

A STUDY  
ON  
THE FEMALE DIACONATE  
OF THE  
NEW TESTAMENT.

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I.

There is a general principle which must be carefully observed in the study of all New Testament passages concerning the details of Church organization, as well as concerning the spheres of doctrine and worship. It is the law of growth. All Revelation has followed this law, and everything pertaining to the kingdom of God on earth pursues the same course. We might as well expect to find in the New Testament a complete system of Dogmatics and Ethics, or an elaborate Church Service, as to find a Diaconate characterized by all the features and details of organization that have been found serviceable in the experience of the Church throughout succeeding ages. The entire Protestant principle is misunderstood and misapplied by the exaltation of Biblical, at the expense of Dogmatic Theology. It is a laudable demand that we should constantly revert to Holy Scripture, and test all doctrines and teachers according to its infallible standard. Everything that



is contrary to or inconsistent with Holy Scripture, must be surrendered. Everything also that cannot be found to proceed from Holy Scripture by a legitimate application of its principles must also be repudiated. But we cannot confine our teaching to the very words of inspiration, without doing a great injustice to Him who has given these words to be the germs of the Church's faith and life, that shall bring forth a harvest until the work of grace on earth is completed. We cannot force ourselves back into the moulds of the life of the Church of Apostolic times. God has appointed us to live and labor in a later age; and it is despising Him to reject the means whereby, throughout centuries of sanctified thought and labor and struggles, He has glorified His name through the many thousands of devout men who have preceded us. We are placed in a field in which we find institutions and appointments already provided; and it is part of our fidelity to God thankfully to use them, and not to pull down for the purpose of beginning to build up again from the foundation.

No advocate of the Female Diaconate at the present can, therefore, be so visionary as to claim that all its good features may be found already in the New Testament. Nor will any intelligent student of the New Testament and the History of the Church be betrayed into the denial of the validity and importance of much for which the New Testament has given only the start, while succeeding ages have contributed a true and healthful development. Since there has been more indisposition in the Reformed, than in the Lutheran Church, to recognize this principle, a comment of Calvin on Acts 6: 1 is of interest: "From this narrative we learn, first of all, that the Church could not be formed all at once, without leaving something yet to be corrected, and that an edifice of such magnitude could not be completed in one day without leaving something necessary to its perfection that was yet to be added."\* If the experience of nineteen centuries, with the

\* Ex hac historia primum discimus, non ita statim formari posse Ecclesiam quin aliquid corrigendum restet, nec posse tantæ molis ædificium primo die sic absolvi, ut non aliquid ad perfectionem addi possit.

constant presence, in the hearts and lives of believers, of the ever-active Holy Spirit, have added nothing in the way of legitimate and organic development of a New Testament institution, all that we read concerning the quick and powerful seed of the Word is difficult to explain. The seed is intended to produce a harvest, and the New Testament Diaconate was intended to be the beginning and foundation of an Ecclesiastical Diaconate with ever expanding powers of adaptation to the supply of the necessities for which it was devised. We must keep this principle constantly before us, if we would avoid the confusion very current of taking a standpoint at a later development of the Diaconate, and finding features there not to be traced in the New Testament, and then summarily concluding that the institutions considered are entirely distinct and separate; or of reading into the New Testament, conceptions of the Diaconate which belong to a later age. Thus, in his argument that the "seven" of Acts vi. were a separate institution, Vitringa's attempt to identify the New Testament deacon with the *Chazan* of the synagogue has been well answered by Augusti, with the remark that the comparison applies better to the ecclesiastical functions of the deacon of the II-IV centuries than to the duties of the deacon according to the prescriptions of the New Testament, which were confined mainly to the care of the sick and collections, while the chief office of the *Chazan* was supervision of the order in the synagogue, assistance in reading the law and in leading the singing; although, meanwhile, we cannot immediately infer from the silence of the New Testament that these duties were not even then performed by the deacons.\*

\* Augusti's *Handbuch der Christlichen Archæologie* (Leipzig, 1836) I. 174. To the same effect also Dr. Ginsburg, well known for his Rabbinical learning: "The *Chazan* was the lowest servant, and was more like the sexton or beadle in our churches. The notion that his office resembled that 'of the Christian deacon,' as well as the assertion that, 'like the *legatus* and elders, he was appointed by the imposition of hands,' have evidently arisen from a confusion of the *Chazan* in the days of Christ with the *Chazan* five centuries after Christ. It was about A.D. 520, when the knowledge of the Hebrew language disappeared from among the people at large, that alterations had to be introduced into the Synagogical service, which involved a change in the office of the *Chazan*." Kitto's "Biblical Cyclopædia," article SYNAGOGUE.



## II.

The same process of development, even within the Apostolic Church and the period covered by the History of the New Testament, produced the Female Diaconate. It was a true growth from the Diaconate, as the Diaconate itself sprang from the Presbyterate or Pastoral Office. A distinction of two classes within the Presbyterate, as of teaching and ruling elders, advocated by Calvin, accepted generally within the Reformed Churches, adopted in the Lutheran Church by A. Hunnius, Gerhard and the theologians of the seventeenth century, defended in this country by Dr. Walther in his *American Lutheran Pastoral Theology* and introduced into the Constitution of our churches in America through the Dutch Lutherans of New York, notwithstanding the high regard that must be paid to any opinion sustained by such an array of authorities, we cannot find grounded in Holy Scripture. The presbyters of the early Church, and its bishops or pastors, were one and the same persons or officers. There is no power in the Church, except that of the Word of God. All ruling is through teaching. It is the Church that teaches, and thus rules by teaching through its presbyters. The very administration of the power of the keys, *i.e.*, of ruling in the Church, is in no other way than by the application of the Word of God; and this is effected, not through another office, but through the same office, whereby the Church provides for the general teaching. The emphasis in 1 Tim. 5: 17 is not well observed, when it is pressed to support the theory of the twofold presbyterate.\* A reference to Eph. 4: 11, in the original, shows clearly the works of the pastors and teachers, *i.e.*, of governing and teaching, there

\* See on this passage Dr. Schaff's "History of the Apostolic Church," p. 529, and the statement which is all the more valuable as coming from a Presbyterian: "Such a distinction of *ruling* elders, belonging to the laity, and *teaching* presbyters, or ministers proper, first suggested by Calvin, and afterwards further insisted upon by many Protestant (especially Presbyterian) divines, rests, indeed, on a very judicious ecclesiastical policy, and is, so far, altogether justifiable; but it cannot be proved at all from the New Testament or Church antiquity." Cf. also Rothe, *Die Anfänge der Christlichen Kirche*, pp. 221-230.

mentioned, are one and the same. So also does Heb. 13: 7. The so-called "Congregational Principle" is in no way infringed upon by asserting that the administration of all the affairs of the congregation was at first exclusively in the hands of the presbyter or presbyters, as its president or presidents (*προεστώτες, πρεσβύτεροι*). They were in the beginning the sole executive officers, exercising representatively for the congregation, as a whole, powers directly committed to it by God. A confusion is sometimes caused by overlooking the twofold office which the Apostles filled. As Apostles, they had a general work to perform, with respect to the founding and superintendence of the Church, upon an authority directly and immediately given them by Christ; and within this sphere, they allowed no man to dictate or call them to account. As such, they are Apostles for all time, as well as for all places; and their Apostolic word is still heard, and will continue to be heard throughout the Church until the end of time. As such they have no successors, either in name or authority. The walls of the New Jerusalem are built upon foundations inscribed with the names of the "twelve Apostles of the Lamb." Rev. 21: 14. But they were presbyters as well as Apostles. St. Peter claims for himself that he was *συμπρεσβύτερος*, 1 Pet. 5: 1. St. John calls himself *ὁ πρεσβύτερος*, 2 John 1. As presbyters, they had to do with a restricted, special, congregational sphere of activity, like any other presbyters, and, thus, to exercise mediate functions, committed by God to the congregation, and then by the congregation to its representative. Their office as Apostles was permanent and chief; their work and office as presbyters was temporary until they could be relieved of local duties for their general work. In the formative period of the Church, how clearly the lines separating these two functions were determined cannot always be accurately traced. Nor must we transfer to the congregation of Apostolic days all the features found in the congregation of to-day. There has been a development of the "congregation" as well as of the Diaconate. The "congregation," in its inner essence, is only two or three believers, gathered together in Christ's



name, Matt. 18: 2c.\* In its subsequent New Testament conception, it is any number of believers upon whom common duties in providing for and attending the ministry of the Word and sacraments are incumbent; and as believers gathered about a common centre had duties in this regard not belonging to others, congregations became localized, as "the church at Jerusalem," "the church at Ephesus," "the church at Cenchrea." The element of localization, with parish limits, etc., is not inherent in the idea of the congregation any more than is the New Testament example of but one congregation for each particular place. We must, therefore, in considering the New Testament congregation, eliminate from it all ideas of a written constitution, and clearly defined rights of voters, and a thorough organization with various classes of officers, and recognition by synodical or other more general association of believers. These matters, however important in the normal development of the congregation, belong to its accidents, and not to its essence.

Such, then, being the "congregation," we can trace the twofold relation in which "the twelve," mentioned in Acts vi., stood to the congregation at Jerusalem. The work of administration, which is there described, had belonged to them as the presbyters of the congregation, while the institution of the office of the Diaconate, being an explicit direction to the Church, and looking forward to a universal institution, belonged to them as Apostles.

Before proceeding, however, to the consideration of the circumstances in which the Diaconate originated, we must first consider whether there be any foundation for the objections sometimes urged against the application of Acts 6: 1, sqq., to this institution. It is claimed that the "seven" there elected and set apart were not "deacons." Vitringa† has most fully presented the arguments to sustain this position:

"1. It is clear from the records of ancient history, according to the common consent of learned men, that the deacons of the first Christian

\* Cf. Tertullian *De Exhortatione Castitatis*, C. 6: "Ubi tres, ecclesia est, licet laici."  
† Campegii Vitringæ, *De Synagoga Vetere*, Libri Tres, Leucopetræ (Weissenfelt), 1726, pp. 920-934.

Church were distinguished from these seven guardians of the poor of the Primitive Church at Jerusalem, inasmuch as the ordinary deacons were so called, since they rendered due service to the Church and the bishops and the presbyters in the service of the synagogue, while the 'seven' of the Church at Jerusalem were ordained peculiarly for giving daily support to the widows and the poor,—offices which greatly differ.

"2. It is clear from the records of history that the chief care of the poor and of distributing alms belonged not to the deacons, unless so far as in this, like in all other sacred works, they afforded the service that was due the bishops. Hence we again infer that they were very distinct from these stewards of the Church at Jerusalem, who were ordained to serve the tables of the widows. That the chief care of the poor belonged to the bishops has been proved by us, and is acknowledged by the learned.

