus turning the tide of feeling in his favor. Such is the universal testimony. The medical missionary prepares the way for the evangelist and the teacher. But what is a medical missionary except a New Testament deacon? His ministry is clearly diaconal in its character. Why then should he not be recognized as such? At present, unless he happens to be ordained as a preacher, he has no ecclesiastical standing except as a private member of a local church thousands of miles distant. And it is easy to foresee how, in the future, dangerous complications might arise from such anomalous conditions. The same may be said of many of our female missionaries. Their work is mainly diaconal. Is it not the part of wisdom, and in harmony with the teachings of Scripture, to set these workers apart as deacons of the church at large, laboring in the regions beyond, and thus to define and regulate their ac-

tivity by giving them the official standing to which their work entitles them?

4. In the office of deacon, if properly developed, we would have a Scriptural safeguard against some subtle dangers which threaten the modern church. One of the latest ecclesiastical fads is what is known as the "*institutional church*." It is a church which, according to its advocates, aims to minister to the whole man—body, soul and spirit; to meet the physical, mental and social, as well as the spiritual needs of a community. It has had its origin in Congregationalism, or a Congregationalized Presbyterianism; and it seems to me to be the result of an honest effort on the part of a church with an incomplete organization to minister to the need and grapple with the difficulties which confront us in modern society. But it lays hold upon agencies which certainly are not recognized in Scripture, and proposes for itself a scope which was not contemplated in the church's commission. The danger is that, in time, it will lose the character of a spiritual body, and become purely secular in its character and humanitarian in its design. The church will be taken and the institution left.

But the Presbyterian church is, by her constitution, already equipped for the work which the institutional church attempts, so far as it is legitimate church work. She has but to lay hold upon the principles imbedded in her constitution relative to the scope and functions of the Diaconate, and make them actual and operative in her organization and life. She will thus do the work in a Scriptural way, and within Scriptural limitations. She will appropriate the good that is in this modern movement and eliminate the evil; she will secure its benefits and avoid its dangers.

Another danger with which we are now threatened is from a tendency to ignore the teaching of Scripture as to the position of woman in the organization and work of the church. Modern society is deeply infected with what Dr. Parkhurst has aptly called *andromania*. The church has not escaped the infection. It is clamorously demanded in behalf of woman that since she is man's equal in gifts and graces she should, equally with the man, be eligible to every position in the church. I shall not attempt any discussion of the question beyond saying that the position of our own church is clearly defined and well understood. It is a position from which she is not likely to recede, for it is based upon the plain teaching of Holy

Scripture. We believe that for wise and good reasons women have been excluded from the place of rulers and public teachers in the Lord's house. But no such prohibition has been spoken as to the deacon's office. This silence is significant. Besides, there are several Scriptures which seem clearly to teach that to this particular ministry she was freely admitted and invited. Phebe was "a servant," literally, *a deacon*, of the church at Cenchrea. She went to Rome on business of an ecclesiastical character. Dr. Magill says: "From John Calvin to Charles Hodge we have a singular succession of learned and illustrious men affirming the official meaning of deaconess in its application to Phebe." Dr. Chalmers says: "Phebe belonged to the order of deaconesses, in which capacity she had been the helper of many, including Paul himself." In 1 Tim. 3: 11, adopting the reading of the Revised Version which seems clearly to be the correct one, we find Paul naming the qualifications necessary for women who would engage in the work of deacons. Our own church, in its Book of Order, recognizes the propriety of setting apart godly women to labor as deaconesses. This is a ministry for which women are peculiarly fitted, and it offers opportunity for unlimited usefulness. Through it our Marthas and Marys may serve the Master, and pour out their offerings of love at his feet without transgressing the limitations which he has set for them in his word. Let attention be called to this open door. Let suitable women be trained for this work, and set apart to it, and supported in it, and we will substitute a woman's ministry that is Scriptural and useful, for one which is lawless and full of danger.

A few years ago a movement was started within the bounds of our Assembly to rescue and utilize a long-neglected gift of our ascended Lord, viz: the Evangelist, under the blessing of God it has been, to a gratifying degree, successful. No one thing has, in my judgment, contributed more to our prosperity and growth. Would it not be a worthy sequel to this fair page of history, if we should now rescue this other New Testament office from a similar neglect, and restore it to its true place of usefulness and honor?

The Lord grant it for his own glory, and establish us, as a church, "in every good word and work."