"3. If the deacons described by Paul in 1 Timothy were truly considered by him as collectors and distributors of alms, and those who provided for the tables of widows, how is it that no mark whatever of this office, not even a trace, appears in the Pauline description of deacons? or, at least, that among the qualities which Paul requires in them, none is mentioned which respects this office?

"4. The guardians of the poor who are said to have been ordained in the Church at Jerusalem are neither in this narrative nor elsewhere called 'deacons,' and it is astonishing that both the more ancient and more modern teachers have been so ready to ascribe to these seven men the name of 'deacons.' Of these seven, Stephen was one; but he is nowhere called 'deacon.' Philip was another; but although frequently mentioned in the Book of Acts, he is nowhere called 'deacon,' but rather 'evangelist.'

"5. When the Apostles made various collections among the Gentiles for the 'saints' at Jerusalem, the deacons of the churches are nowhere mentioned as those upon whom the duty of collecting and distributing alms was incumbent.

"6. It is worthy of mention that seven deacons, after the pattern of the 'seven,' were at length appointed in the Roman Church, undoubtedly from this misunderstood passage of Luke.

"7. It is more than probable from the circumstances of the text that the 'seven' were placed only over the Hellenists, as their names are all Greek. If this is established, who does not see that the 'seven' were not properly deacons of the Church at Jerusalem, but administrators of the tables of the Hellenistic widows?"

This entire argument of Vitringa is in advocacy of the position that the organization of the Christian Church only



reproduced the arrangements of the Jewish synagogue, and that no duties are to be ascribed to the "deacons" which cannot be traced in the corresponding Jewish officials.\* We can concede this, under certain limitations, with respect to the presbyterate, of whose institution we have no account, since it grew up gradually as succeeding the arrangements of the synagogue; but the very minuteness of detail shows that the "diaconate" was heretofore something unknown, and had to be explained. This hypothesis labors also under the error of not taking into account the principle of ecclesiastical development, and accordingly demanding either that all the features of the later diaconate must be found in Acts, or it must be referred to another office.

Dr. J. H. Boehmer, of Halle,† one of our most renowned writers on ecclesiastical polity, following Vitringa, regards Acts 6 as containing the account of the institution of the lay presbyterate. Lechler, Ritschl and Bernard Weiss, in late years, have taken essentially the same position. Weiss rather conceives of the account in Acts vi. as referring to the adoption of a measure to supply a temporary emergency, which suggested the subsequent institution of the lay eldership as "an imitation of the elders of the synagogue."‡

It is not, therefore, the exegetical writers, but those who

\* The argument here involved has been well answered by the late Bishop Lightfoot, in an Appendix to his Commentary on Philippians: "The institution was novel absolutely. There is no reason for connecting it with any prototype existing in the Jewish community. The Levite, whose function it was to keep the beasts for slaughter, to cleanse away the blood and offal of the sacrifices, to serve as porter at the temple gates and to swell the chorus of sacred psalmody, bears no strong resemblance to the Christian deacon, whose ministrations lay among the widows and orphans, and whose time was almost wholly spent in works of charity. And again, the Chazan or attendant in the synagogue, whose duties were confined to the care of the building and the preparation for service, has more in common with the modern parish clerk than with the deacon in the infant Church of Christ. Among other objections to this view, the fact that as a rule there was only one Chazan to each synagogue must not be overlooked. The Hebrew Chazan is not rendered by "deacon" in the Greek Testament; but a different word is used instead (*ὑπηρέτης*, Luke 4: 20).

† *Jus Ecclesiasticum Protestantium*, 3d ed., I. 552 sq.

‡ *Bibl. Theol. of N. T.*, Eng. Tr., I. 189.

advocate a particular form of Church Polity, who raise difficulties concerning this application. Almost the entire exegetical tradition is on the side of the identification of the "seven" with the deacons. Chrysostom seems to be the first to question it. The confusion in his mind is reflected in the obscurity of his language in commenting on Acts vi. in a passage concerning the precise meaning of which his commentators are in doubt. But the whole force of his argument seems to us to be that the functions of the "seven" are so different from those discharged by "deacons" at his day, that the offices could scarcely be the same. Lechler, in Herzog's *Real-Encyclopædie*\* has made a great blunder in ascribing the origin of the interpretation here adopted to Cyprian. Tertullian explicitly maintains it †; and more than a century before Tertullian, Ignatius accepts it as a matter of course. ‡ Very soon after Cyprian, it was incorporated into a Church decision in Canon XV. of the Synod of Neocæsarea (A.D. 314): "In even the largest cities there may not be more than seven deacons, for this may be proved from the Acts of the Apostles." § More than three hundred years afterwards, the Trullan Council tried to remove the difficulties which occurred to Chrysostom in its Canon XVI., in which it discriminates between two kinds of deacons, and says that Acts vi. refers, "not to the deacons who minister in the mysteries, but to the service of tables." This interpretation is embodied in the beautiful collect of the Greek Church in the Order for the Consecration of Deacons: "O God, our Saviour, who, by Thine unerring voice, didst ordain the rule of the diaconate to Thine Apostles, and didst choose to the office Thy first martyr Stephen, and gavest him priority in the fulfilment of his office as deacon, according to the precept of Thy Holy Gospel: 'Whoever among you will be first, let him be your deacon.'" Erasmus, Luther, Calvin, Flacius, Sebastian Schmidt, Osiander, Sarcerius, Gerhard, Calov, Ziegler, Bengel, Hooker, Stier, Neander, Rothe, Meyer, Philippi, J. A. Alexander, Schaff,

\* Herzog-Plitt, XII. 177. † *De Præscriptionibus*, XLVI.

‡ Epistle to the Trallians, VII. § Hefele's Councils, Eng. Tr., Vol. I, p. 230.



Davidson, Lightfoot, Stokes, etc., to mention but a few out of many, support this view.

All the difficulties seem to vanish when the principle of the development of the diaconate is closely observed. If the subsequent diaconate is regarded as founded on this appointment, the same result is attained. The name "seven" occasions no more trouble than the application of the name "the twelve" to the Apostles in the same chapter. The office was first instituted, and the term "deacon," heretofore used as a general term for minister or servant, was applied to it afterwards in a special sense, just as the word "minister" has also been narrowed into its signification, since the institution of the office, to the ministry of the Word. Concerning the contrast of qualifications with those of 1 Tim. 3: 8 sqq., we can say with Alford: "In 1 Tim. 3: 8 sqq., there is no absolute identification of the duties of deacons with those allotted to the seven, but at the same time nothing to imply that they were different. And ἀνεγκλητοι, *ib.* ver. 10, at all events is parallel with our μαρτυρουμένους, ver. 3;" and concerning Vitringa's argument from the Greek names: "These names are all Greek; but we cannot thence infer that the seven were all Hellenists; the apostles Philip and Andrew bore Greek names, but were certainly not Hellenists." The progress in the extension of functions from those at first mainly secular to those spiritual, and then, as the spiritual sphere of work grew, to the diminution, and finally the exclusion of the secular, we believe can also be traced.\* Some of the difficulty that has arisen concerning this passage has come from the attempt of some Roman Catholic expositors to interpret "the serving of tables" as referring to the administration of the Lord's Supper. Far better is the application of the distinction drawn between the two classes of functions pertaining to the diaconate of later times—"functions pertaining to the Order" and "those pertaining to the discipline." To the former belonged their duties in reading the Gospels, assisting at the Lord's Supper, instructing candidates for baptism

\* Schaff's "Hist. of Apostolic Church," p. 134.

and other clerical offices. To the latter the administration of the income, caring for the poor, etc.\* As first instituted, the office was pre-eminently occupied with "functions of the discipline;" those of the "order" were gradually developed until they almost completely displaced those of the discipline, and the difficulty to find the scriptural origin of the diaconate was very natural.

### III.

When we come to the examination of the details of the narrative recorded in Acts vi. a remark of Calvin is in point, as showing the human factor which enters into the determination of the various stages of the development of a Church institution: "It may seem strange," he says, "since it is such an excellent and necessary Church office, why the institution of deacons had not spontaneously occurred to the Apostles, and why the Spirit of God had not given them the advice which they now receive, as though compelled. But what happened was both better at the time, and is more profitable as an example to us at present. For if the Apostles had spoken concerning the election of deacons, before any necessity demanded it, the people would have been less ready to accede, as they would have thought that the Apostles were trying to escape labor and trouble." With the growth of the congregation, the work of the administration, which, in the beginning, had been exceedingly simple, had grown to such proportions, that, if it were to be efficiently rendered, a division and further organization of labor were necessary. There were complaints that important functions of administration were being neglected. Misunderstandings and party jealousies were arising. However unreasonable the demands, there was clearly a foundation of justice at their basis. The influence of the presbyterate was not penetrating the entire mass. The centre had become too remote from the circumference. There were numberless recesses into which the life

\* Encyclopädisches Handbuch der Katholischen Liturgie, Schinke u. Ruehn, Gleiwitz, 1846, p. 255.



of the Church was to be carried and its activity exercised, and its purposes executed, that, under the existing organization, could not be reached. The presbyters would either have to neglect a part of the work to which they had been called and consecrated, and devote their energies to more thorough attention to the new spheres of activity that were opening, or a new class of agents of administration would have to be provided as nerves to bind together the congregation, and as arteries to carry its nourishment to the remotest parts of the body. Such was the origin of the Diaconate. It grew out of the Presbyterate, and to it the presbyters transferred certain duties which, in the earlier form of the congregation, had been directly and immediately and exclusively exercised by themselves. The line of distinction between it and the Presbyterate was clearly drawn, the latter being the *διακονία τοῦ λόγου*, "the ministry of the Word," and the former the *διακονία ἡ καθημερινή*, "the daily ministration," or "every-day ministry." To the former belonged the preaching of the Word; to the latter, all other duties besides the preaching of the Word, from which the Apostles, as presbyters, found it necessary to be released.\* As Bengel says: "There are long discussions concerning the functions of deacons in the Primitive Church; but the matter may be summed up. It was the especial duty of the Apostles, evangelists and bishops to preach God's Word; it was their secondary duty to exercise a kind of fatherly care (for the Church was, at the beginning, like a family) over the sustenance, particularly of the poor, of strangers, of widows, etc. But deacons of both sexes were appointed especially for the same care of the sustenance."

Nevertheless, they were not independent offices, moving on parallel lines. Neither the Presbyterate nor the Diaconate were self-perpetuating Orders. They exercised only representative and delegated, but not transferred functions of the con-

\* An old Puritan writer, Thomas Cartwright, has made the following significant and suggestive reflection on this Apostolic division of labor: "He that shall do both now, must either do none well and profitably, or else he must have greater gifts than the Apostles had." Keble's Notes on Hooker's Ecc. Polity, Book V., Note 24.

gregation. The Power of the Keys belonged to the presbyters, not as presbyters, nor to any and every layman as a spiritual priest, nor to any individual whatever, but to the entire congregation, the entire spiritual priesthood, who, however, could administer it only through their representative or presbyter, who in so doing acts only as their organ or instrument. The presbyter, in the Absolution or Retention, became the mouth-piece of God in so far as he was the mouth-piece of the congregation of believers to which God has given the authority to speak in His name, and in so far as that congregation of believers speaks only that and no more than God has commanded it to speak. So the work of the Diaconate was also a purely representative work. It was the congregation that, in its representative, did the work of the deacon. The work of administration was also subordinate to the work of teaching. No conflict between the two spheres was possible, as the Diaconate was intended simply to relieve the Presbyterate of pressing duties, and the deacons served as the true ministers or hands (from L. *manus*) of the presbyters, i.e., bishops.\* When such labor did not interfere with their duties as public teachers, it was not unlawful for the presbyters to discharge diaconal functions as previously. This may be seen in Acts 11: 30, where it is not to the deacons, but to the presbyters at Jerusalem, that money is sent

\* Since writing the above, we are pleased to find that Bishop Lightfoot, on Philipians, expresses the same opinion concerning ministerial functions: "For communicating instruction, and for preserving public order, for conducting religious worship and for dispensing social charities, it became necessary to appoint special officers. But the priestly functions and privileges of the Christian people are never regarded as transferred or even delegated to these officers. The only priests under the Gospel, designated as such in the New Testament, are the saints, the members of the Christian brotherhood. As individuals, all Christians are priests alike. As members of a corporation, they have their several and distinct offices." P. 185.

"The minister is regarded as a priest, because he is the mouth-piece, the representative, of a priestly race. Such appears to be the conception of Tertullian, who speaks of the clergy as separate from the laity, only because the Church, in the exercise of her prerogative, has for convenience entrusted to them the performance of certain sacerdotal functions belonging properly to the whole congregation. So long as this important aspect is kept in view, so long as the priesthood of the ministry is regarded as springing from the priesthood of the whole body, the teaching of the Apostles has not been directly violated." P. 257.



for the relief of the destitute Christians in Judea. Nor, as the Sermon of St. Stephen shows, was it improper for the deacon, in the absence of presbyters, to undertake the ministry of the Word. The special regard which is had, both in Acts 6: 3 and 1 Tim. 3: 8-11, to the spiritual qualifications of deacons, as well as the fact that the qualifications of the deacons are almost absolutely identical with those of the presbyters, *i.e.*, of the bishops prescribed in 1 Tim. 3, and in Titus 1, clearly indicate that their work was not confined to the administration of the temporalities of the Church, prominent as this was among their duties. Wherever the presbyter required help, there the office of the deacon supplied it. Their work was first to remove the burden of the care of the temporalities off of their shoulders, and then to discharge any spiritual office under their direction that otherwise could not be readily performed. What the Apostolic Constitutions (II. 44) afterwards say of a later period: "Let the deacon be the bishop's ear, and eye, and mouth, and heart, and soul," pertains also to a purer age. The sphere of the deacon's service comprised, more and more, the whole circle of the bishop's activity. Luther, in his sermon on the Epistle for St. Stephen's Day, takes occasion to comment on the true principles determining lay preaching, as that of readiness to preach, wherever any one will hear, and to be silent wherever the Apostles themselves are present to preach.\*

## IV.

The deacons originally were all men. "Look ye out among you seven men," *ἀνδρας ἐπτὰ*, Acts 6: 3. It may seem strange to speak of women as "deacons." But in the development of the organization of the Church there were female deacons before there was the institution of deaconesses. At first a distinction of office was not made according to sex, although there doubtless was a distinction in some of the functions of the office corresponding to the sex of the

one who filled it. There is no such word as *διακονίσσα* in the New Testament. The word *ἡ διάκονος*, "woman deacon," applied to Phoebe, Rom. 16: 1, shows the transition in the office. The noun which in classical Greek is always masculine becomes, as a technical term for the office, common. So it continued also for a time in the Patristic period. Ignatius to the Antiochians (even though genuineness of epistle be questioned) salutes *τάς ἐν χριστῷ διακόνας*. The Church historian, Theodoret, calls Publia, who lived in the time of Julian, "a deacon." Chrysostom, on 1 Tim. 3: 11, interprets "the women" in that passage as *γυναικας διακόνας*. The doubtful writings of Clement of Rome have both *ἡ διάκονος* and *διακονίσσα*. We read, for instance, in the *Apostolic Constitutions* (II. 26): "Let no woman come to the deacon or bishop, *ἄνευ τῆς διακόνου*,—without a woman deacon." A few sentences earlier the bishop is compared to the Father, the *ὁ διάκονος*, or man deacon, to the Son, and the *ἡ διάκονος* to the Holy Ghost. *Ἡ δὲ διάκονος εἰς τύπον τοῦ ἀγίου πνεύματος τετιμήσθω ὑμῖν, μηδὲν ἄνευ τοῦ διακόνου πράττουσα, ἢ φθειγγόμενη.* In Book III., Cap. XV., there is an interesting passage: *Προχίρεισαι δὲ καὶ διάκονον πιστὴν καὶ ἀγίαν . . . Ἔστι γὰρ ὁπόταν ἐν τισιν οἰκίαις ἄνδρα γυναιξὶν οὐ δύναται πέμπειν, διὰ τοῦτ' ἀπίστοις ἀποστελεῖς οὐκ ἁπλῶς διάκονον.* "Choose also a faithful and holy female deacon. . . . For since it sometimes occurs in some houses that it is impossible to send a man deacon to the women, because of the unbelieving, you will appoint a woman deacon." Then it proceeds: "When women are baptized, let the man deacon anoint only their forehead with holy oil," and afterward *ἡ διάκονος ἀλείψει αὐτάς*. In the next chapter, in the directions concerning Baptism: *Βαπτίσεις αὐτοὺς ἐν τῷ ὕδατι. καὶ τὸν μὲν ἄνδρα ὑποδεχέσθω ὁ διάκονος· τὴν δὲ γυναῖκα, ἡ διάκονος.* "You shall baptize them in water; and let the man deacon receive the man, and the woman deacon the woman." Additional passages may be found in Suicer's Thesaurus, I. 864, as well as in a subsequent part of this paper.

\* Erlangen Edition, Luther's Works, Vol. VIII., p. 230.



## V.

But the question here meets us, as to whether *διάκονος* in Rom. 16: 1, actually refers to an office, or whether it may not be used rather in a general sense for "servant," as in Matt. 20: 26; 23: 11; Mark 9: 35. We hold, however, that the word *διάκονος* always implies an official relation. It is not the word to indicate the mere state or relation of a servant; for this is *δοῦλος*, which is a very usual word with St. Paul, as when he begins this epistle with calling himself "the servant of Jesus Christ," and in the sixth chapter he speaks of men in their natural estate being the "servants of sin," and in Eph. 6: 5, and Col. 3: 22, and 1 Tim. 6: 1 he addresses "servants," and bids them be obedient to their masters, and in Phil. 2: 7 he describes the state of humiliation as that of the "form of a servant." On the other hand, *διάκονος* contains two ideas, viz., that of activity and zeal in the performance of duty, and that of executing, by this activity, the will and promoting the interests of another. These ideas are contained in all the thirty passages of the New Testament where it occurs, as well as in the cognate words from the same root. There is always implied the discharge of some particular commission with which the person is entrusted. The only question to be decided in a passage, is as to whether the reference be to a temporary or to a permanent office. Dr. W. L. Alexander, in Kitto's Bible Cyclopædia, rejects the application of "deacon" as a specific office to Phœbe, upon the ground that "for aught the word teaches she may have been the doorkeeper or cleaner of the place where the church assembled." But when we can trace the female diaconate through 1 Tim. 3: 11, directly into the patristic period through the earlier literary monuments of the Church, such explanation seems very unnatural. Much weight is laid by all writers on the Evidences of Christianity upon the famous letter of the younger Pliny to the Emperor Trajan, at the very beginning of the second century, asking advice concerning the treatment of Christians. In a few words

it throws much light upon many most interesting details of the lives of the first members of the Church—their blameless character, their devout assemblies, their Sunday worship, their antiphonal singing, and, especially important here, the institution of the female diaconate. He says that in order to determine whether the charges made by the enemies of the Christians were true, he had examined by torture "two maid-servants which were called ministers," the very word in Latin corresponding to "deacons." Here, then, within half a century of the Epistle to the Romans, we find the office of the female diaconate recognized by those outside the Christian Church, while the passages above quoted concerning the term *ἡ διάκονος* show how firmly it was established at a very early period, and how soon its duties became very clearly and minutely defined. Hence the almost completely unanimous testimony of those who have given any opinion concerning the meaning of the passage.

ORIGEN says: "This passage teaches with Apostolic authority that women are appointed to the ministry in the Church." JEROME: "Just as now among the Orientals, women administer to their own sex in baptism, or in the ministry of the Word, as we have found them privately teaching women." PRIMACIUS, Bishop of Adrametium, who styles himself the pupil of Augustine: "In the ministry, as deaconesses are." THEODORET (457): "Such was the organization of the church at Cenchrea, that it had not only a woman-deacon, but also one both eminent and well-known." ANSELM uses the very same words as Origen. CALVIN: "He commends her first from her office, because she is performing a most honorable and holy ministry in the Church. Not only was it becoming for them to embrace all the members of Christ in love, but those who bear public office in the Church, they ought to honor and advance with peculiar affection." FLACIUS: "They had formerly also deaconesses, chosen for the same care of external things, as was Phœbe." GROTIUS: "In Judea men-deacons could minister also to women; for there was freer access to women than in Greece, where the women's apartments were closed to the men. On this account, the churches in Greece had need of a two-fold aid of women." CALOVIVS: "She was in the ministry of the church at Cenchrea, a little town, distant about 70 stadia from Corinth; not that she preached the word publicly, which the Apostle does not allow to women,

\* Clavis Scr. Sacræ, 233.



but that she gave instruction privately, and that, according to the rite of the Primitive Church, she ministered to the saints in the distribution of alms, and in care for the sick." GERHARD: "This is by no means to be received of the public office of teaching in the church, but of the care of the sick, the poor and strangers."\* QUENSTEDT: "These ecclesiastical female ministers in the Primitive Church were, so to say, the 'subsidiary hands' of the deacons. St. Paul calls them *διακόνους*, Rom. 16: 1; the following Church *δρακονίσσας*."† ZIEGLER: ‡ "Concerning its origin, it is to be observed that this is very ancient, and that deaconesses were appointed already in the Apostolic Church. Paul, in Rom. 16: 1, commends Phœbe as a woman of such ministry. . . . Phœbe, who exercised an ecclesiastical office at that place [Cenchrea], is therefore called by Paul a deacon." BUDDEUS: "It is evident that besides deacons, in the Apostolic Church, there were deaconesses. If this office was not an Apostolic institution, it was certainly approved and confirmed by the Apostles. This can be proved by the example of Phœbe." § BENDEL: "A servant or minister without the office of teacher." BERLEBURG BIBLE: "To be regarded as a deaconess in the special sense of that time, whose office consisted in the instruction of female candidates for baptism in Christian doctrine, distribution alms, waiting on the sick." BAUMGARTEN: "Eine gottesdienstliche Person, so zur Armenpflege und Besorgung anderer äussern Bedürfnisse und Angelegenheiten einer Gemeinde bestellt gewesen." BINTERIM (R. C.): "This appears to me to be the proper origin of deaconesses." || FRITZSCHE: "Who is a deaconess." DE WETTE: "Deaconesses," and then refers to Suicer, Ziegler and Neander on the office. OLSHAUSEN: "ἡ διάκονος, and later ἡ διάκονισσα, designates the female ministers of the Church, whom the rites of the old Church, especially Baptism and the position of women in the East, rendered necessary." NEANDER: "The office of deaconess was instituted in addition to that of deacon, perhaps first in the churches of Gentile Christians. Of its institution and duties in the Apostolic age we have no present information, since we find it explicitly mentioned in only one passage of the New Testament, Rom. 16: 1." ¶ THOLUCK assumes that Phœbe is a deaconess, and continues: "The deaconesses in the churches had the same services to perform as the deacons, except that they chiefly devoted themselves to their own sex. Through their means, Christianity, in its early days, was introduced in an unsuspected way, into the bosom of Gentile families." BESSER: "She was a deaconess there; from this we see that already, under the Church government of

\* Loci Theol. Cotta Ed. XIII. 9.

† Casparis Ziegleri, De Diaconis et Diaconissis Veteris Ecclesiæ. Wittebergæ, 1678, p. 349.

‡ Ecclesia Apostolica, p. 768.

§ Planting and Training of the Chr. Church by the Apostles. Eng. Tr. p. 155.

¶ Antiquitates, I. 95.

|| Denkwürdigkeiten, I. 1: 435.

¶ History of the Apostolic Church, p. 535.

the Apostle Paul, the peculiar gifts of women in the care of the sick, the poor and strangers, were recognized in a special Church office." PHILIPPI: "It is not to be explained as 'up to now' being a deacon, as though Phœbe could not, as a deaconess, have undertaken a journey to Rome, but 'who is a deaconess.' Concerning deaconesses as attendants upon the poor, sick and strangers in the Church, see, etc." VILMAR: "According to this, the diaconate was already extended to women." LANGE: "Who is a deaconess. On the institution of deaconesses, comp. Church History." LÖHE: "Such a deaconess was Phœbe, commended to the Romans by St. Paul,"\* MEYER: "Very groundlessly Lucht, because this service in the Church was of later date, pronounces the words *οὐσαν . . . κεχῆ* not to belong to Paul." LECHLER: "The mention of a woman-deacon, Phœbe, in the church at Cenchrea, presupposes the presence of men-deacons. . . . For the diffusion of the gospel among women, the services of women had to be employed." † ROTHÉ: "Of the existence of these female ministers in Apostolic times, there can be no doubt whatever. Rom. 16: 1, 2 alone would prove it." MOSES STUART: "It should be remembered that in the East, women were not permitted to mix in the society of men. They were kept secluded for the most part in a retired room or *γυναικείον*, to which no stranger would have access. Consequently it became highly important for the Church to have *αἱ διάκονοι*, as well as *οἱ διάκονοι*, in order that the former might look to the females who were indigent or sick." CHALMERS: "Phœbe belonged to the order of deaconesses—in which capacity she had been the helper of many." CHARLES HODGE: "Cenchrea, where a church had been organized, of which Phœbe was a servant, *i.e.*, deaconess. It appears that in the Apostolic Church elderly females were selected to attend upon the poor and sick of their own sex." SHEDD: "Owing to the rigid separation of the sexes, females in the early Church performed the duties of the diaconate, in caring for the sick, poor and strangers of the female portion of the church." SCHAFF: "The existence of deaconesses in the Apostolic Church is placed beyond a doubt by Rom. 16: 1." ‡ BROWN: "That in the earliest churches there were deaconesses to attend to the wants of the female members, there is no good reason to doubt. . . . Indeed, from the relation in which the sexes then stood to each other, something of this sort would seem to have been a necessity." ALFORD: "Deaconess. See 1 Tim. 3: 11, note." References are then made to Pliny, Suicer, Bingham, Neander, etc. GODER: "It has been denied that at so remote a period the office of deaconess could already be in existence. But why if there were deacons, should there not have been from primitive times an office discharged by women, members of the church? With what

\* Aphorismen, I. p. 93.

† Apostol. Zeitalter. p. 362.

‡ History of the Apostolic Church, p. 535.



right can we allege that the office mentioned in 12: 8 belonged only to men? It seems to us impossible to think that the widows spoken of in 1 Tim. 5: 3, *et seq.* were not persons invested with an ecclesiastical office. And in any case, the ministrations of beneficence of a private nature, mentioned in our Epistle (12: 7) must have been carried out in good measure by sisters. And why should not a rich and devoted woman, who had for a time occupied herself with such work, have borne, even without ecclesiastical consecration, the title of deaconess? If our passage had a later origin than the first century, there would certainly have been introduced here, instead of the word *διάκονος* (deacon), which is the masculine term originally applied to both sexes, the feminine title *ιακόνισσα* (deaconess) already in use in the second century. There were so many services to render to the poor, to orphans, to strangers, to the sick which only women could discharge! BISHOP LIGHTFOOT: "The strict seclusion of the female sex in Greece and in some Oriental countries necessarily debarred them from the ministrations of men; and to meet the want, thus felt, it was found necessary at an early date to admit women to the diaconate. A woman-deacon belonging to the church of Cenchrea is mentioned in the Epistle to the Romans, Rom. 16: 1."\* SANDAY: "This is the first reference to women-deacons, in regard to whom instructions are given to Timothy, 1 Tim. 3: 11." SCHULTZE: "As a parallel institution with the male diaconate, there was established already in Apostolic times, although not yet with a fixed form, a female diaconate (*αἱ διάκονοι, διακόνισσαι, ministræ, virginēs*) for the purpose of diaconal ministrations to the female part of the congregation, Rom. 16: 1." SCHÄFER: "We find the office undoubtedly mentioned in the words of commendation of Phœbe sent to Rome." To these we might add the reference in the old Prayer of Consecration of Deaconesses in the Greek Church: † "O Lord, who didst grant the grace of the Holy Spirit to Phœbe chosen to the work of the ministry."

While the number of authorities commending an interpretation does not determine it to be correct, we certainly must have more valid reasons to oppose them than that suggested by the highly-revered pupil and friend of Luther, the Nürnberg pastor, Veit Dietrich, whom Marloratus quotes as saying: "She is called a minister of the Church because she ministered to the saints, whom he here calls by *autonomasia* the Church," *i.e.*, her services rendered a number of individual Christians at

\* Essay on the Christian Ministry, appended to Commentary on Philippians, p. 191.

† Martine, *De Antiquis Ecclesiæ Ritibus*, II: 201.

Cenchrea are her only title to the name "minister," or "deacon of the Church." Nor is the interpretation of Ægidius Hunnius much better: "Of this Church she is called a minister, not by discharging the Ecclesiastical ministry, whose administration belongs only to men, but by ministering to the saints through other honorable offices, and especially by benefiting the ministers of the Church," *i.e.*, she is a minister of the Church by promoting the interests of ministers of the Church! This disposition to deny the New Testament female diaconate may possibly find its explanation in the use which ALTING says that the opponents of the Reformation made of the example of Phœbe, in behalf of the institution of nuns, and the citation of the *προστάτις*, to prove that Phœbe was an Abbess.\* Conybeare and Howson's † doubt on the subject arises from the fact that *διάκονος* is so frequently used in the New Testament in a general and non-technical sense.

## VI.

With the growth of the Church, it had been found, therefore, that there were spheres in its administrative work where even the diaconate could not enter until its scope were enlarged so as to admit of the work of women. The farther Christianity found it necessary to extend its direct work into home and family life, the greater was the demand for such new office. In the neighborhood of Corinth, where the greatest irregularities are reported, the reformatory measures instituted by St. Paul's First Epistle bore their fruits in the carrying out of the principle of Church organization into a new field. Who could discover so well whether "widows were neglected in the daily ministration," as godly women who would go forth upon their missions of inquiry with the commission and authority of the congregation? Even where there would be reluctance and hesitancy to make complaints,

\* Sunt ex Pontificiis, qui eam exemplum faciunt, Monialium in monasterio inclusarum, et quid in Abbatissam, quia *προστάτις*.

† Life and Epistles of St. Paul, I. 435.



or a positive effort to hide sorrow from others, the quick eye and delicate sensibility of such a representative would at once learn the true condition, while the men-deacons would have to follow a prolonged process of investigation to reach the same result. Who could discern so well the peculiar necessities of family life and provide for them with such versatile tact as those whom God has especially appointed as the guardians of homes? Who could sympathize with sorrow so deeply, and bring to sufferers the consolations of the Gospel so well as that portion of the Christian congregation who themselves are the greatest sufferers? On some crowded thoroughfare, on a railway or a vessel, at the present day, let there be some sudden distress, an infant perhaps overtaken by the shadow of death, or a helpless stranger separated by some accident from her friends. Who are the first to rush to the relief of the afflicted one, and use every effort to assuage the sorrow, if it cannot be removed? If, then, it is to be an especial office of the Church to bring relief to the suffering bodies of men as well as for their souls, to provide for the widows, and the fatherless, and the stranger, she must use those of her members as her agents in this work who are best fitted by natural endowments and sanctified experience for this ministry. Those who still remember the horrors of our Civil War, with its wholesale slaughter and its daily sacrifices of the youth of our country, may recall many a hospital scene, where the presence of a godly woman amidst the scenes of torture brought comfort and peace beyond the best efforts of surgeon or nurse or chaplain. Who, too, could show better credentials, not only of success in the performance of the very duties which were to belong to the office, but also of the Lord's approval and endorsement of their employment in it? New as the office was to women, the work of the office was not new. Every wife who is diligent in her family duties, every mother who sacrifices herself to the interests of her children, is doing the work, even though she have not the office. Such women have all the distinguishing characteristics of a deacon, viz.: intense activity in order to benefit those to whose lives

they have made their own subordinate and subservient. From the very beginning of the Christian Dispensation women had been discharging unofficially these various duties. The extension of the diaconate only reduced to order and system what had already existed, and defined more clearly its relations to other spheres of labor. It followed the rule which belongs to all extensive Church work. Individuals first freely and spontaneously offer their services and use their gifts in answer to urgent demands made as emergencies arise. But as the work grows, it can no longer be pursued as a side avocation, but must be administered by those who concentrate upon it all their energies, and devote to it all their lives, and who, if need be, while they withdraw from other pursuits, are sustained in it by the Church. When there is a necessity for the permanent establishment of any office in the Church, the time comes, sooner or later, for its separation from other duties. With the growth of the functions of the office, as they are faithfully discharged, other occupations must necessarily be displaced and foregone.

We need only review the life of our Lord, as given by the Evangelists, and we can clearly see the first traces of this office, as it begins to appear in the spontaneous services of devout women. Especially significant, as foreshadowing it, is the statement in Luke 8: 1-3 concerning Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Susanna, and many other women who "ministered," *διακόνουν*, of their substance, as He went throughout every city, preaching the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. It was the same work which the angels did when, after His temptation, they "ministered," *διακόνουν*, unto Him, Matt. 4: 11; and which they still render, as sent forth *εἰς διακονίαν*, to minister to the heirs of salvation, Heb. 2: 14. It was truly a like diaconal work that was rendered when the woman broke the alabaster box of ointment in the house of Simon, over the feet of our Lord, and by her silent sympathy touched the heart of her Saviour. It was truly a like diaconal work to look for the sepulchre of Christ and prepare the spices for His burial. So also was it, with the angels, to be early at the sepulchre, and



to become the first messengers to bear the tidings of the Gospel of the Resurrection to the despondent band of disciples—not heralding it in the public assembly, but, in private, committing it to those who were to become its great apostles. Dorcas, with her fulness of good works, and Priscilla, with her private instruction given Apollos, both perform diaconal functions before the office was created. If the sphere of Christian women be exclusively that of family life, these various incidents of the New Testament are entirely inexplicable.

## VII.

But when Rom. 16:1 expressly mentions Phœbe as a deacon, it by no means intends that the duties of the two classes of deacons exactly coincided. Each discharged the duties of the same office with reference to the sphere determined by the sex. The female diaconate was instituted to perform duties which men could not successfully undertake, and left to the male deacons the entire field which, by the limitations of their sex, women could not cultivate. It was no more part of the office of Phœbe to preach, as under certain circumstances Stephen and Philip did, than it was the part of the office of the latter to make coats and garments, as did Dorcas. If the preaching of even the male deacon was, only as an exception, allowable in the absence of the presbyter, the preaching of the female deacon was absolutely out of question in the light of such general rules as those of 1 Cor. 4:34; 1 Tim. 2:12. So, according to 1 Tim. 2:8, "I wish that the men, *ἄνδρες*, pray everywhere," were the public prayers of women in mixed assemblies. As early as the beginning of the Third century the Cataphrygians, a Montanistic sect, whom both Augustine and Epiphanius refute, thought that they could find in the example of Phœbe an argument for the preaching of women. The fact is thus overlooked, as it is also by some who on the other side argue against the New Testament Female Diaconate, that there are other very important functions of the ministry, besides those of public teaching

and prayer. In the ecclesiastical development of the Female Diaconate this principle was carefully observed, and the resources of the ministry of women richly and legitimately unfolded from this beginning. If there is any one thing on which the testimony of the Church succeeding the Apostles is clear, it is that of the prohibition of public teaching by women. Even Tertullian, with his Montanistic tendency, speaks in unmeasured terms: "The very women of these heretics, how wanton they are! For they are bold enough to teach, to dispute, to enact exorcisms, to undertake cures—even to baptize."\* "It is not permitted to a woman to speak in the church; but neither is it to teach, nor to baptize, nor to offer, nor to claim for herself a lot in any manly function, not to say in any sacerdotal office."† So the Council of Carthage decreed: "Let not a woman, however learned and holy, presume to teach men in an assembly."‡ The "Apostolic Constitutions" which afford so much material concerning the male and female diaconates, pronounce baptism by women as "dangerous," "wicked," "impious," and continues: "This is one of the ignorant practices of gentile atheism, to ordain women priests."§

It cannot, indeed, be justly claimed that all the offices subsequently rendered by ecclesiastical female deacons were in the Apostolic church already afforded; for this would be to deny the principle of the legitimate development of Church Institutions. But if in the subsequent period we find the female deacons, or deaconesses, active in the preparations for the baptism of women, in all family and household commissions of the bishop, in all communications between the bishop and female members of the Church, in keeping the doors of the houses of worship, in finding places for the women at the public services, holding a position even above the widows,|| and especially active in the care of the poor and sick and strangers,

\* De Præscriptione, Cap. xli.

† De Velandis Virginibus, Cap. ix.

‡ Can. 99.

§ Book III, chap. ix.

|| Ap. Con. iii. 7: Σεμνὴς οὖν δεῖ εἶναι τὰς χήρας, πειθομένους τοῖς ἐπισκόποις καὶ τοῖς πρεσβυτέροις καὶ τοῖς διακόνους, ἔτι μὴν καὶ ταῖς διακόνους.



we may infer that in the earlier period the germs of these forms of activity, if not the most of them, were already exercised. Light is thrown upon the nature of their duties by the requirements in 1 Tim. 3, which we have yet to notice.

## VIII.

What has been said concerning the diaconal office as rooted in the congregation pertains also to the Female Diaconate in particular. St. Paul commends Phœbe as "a deacon of the church which is at Cenchrea." It is not an office which she has assumed for herself, or one transmitted by external succession from other deacons; but the local congregation at Cenchrea has called her, and set her apart to this work. She has thus become, and remains, even while at Rome, an officer of the Cenchrean church, who by her services is devoted to advance the interests of her home congregation. The Female Diaconate of the New Testament is thus a purely congregational office. This by no means impugns the Diaconate of later days, where, according to the principle of congregational development, an assembly of congregations or representatives of congregations could, with equal propriety, consecrate persons to this service. Nor, in the lack of such provision, does it prevent any association of believers from entering upon the same work; just as the carrying on of foreign missions by societies has to be gratefully recognized and used when the Church, as an organization, is not prepared to enter into this work with any degree of efficiency. The form which the congregation has assumed, in the course of time, in its development from the New Testament congregation, must not be made the absolute standard of all congregational or Church modes of procedure. Any assembly of believers, united to provide for the administration of the gospel, is competent to take measures for the conduct of such work, provided it be done with due regard to the interests of all other established congregations. The female deacon, being thus a congregational officer, must not be esteemed a mere nurse or teacher

or guardian. It is not a secular, but a spiritual office which she fills, even though the office deal largely with secular matters. A Deaconess Institute is not a training-school for nurses, but has as distinct reference to spiritual and Church work as a Theological Seminary has.

But while it was originally a congregational office, it did not even then limit its administration to purely congregational work. As the diaconate was intended to render the presbyterate or episcopate more efficient by enabling the presbyter to act through the deacon; so whatever was the locality in which the presbyter-bishop had work, he had his deacons, whether male or female, at hand, to be his agents or adjutants, his "ear and eye and mouth and heart and soul." If we remember, then, that every congregation was a centre of missionary operations extending far beyond itself, that every presbyter was an aggressive missionary, and that some presbyters were at the same time apostles, we will see that the sphere of the activity of the deacon widened with that of his presbyter. The deacons could at any time be detached from their local work, and dispatched upon some special commission connected with the missionary or apostolic work of their presbyter. So Phœbe was sent to Rome. There seems to be no reason for discrediting the note, not indeed belonging to the text, found at the end of the Epistle, and attested by the universal tradition: "It was written to the Romans from Corinth through Phœbe, the deacon of the church at Cenchrea," *i. e.*, as interpreted by Luther, followed by our English version: "Sent to the Romans from Corinth by Phœbe." It was thus to the Female Diaconate that St. Paul entrusted the carrying of the Epistle, which was to be the great foundation of the Church's teaching throughout all ages concerning the central doctrines of sin and grace. In whose hands could it have been protected more carefully than in those of a consecrated woman, from all the perils of the journey?

Nor must the side-light thrown upon the character of the office by the statement that Phœbe was a *προσδύτις* to many,



be disregarded. It cannot be shown that this is the word for any technical office, as some have suggested that she may have been the abbess of a cloister, and others that she was a lady president of the Cenchrean church. The analogy of the masculine form; *προστάτης*, in later Greek, will not hold. She could not have been the "president" or "ruler" of many, because she could not have been the "president" or "ruler" of the Apostle. The sense is general. She is one ever standing before (*πρό* and *ἰστημι*) him, ready to run forth upon any errand, —one in the front rank when any commission was to be discharged. She was not merely a *παραστάτις*, or "stand-by," which pastors at the present day find in some godly women; more than this, she was a *προστάτις*. Chrysostom uses the same word in a similar connection, and with probable reference to this passage: *Προστάτις ἡμῶν ἔστιν ἡ δυνάτις χήρα*.\*

Nor was her mission at Rome complete with the delivery of the Epistle. Her business may have been in part private; but as the request to aid her in attending to it is addressed to the entire church at Rome, it seems far more probable that she had work to do for the church at Corinth, or its sea-port, Cenchrea. The participle *οἰσαν* indicates that her office as deacon for the congregation at Cenchrea has not ceased, but continues as she goes to Rome. Who can tell what members of the churches from the neighborhood of Corinth had wandered to Rome, and what were their circumstances in the metropolis and capital of the world? Who can know the dangers to which female members of the churches of the Corinthian region were exposed by the temptations to return to the vices for which Corinth, above all other places, was famous, and where the standard of morality had been so completely perverted that Paul's first epistle written to the Corinthians shows that the entire church was inclined to condone as a pardonable offence what was in fact a flagrant crime? Female converts from such a place certainly needed the continued care and guardianship of those through whom they had been brought to Christ, when, as Corinthians, they

\* Works, Migne Ed. III: 372.

came and were known in that collection of the dregs of the Empire and fosterer of its corruption, which the cotemporary Roman writers, Juvenal\* and Tacitus† describe Rome then to have been. Who can tell what cases of distress she had not to search out diligently, or what cares for unprotected sisters of the church she bore upon her heart? Who can tell what duties she had to discharge, like those of Onesiphorus, who, when in Rome, refreshed by his repeated visits to the prison the languishing soul of Paul? Or what information she may have been gathering, or errands discharging in the metropolis, for the use of the home congregations or any of its members, under the peculiar emergencies that may have arisen? As one continuing to be a deacon of the congregation, she must have been engaged chiefly in Church work, and that, too, Church work largely among the Christian women in or from the home church.

When the Romans, therefore, are exhorted to receive her in the Lord, the reference is to her not so much as a private member as in her official position. They are to receive her, first, because she is a deacon, and, secondly, because in this office she has proven herself so faithful. The cordiality of the reception is made especially emphatic by the use of the word employed in Luke 2: 25-38; Tit. 2: 13; Acts 23: 21; Luke 12: 36, etc., for "wait for," "long for," "expect," "anticipate the coming of." Although the Female Diaconate is not an essential, but an accidental feature of the Church, nevertheless, when by the leadings of Providence it comes to us, it is not only to be welcomed, but every means employed to promote its work and efficiency.

#### IX.

While Rom. 16: 1, 2, is the only passage in the New Testament in which the Female Diaconate is directly mentioned, the review of evidence which has been made in the prepara-

\* Satire III. 62 sqq.

† Annals XV. 44: "Quo cuncta undique atrocia aut pudenda confluunt celebranturque."



tion of this paper leads us clearly to the conviction that 1 Tim. 3: 11 also refers to the same subject. Previously we felt a difficulty in finding any "deaconesses" in the passage. We reasoned that verses 8-10 treat of "deacons," and as verses 12, 13 are on the same subject, it would be very unnatural to find a verse interjected concerning the Female Diaconate. But when we find that in the New Testament and early patristic usage *διάκονος* is of the common gender, this argument at once disappears. Verses 8-13 do not treat of two different offices, but of one and the same office with respect to the two classes of men-deacons and women-deacons. Far more unnatural would it have been, right in the midst of the enumeration of the qualifications of deacons, to have inserted the qualifications of their wives. Huther's suggestion that it was because the wives of deacons had to lend a helping hand in the care of the sick is altogether inadequate and unsatisfactory. We can best illustrate the construction and argument by the following table:

[Ἄνδρας] ὡσαύτως	Διάκονους,
σεμνούς	Γυναῖκας ὡσαύτως
μὴ διλόγους	σεμνάς
μὴ οἰνῷ πολλῷ προσέχοντας	μὴ διαβόλους
μὴ αἰσχροπερθεῖς	νηφαλίους
	πιστάς ἐν πᾶσι.

The masculine form of the adjective in verse 8 restricts the first application to the men-deacons as effectually as though ἄνδρας were expressed. In verse 11 the *γυναῖκας* stands in parative apposition to *διάκονους* of verse 8. The construction and expression are both, as has been seen above, not unusual in the earlier fathers. The repetition of the *ὡσαύτως* adds to the argument. It disjoins and sets in contrast the two classes, like a pair of adversative conjunctions. The thought is "not only must the men, but the women-deacons must also be grave." Let a Church writer to whom the Greek language was vernacular be heard on this point. Chrysostom says: *Γυναῖκας ὡσαύτως διάκονους φησὶ σεμνάς, μὴ διλόγους,\* νηφαλίους πιστάς ἐν*

\* Wrong reading.

πᾶσι. *Τινές ἀπλῶς περὶ γυναικῶν εἰρησθαι τοῦτο φασιν, οὐκ ἔστι δέ. Τί γὰρ ἐβούλετο μεταξὺ τῶν εἰρημένων παραβαλεῖν τι περὶ γυναικῶν; ἀλλὰ περὶ τῶν τὸ αξίωμα τῆς διακονίας ἔχουσῶν λέγει. "Let women deacons," he says, 'likewise be grave, not double-tongued, temperate, faithful in all things.' Some say that he is speaking concerning women absolutely. But this is not possible; for what would he have meant by inserting something concerning women right in the midst of what is being said? He is speaking, however, concerning those having the dignity of the diaconate."*

We find in verse 11 an enumeration of the qualifications of those who are to be entrusted with the Female Diaconates: 1. Like the male deacons, they must be noted for their gravity. There is an especial reason for the repetition of these qualifications. Whatever allowances may be made for her weakness as a private Christian, no light, frivolous, trifling person is to be admitted. The earnestness and seriousness of the deacon must impress itself upon all about her. She must be one who both herself is full of the spirit of reverence and is revered by others. 2. In the second qualification of each of the classes we find a delicate suggestion of diverse faults of the two sexes. In both cases the qualification has to do with the control of the tongue. The men-deacons must not be "double-tongued," *μὴ διλόγους*; the women-deacons not slanderers, "devils," *μὴ διαβόλους*. The faults of men in this respect are more those of deliberation; the faults of women those of impulse. The former class are apt to have the tongue under control, but shrewdly use it as unscrupulous politicians and tradesmen to deceive, speaking one thing to one man and another to another, one thing at one time and another at another, now flattering and then assailing as the short-sighted policy of worldly prudence demands, Prov. 20: 14. If such men are to be rejected, in selecting persons to be men-deacons, and especial pains be taken to fill the office with men of their word, a corresponding care must be taken to exclude from the Female Diaconate all such as are explicitly mentioned in 1 Tim. 4: 13, i.e., "those who "wander about from house to house, tattlers,



busybodies, speaking things which they ought not." The women-deacons must have learned and become examples of the golden virtue of silence, and be careful to speak evil of no one except when official warning must be given. "Woman is more disposed than man to become a member of a school for scandal. The same love of prattle further leads to the blurring out of secrets that ought not to be told."\* The work of the Female Diaconate, leading them into the homes of the members of the congregation, gave them peculiar opportunities for observation and gathering information as well as peculiar temptations to impart this knowledge to eager and officious listeners. If the Female Diaconate was to be an efficient agency in the Church, it had to be raised above the danger of having in its ranks any women afflicted with this not uncommon disease. 3. Corresponding to the requirement of the men-deacons; "Not given to much wine," that of the women-deacons is "sober." In the former class, it is more external sobriety, temperance in drink, that is emphasized, while in the latter sobriety of spirit is made more prominent. Let them be women who are calm and collected in spirit, not given to extremes or exaggerations in judgment and language, dispassionate, circumspect, discriminating. Temperance in drink is not excluded; but while intemperance in man is more apt to assume the form of bodily intoxication, that in women is more characterized by excesses in thought and expression. 4. The prohibition of the disgraceful pursuit of gain on the part of men is balanced by the requirement of fidelity in all things on the part of the women-deacons. The collection and distribution of the alms of the Church were incumbent chiefly on the men-deacons, and temptations to misuse or misappropriate them would, therefore, be found chiefly here. But among the female deacons, infidelity could more readily assume a variety of forms, from mere carelessness and indolence on the one side, to the betrayal of important interests by indiscretions in word and work, and hence the wider sweep of the requirement. She must be one who, by long experience, has been proved to

\* Martensen's Ethics, Eng. Edition, II., 16.

be thoroughly trustworthy, as St. Paul had found Phœbe to be.

All these qualifications must form a directory to the Church for all time concerning what is to be demanded of those who are to be invested with official position. What is expected in general of every believing member of the Church is to be intensified or concentrated in its officers. No Christian man is to be given to much wine, or to be double-tongued, or to be greedy of filthy lucre; but if allowances are made for peculiar cases of weakness, these allowances are not admissible when considering their qualifications for the Diaconate. No Christian woman, without contradicting her profession, can be a slanderer, or extravagant in thought and judgment, or untrustworthy. But if allowances be made for peculiar cases of weakness, all these allowances must be dismissed when we are considering applicants or looking for candidates for the Female Diaconate.

Such is the positive argument for the reference of this passage to the women-deacons. It was satisfactory, so far as we know, to the entire Ancient Church. Theodoret, *e.g.*, follows Chrysostom in unmistakable words: *Γυναῖκας, τοῦτέστι διακόνους*. "Women, that is, deacons." So Anselm: "*Mulieres, id est, Diaconissæ*." Grotius refers to this: "Supply *διακόνους*, which, being common to the clauses, must be repeated, as Chrysostom, Œcumenius and Theophylact correctly saw. For that women also were deacons may be seen from Rom. 16: 1." So in more recent times Mosheim, De Wette, Wiesinger, Philippi,\* Ellicott, Alford and Bernard Weiss. The application to women in general has been refuted already by the difficulty which Chrysostom expresses. A more current view is that of Luther's German version, followed by the English of Tyndale, Coverdale, etc., and finally given in our Authorized Version, which translates: "Even so must their wives be grave." As it is the general belief that Luther translated his New Testament from the second edition of Erasmus' Greek Testament of 1519, a reference to this edition shows that in this

\* *Kirchliche Glaubenslehre*, V., 3: 290.



rendering Luther simply follows Erasmus' Latin translation of the Vulgate, given in a parallel column to the Greek text, where Erasmus has given "*Uxores*," "wives," instead of "*Mulieres*," "women." Erasmus' paraphrase of 1521 further explains this: "He is requiring the like modesty and integrity of the wives of bishops and deacons." Calvin and Calovius have since then argued for the same interpretation. The strength of this argument may be estimated from the explanation of the context by the latter, that since the Apostle has laid down the requirement concerning bishops that they are to be the husbands of one wife, and is about to make the same requirement of deacons, he prefaces it with a statement of the qualifications needed in the wives of both. Bengel resorts to a very singular construction, in behalf of the application of the passage to the wives of deacons, when he says that *γυναῖξας* is governed by *ἔχοντας* of v. 9. This would require the translation: "Having the mystery of the faith, and having wives grave, not false accusers, etc." The omission of the *αὐτῶν* is certainly an important consideration to be taken into account in the decision of this question. Van Oosterzee seeks to escape the difficulty by understanding the *γυναῖξας* of the wives of deacons who were at the same time deaconesses,\* while Fairbairn in his perplexity concludes: "Possibly it was so put as intentionally to include the women of both classes; at once wives to the deacons, who occasionally shared with their husbands in diaconal ministrations, and women who were themselves charged by the Church with such ministrations. Anyhow, it ought to be understood of women who, in the one character or the other, were actively engaged in the kind of work which was proper to deacons."

\* Ziegler, *De Diaconis et Diaconissis Vet. Ecclesiae*, Witt. 1678, p. 348, shows that the wives of deacons were sometimes called deaconesses, just as the wife of the presbyter was known as *presbytera* and the wife of the *episcopus* as *episcopa*. Thus, Canon of Council of Turin (A.D. 398): "Si inventus fuerit presbyter cum suâ presbytera, aut diaconus cum suâ diaconissâ, aut subdiaconus cum suâ subdiaconissâ, annum integrum, excommunicatus habetur."

## X.

The subject of the Female Diaconate in the New Testament we believe to be exhausted with the consideration of these two passages, Rom. 16: 1, 2; 1 Tim. 3: 11. Many identify with it the institution of "widows" of 1 Tim. 5: 9 sqq. We are fully convinced that in their origin they are entirely distinct institutions. The confusion between them we believe to be readily explicable, although it is very difficult to separate the threads of their historical development. In an examination of the subsequent history, the principle of the development of both offices must be carefully observed. As the deacons of the New Testament are not exactly the deacons or deaconesses, so also the "widows" of the New Testament are not exactly the "widows" of several centuries later. If, as the stream of time is followed, the offices merge, or the one supplants the other, this condition must not be transferred and read into the New Testament.

The following considerations we believe decide the question:

1. In this passage St. Paul is not dealing with the qualifications and duties of Church officials. To this subject he had devoted chapter 3: 1-13. In chapter 5, he is instructing Timothy concerning his treatment of different classes of persons in the Church, *viz.*, aged men, aged women, younger women and widows. What is said concerning an institution of widows enters as supplementary to what is said of widows in general, in verses 3-8. In verse 9, he speaks of a particular class of widows, who are enrolled or entered upon a list, *λίσσα καταλεγέσθω*, *i.e.*, catalogued, and concerning whom special requirements are made, "not less than sixty years old," the widow of but one husband, a mother, prominence in works of mercy. The support and aid of the Church are to be freely given even those not on such list; for its aid is never to be withheld from any of its members in actual want. But from the destitute women, a number is to be selected for permanent



support; and the position is raised above the character of pure charity and any beneficiary relation, by the strictness of the requirements for entrance exalting it to a post of rare honor. The subsequent development shows that, from the beginning, certain duties were connected with the institution, which were assigned to it not so much for the work's sake, as for the employment and dignity of the widows themselves, whose declining years were soothed by the consolation that they were still useful, and that they had a field of labor before them until the end of life. If, as some think, Tit. 2: 3, 4 refers to this institution, it is perfectly consistent with the employments of the "widows" in the period which immediately followed.

But how confused the arrangement, if St. Paul had treated of women-deacons in one verse of chapter 3, and recurred to them after such a long digression; or if, as some would affirm, he passed them by entirely when treating of the men-deacons and bishops, *i.e.*, of all other church officers, and then introduced them at this place!

2. The age of the widows, "not less than sixty," would have disqualified them from that active service, which the office of the woman-deacon demanded. That, after such limit, service could be efficiently rendered among us, cannot be denied; for it is not unusual to find vigorous women of sixty. But in the East the powers of life are sooner exhausted; and, most important of all, it is not simply that the incumbents of the position, but that the very youngest members, the novices who have to familiarize themselves with the duties, and on whom the chief strain of the work must rest, are all over sixty. There are absolutely no young or middle-aged members who may be depended on for that occupation of intense activity denoted by the word "deacon" (probably from *διώζω*, "to pursue," "to run after," "to set in quick motion," "to hurry").\*

\* Contrast this requirement of activity with the regulation of the Apostolic Constitutions for the "widows": "Let her sit in her house, and not enter into the houses of the faithful under any pretext; for the altar of God never runs about, but is fixed in one place." (Book III., § 6).

3. The provision for the "widows" is mainly beneficiary. But there is no such indication concerning the women-deacons. The opinion generally entertained concerning Phœbe, while not expressed in Rom. 16, is not foreign to the text, and may be regarded, as in the highest degree probable, that it was by the liberal use of her wealth she had benefited St. Paul and many at Cenchrea. She has certainly no need of pecuniary assistance from the Christians at Rome. In entire harmony with this conception of Phœbe, is the fact that some of the women deacons of the later period are from the higher and wealthier classes. Thus Palladius, in his life of Chrysostom, speaks of *κόσμαι γυναῖκες ἐκ γένους ὑπάτων, διδόνουσι τῆς Κωνσταντινουπολιτῶν ἐκκλησίας*, "honorable women from the rank of the nobility, deacons of the Church of Constantinople," who were forced to give Arsacius two hundred litres of gold. Such persons would have been excluded from the institution of widows, as the enrolment of the widows was by a selection from those without near relatives to support them.

4. Phœbe may or may not have been a widow in the wide sense of the term. The freedom with which she traveled from Cenchrea to Rome, and moved about there upon the errands with which she was charged, is generally thought to prove that she was a widow of at least middle life, if not older. There is certainly nothing inconsistent with the diaconate in the estate of widowhood. The question is not as to whether widows could be deacons, but as to whether the specific institution of widows of 1 Tim. 5 was the same as the diaconate, or whether none but widows could be deacons. But when, at the very beginning of the Second Century, about forty years after 1 Timothy was written, we find the first allusion to women-deacons in uninspired writings in Pliny's letter, as *duo ancillæ*, it becomes manifest that these deacons were not exclusively widows, and certainly could not have been over sixty years of age.

Some learned advocates of the view from which we dissent have found it necessary to concede that the deaconesses must have included those not widows. But how forced, then,



becomes the interpretation when the institution of widows of 1 Tim. 5 is interpreted as including those not real widows, may be seen from several examples. Thus the Roman Catholic writer, Binterim\*: "What the Apostle says in 1 Tim. 5: 9 pertains to our deaconesses; he calls those previously married and those not actually married by the same expression—'widows.' Those whom the Apostle here calls younger widows were in my opinion virgins." So the learned Cotelier,† also Roman Catholic: "That virgins, or women who do not have a husband, are embraced in the appellation 'widows,' is evident from Javolenus: 'Labeo says that a widow is not merely one who was once married, but also one who has not had a husband, because widows are so called, after the analogy of *vecors*, *vesanus*, i.e., one without a heart, and without sanity; so a widow, *vidua*, is one *sine duitate*, without duality.' A virgin of advanced age may therefore be regarded a widow."

Such is the consequence of insisting upon the identity of the two institutions, and trying to reconcile the overwhelming patristic testimony concerning the virginity of some of the deaconesses with the Scriptural account of the widows. Ignatius to the Smyrnæans speaks indeed of *τάς παρθένους τάς λεγομένας χήρας*, "virgins called widows." This can, however, be better explained as referring not to the institution of widows, but to that of deaconesses, who probably were so largely taken from widows, that, by an ordinary figure of speech, those not widows among the deaconesses could readily have received the name. Tertullian certainly writes afterwards with great indignation at the enrollment of a virgin of twenty years old in the institution of widows. The term "virgin-widow," he writes, is a monstrosity. He says that if there had been need of provision for her support, it could have been made otherwise than by doing defiance to the clear statements of Scripture concerning the qualifications of those who are to be in the order of widows.‡ But, on the other hand, the Apostolic Constitutions

\* Denkwürdigkeiten der Christ-Katholischen Kirche, I. 436.

† SS. Patrum qui temporibus Apostolicis floruerunt opera, Amstelodami, 1724, I., 38, note.

‡ On the Veiling of Virgins, Chap. IX.

directly prescribe: "Let the deaconess be a pure virgin, or, at the least, a widow who has been but once married."\* The sister of Gregory of Nyssa was both a virgin and a deaconess.

As time advanced, it became more and more difficult to separate the institutions. Their duties gradually blended, and their original separation was forgotten. But this separation was still observed in the time of Chrysostom. His biographer, Palladius, refers to a memorable occasion when, "having entered the baptistery, he called for Olympias,† a constant attendant, *ἀναπύλληκτον*, of the Church, and, at the same time, Pentadia and Procla, the *deacons*, and Silvina, wife of the blessed Nebridius, who adorned her *widowhood* with honor and modesty."‡ In his Homilies on Corinthians he enumerates distinct classes or orders within the Church, as bishops, presbyters, deacons, virgins, the continent and widows, *ὡσπερ γὰρ ἐπισκόπους καὶ πρεσβυτέρους καὶ διακόνους καὶ παρθένους καὶ ἐγκρατευομένους ἀριθμῶ, τὰ μέλη τῆς ἐκκλησίας καταλέγων, οὕτω καὶ χήρας*. Nor could any statement be clearer as to the separation of the institution of widows from diaconal functions, and the devotion of its members entirely to the offices of worship. He tries to soothe their sensitiveness about being objects of charity, by protesting that they are not such, and maintains that they actually accomplished much by their prayers and songs. If such worship would have had no other end than support, they would have sought this by other means, as they might do as well by begging in the market-place and streets. When some were enrolled who were able to support themselves, he protests against it as unlawful. From this passage he maintains that the reason why sixty years is made the limit, is due to the fact that, while youth is an ocean tossed by various winds, at sixty the harbor of peace is at last reached. He contends that there is no absolute prohibition for the admission of younger widows; that the command binds Timothy, but not the widows, i.e., Timothy was not to propose or encourage their enrollment, as

\* Book VI, § 617.

† Sozomen says that she was a *young* widow who became a deaconess, VIII. 9.

‡ Chrysostom's Works, Migne Edition, p. 90.



this might give offence and cause scandal; but if young widows were resolved upon entering themselves on the list, it could be done. This plea we do not regard as admissible; but, however that may be, the restriction of the text, in his view, to widows is established. So the Apostolical Constitutions, Book III, after devoting the first sections to the qualifications and duties of "widows," does not reach the subject of deaconesses until Section 15.

The canons also throw light on the subject. The Council of Chalcedon (451) declares "that a woman shall not be ordained Deaconess under forty years of age," thus clearly separating the office from that of the institution of widows, with its limit at sixty. The Trullan Council (692) made forty the age for a deaconess, and *sixty that for a widow*, thus placing itself clearly upon the distinction that has been traced. The decree of Theodosius fixing forty as the age for a deaconess only shows that the confusion had already made great progress, while the subsequent legislation of Justinian, reverting to the limit of forty, shows that the confusion was not as yet permanently established.

The entire subject is a most interesting one, opening up a wide field for historical research in the writings of the early Church, which have not yet been thoroughly and satisfactorily explored for the light on this point that may there be found. The statements of text-books should not be accepted without a careful sifting of their evidence.\* The summary of Uhlhorn is suggestive, and is in the main no doubt correct, although, from evidence above given, we cannot admit that Ignatius knew nothing of women-deacons: "The development of female ministration was in its larger features probably as follows: that of two institutions existing in the Apostolic age, viz.: those of widows and deaconesses, the latter for a long period entirely disappeared. In both the East and West only widows are met with. Then, at the end of the third century, the institution of deaconesses again emerges in the East, and attains a maturity and dissemination which it never before

\* Christian Charity in the Ancient Church, p. 165 sq. (Eng. Transl.)

possessed, while the Western Church, in which the need of a female diaconate was not nearly so great as in the Eastern, did not accept the institution of deaconesses, at least as a generally diffused one, but kept to that of widows, which certainly was soon afterwards vitiated, and was never of much importance in the matter of charity. Deaconesses have everywhere disappeared, though we everywhere meet with widows, who, supported by the Church, occupy a position of honor therein, and at the same time render it their services. This is evidently the same institution with which 1 Tim. 5 makes us acquainted."

The reasons for the early discontinuance of the institution of "women-deacons" in the West are not difficult to determine:

1. Bishop Atto of Vercelli (d. 960), in a passage quoted by Ducange \* gives one reason: "The women-deacons (*diaconæ*) had the office of ministering or baptizing, an office now no longer expedient. For, on account of the religious devotion of their parents, infants are now baptized at such an early age, that no modesty can hinder them, or no impure thought occur to those who baptize. Hence, the rule now is that no woman shall dare to assume the office of baptizing." It is too much, indeed, to affirm that they baptized except in case of necessity; but from an early period they had certain clearly-defined offices to perform in connection with the baptism of women, by immersion, of course, with the accompanying chrism over the whole person. As Adult Baptism became rarer, when, in its more settled condition, the children of the Church were brought to baptism in infancy, and sprinkling in the West replaced immersion in the East, this office of the deaconess lost its importance. So also with the work of instruction of female candidates for baptism, their offices were not as urgent.

2. The cases of physical distress among the early Christians became less numerous when the persecutions ceased and Christianity became the State religion. The care of the poor became the work of the State, and the Church gradually

\* Glossarium Mediæ et Infimæ Latinitatis, II. 834.



relinquished this portion of her former activity. When this occurred she would naturally have little use for those who had previously been her almoners among the women of the Church.

3. The seclusion of women in the East would lose its force as an argument for the female diaconate, as the Church extended westward.

4. The diaconate as exercised by men had greatly changed its character. So completely was the occasion of its original institution lost sight of, that the contrast between the functions of the diaconate described in Acts 6 and the duties afterwards performed by the office, forms the main argument by which the identification of the "seven" is attacked. The care of the poor gradually passed from their hands, and they were occupied largely in the public services of the Church.\* They assisted in the administration of the Lord's Supper, especially in giving the cup, reading the gospel, recited the prayers, presented the offerings, made the general arrangements for the order of the worship, as well as administered the discipline of the Church. The week-day services were sometimes entirely under their care. They baptized in some places, suspended the inferior clergy, and acted for their bishops at Synods. The diaconate thus became more and more regarded as a preparatory grade to the office of presbyter. The deacons were no longer, as in Acts, elected by the people, but appointed immediately by the bishop. They were no longer ministers of the congregation, but of the bishop. But the female diaconate, however, could not keep pace with this development, which made such advances that the identity of the institution with that of Acts 6 began to be questioned.† Some

\* Hooker explains this: "Tract of time having clean worn out those first occasions for which the deaconship was then most necessary, it might the better be afterwards extended to other services, and so remain, as at the present day a degree in the clergy." Cf. illustrative note from Whitgift: "If you speak of deacons now, I say unto you that under a Christian prince in time of peace, that part of their office to provide for the poor is not necessary." Hooker's Works, Am. Edition, I. 508.

† Prof. Stokes, of the University of Dublin, an Anglican, in his recently published (1891) commentary on Acts, maintains that the Apostolic diaconate has been practically set aside, and that, as a consequence, the Church is sorely suffering. P. 280 sq.

similar duties, indeed, became attached to the office, but they were few, and were restricted to those of a more private character. Hence, the line of distinction had to be more distinctly drawn by substituting *ἡ διακονίσσα* for *ἡ διάκονος*. The office of woman-deacon becomes then obsolete, when it becomes manifest that the principal duties of the deacon are those from which she is debarred. All that remains for her can be readily discharged by the institution of widows. In this same process the diaconate soon became one of the orders of the priesthood, to which, of course, women could not be admitted. The deacons were regarded as clergy; the deaconesses only as members of the laity. The deacons were ordained; the deaconesses only blessed or consecrated. Much is made of the distinction drawn in the Apostolical Constitutions, § VIII., 17, 19: "Concerning the *ordination* (*χειροτονίας*) of deacons, I, Philip, make this constitution: Thou shalt ordain (*καταστήσεις*) a deacon, a bishop, by laying thy hands upon him in the presence of the whole presbytery." "Concerning a deaconess (*διακονίσσης*), I, Bartholomew, make this constitution: O bishop, thou shalt lay thy hands (*ἐπιθήσεις αὐτῇ τὰς χεῖρας*) upon her in the presence of the presbytery." Cf. chap. 16: "Concerning the *ordination* of presbyters . . . when thou ordainest a presbyter, etc." The laying on of the bishop's hands is here distinguished from ordination. In the touching prayer of consecration, however, which follows, there seems to be a contradiction to this, explicable, doubtless, from the fact that the prayer is older than the rubric. The gradual vanishing of the importance of the deaconesses is seen as we trace the various canons concerning them. Thus the Synod of Orange (441) forbids to them any other than lay consecration. The Synod of Epaon (517) allows them only the blessing of penance; and the Synod of Orleans (533) absolutely forbids the *benedictio diaconalis* to any woman, "because of the infirmity of the sex." \*

This tendency is shown especially in the comment of the Ambrosiaster (confessedly much later than Ambrose) on 1 Tim.

\* Hefele's *Conciliengeschichte*, Vol. II: pp. 278, 664, 736.



3: 11: "The Cataphrygians, finding an occasion for error in the fact that he speaks of women after men, maintained, with vain presumption, that the women-deaconesses ought to be ordained, although they know that the Apostles appointed seven men-deacons. Was no woman then found fit, as we read that there were holy women with the eleven Apostles?" The purport of this is to claim that the Female and Male Diaconates were from the beginning entirely distinct offices, alike in name, but not in rank or duties.

5. As it was from a congregational necessity that the office of woman-deacon, like that of man-deacon, originated, when the importance of the congregation as the primary seat of the Church authority gradually sinks into that of the diocesan bishop; when the presbyter as the head of the congregation becomes only the agent of the administration by the bishop; when the diaconate, instead of being responsible to the congregation through the presbyter, is responsible only to the bishop—the entire conditions of Church organization have assumed such a phase that the disappearance for a time of the female diaconate is not to be wondered at.\*

We are, therefore, not at all surprised to find the writers of the Reformation period, without being called by any special emergency to thoroughly review this question, adhering to the conception of the Female Diaconate that had become traditional in the Western Church, and confusing it with the institution of widows. In more recent times, Grotius, Mosheim, Neander, De Wette, Rothe, Wiesinger, Huther, Alford, Elliott, Brown, Spence, Weiss, Plummer, etc., have been constrained by the considerations above recounted to maintain the separation of the two institutions.

\* Director Schäfer in his treatise on *Diaconics* in Zöckler's *Handbuch* recapitulates the story of the decline as follows: "Abuses, the changed condition of the times, the more rare occurrence of Adult Baptism, the inclination to the life of nuns, led to the decline in the office of the deaconess. About the year 1200, it may be said to have been entirely abolished."

# XI.

From this review, we believe it may be fairly inferred that the Lord has provided for woman an important official position in His Church. While neither the Female nor Male Diaconate belongs to the essentials of the Church\*—since the Church existed before the Diaconate, and for many centuries since, it has been without women-deacons—nevertheless, whenever the same circumstances recur, the mode is suggested to God's people as to how to discharge their duty. As the Church is secularized, it is satisfied to throw the responsibility of the care of its indigent members upon the State, and of the diseased and injured upon any association that for purely humanitarian reasons may be ready to receive them. It is conceived of too exclusively as an institution providing for public assemblies, the preaching of the Gospel and certain pastoral acts. Incompleteness, therefore, characterizes all its activity. Instead of caring for the poor, it too often excludes them by modes of raising revenues that prove oppressive to those bordering upon want, and an absolute bar to those without means. The tendency is apt to grow, whereby class and social distinctions prevail in its administration. Whenever any remedy is proposed for these patent evils, conservative minds become alarmed, and great fear is expressed that an effort is being made to carry the Church into spheres with which our fathers were not acquainted. The work of women in the Church is denounced as an unwarrantable usurpation of prerogatives that belong to men. When their deep sympathies respond to the cries of misery that are constantly ascending from a sin-cursed earth, and they seek to bring spasmodic and occasional efforts to a system, and substitute for them organized labor, they are told that they would better

\* For we cannot hold with Ignatius to the Trallians (chap. 3), that where there are no deacons as well as presbyters and apostles, "there is in no elect Church, no congregation of holy ones, no assembly of saints," ἐκκλησία, ἐκλεκτῇ, συνέθροισμα ἁγίων συναγωγῇ ὁσίων. They are "essential, not to the being, but to the well-being of the church," Davidson's *Ecc. Polity*, p. 113.



see to their homes, and not presume to aspire to any official position in the Church.

But the New Testament teaches differently. It proclaims the work of the Church to be an all-pervading one, that is, that there is no sphere within which, in a proper way, it may not enter. It claims the relief of all the suffering which sin has brought into the world, whether spiritual, mental or bodily, as a part of the Church's divine mission. It strictly enjoins woman to carefully observe her place, and forbids her to be a public teacher, or ruler; but, if relieved of other cares, to use her talents for efficient service in any organized form of external labor to which the Church may appoint her. While it exalts the calling of wife and mother as the highest form of the diaconal office, it opens up like spheres of angelic employment for those not entirely engrossed by such responsibilities. It makes such employment not self-determined but dependent upon the call and appointment of the congregation, and under the direction and oversight of the presbyters, *i.e.*, the bishops or pastors of the Church. It does not separate the work of the sexes in such labor from each other, but organizes it just as it does the Christian family, with man as its head, and woman as its heart, its soul, its eyes, its hands.

As Providence leads the way, we may very properly take up the Female Diaconate at the point where its historical development was broken off, and carry it into a later age of the world and new circumstances, with a wise adaptation of its features to race, nation, language and new emergencies. We cannot reproduce all the features of the Apostolic Diaconate or the Female Diaconate of the Eastern Church at this time and in this land. Nor would we, if we could. Its own peculiar calling belongs to every hour and every nationality. The New Testament Church is a model as to how to be unconcerned about precedents when some special work is demanded for which provision had not been previously made. As long as the Church has life, it will continue to develop its old powers into new forms, always, however, upon the basis of what has preceded.

The institution of deaconesses in establishments like this,\* providing for the care of the sick and injured, and the Christian education of the daughters of the Church, is only one phase—although a most important one—of the Female Diaconate. There could be a purely congregational diaconate among us in many of our churches, as there was in Cenchrea, and that, too, as probably there, without requiring the renunciation of home life, and permitting the discharge of other duties. Certainly, here and there, a devout wife of a pastor, without pressing family cares, is a deaconess in fact, if not in name. The Zenana work in India into which our Lutheran Church in America, with other religious communions, has entered, is in reality only another form of the Female Diaconate. The various societies of women in our congregations may also find both their justification and their limits and precise sphere of work in the Female Diaconate of the New Testament.

If we, as pastors and teachers, fail to appreciate the importance of what may be legitimately effected by proper organization, and to endeavor, in the position in which God has placed us, to direct this work into the channels found in the New Testament and the experience of the Church as developed therefrom, the call will still be heard by devout women; but we will be responsible for the irregularities and extravagances and confusion which inevitably occur when it transcends its proper sphere. Let us, on the contrary, seek to awaken an interest in this office, which rests so clearly on divine authority, and to utilize it to the utmost in meeting, in Christ's name, some of the deeply-felt wants of our times.

\* This first draught of this article was read at the Anniversary of the Mary J. Drexel Deaconesses' Institute, October 2d, 1891.