

THE PLACE OF THE DEACONESS IN THE FOREIGN MISSION ENTERPRISE OF THE CHURCH

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It does not take a great deal of reflection to understand that there ought to be a definite place for deaconesses in the foreign mission endeavor of the Christian Church. One might argue this already from general principles. The various talents which the Lord has given to His children upon earth are to be employed in the building of His Kingdom. There are certain very definite talents that find their use and expression in the so-called deaconess work of the church. Even as we find that deaconesses can be employed to very good advantage on the home field, so even on general principles there ought to be a place for them also on the foreign mission field.

Specialized Training

To this we might add the further thought that any mission enterprise which calls for specialized effort also indicates the need for specialized training and equipment. Here again one might say that even as young women are trained for the specific objectives of deaconess work in this country thus specialized training of this kind ought to proved helpful also on the foreign mission field. Wise stewardship will advocate the development of those talents for giving witness and the specialized fit for rendering service which find their outlet in the so-called deaconess branch of the work of the church.

Deaconess Needed to Approach the Women

And then there are reasons stemming from the conditions on the foreign mission field which eloquently plead the cause of using deaconesses over there. Our foreign mission work carries us into countries where the separation of the sexes is much more pronounced than in this country and where it is, therefore, exceedingly difficult for a male missionary to move about as freely and to carry on his missionary work in as general a fashion as that would be possible in this country. It is well known that in many of these foreign countries women are kept in a secluded position and that it would be impossible for a missionary to penetrate into these interiors and to have the opportunity of speaking to all the members of the family and inviting them to accept Christ as their Savior. We, therefore, need women mission workers who can approach women on the foreign fields, gain their confidence and discuss with them the needs of their soul and tell

them the story of salvation through Christ and his blood. In our school system we are able to bring groups of girls, and especially the girls of high school age would need the loving attention and the skilled care of a deaconess. It would be manifestly impossible for any missionary to have opportunity for the instruction and admonition which these people need and which can be given them only through a woman mission worker. The practices and traditions of the Orient also make it extremely important that when such girls come to our high school they must be under expert and loving supervision. People over there are not trained to take care of themselves as we expect our young people in this country to be able to take care of themselves. They need matrons and spiritual guides and leaders, and in the very nature of the case such guidance and leadership can be supplied only by woman mission workers.

Furthering Better Home Conditions

A further consideration is that much of the misery and grinding poverty of the Orient could apparently be alleviated if there were a proper understanding of the principles of sanitation and home making as it is understood and practiced in Western countries. What a wide field for usefulness will a deaconess, therefore, find if she can penetrate into the homes and get an insight into the lives of those people over there and can interest them in the practice of just common principles of cleanliness and proper home making. If the homes can be made cleaner and more attractive, if in this manner disease and suffering can be combated, if those people can be led into a fuller and more satisfactory life that will contribute much to their outward well-being and will enable them again to assist more effectively in the building of the church in their own midst.

Fanaticism of Heathen Women

And there is another reason why women workers are so necessary. Heathenism is dreadfully hard for womankind. It keeps women in a very humiliated position. And yet women are the most fanatic devotees of those heathen religions. Ignorance and superstition have such a hold on them that it is extremely difficult for them to break that hold and, therefore, also extremely difficult for a missionary to win them away from their heathen views and practices. Since a missionary would hardly have a chance to say much or do much about these things by reason of the Oriental seclusion of the women, it is necessary to have women mission workers try to break down this fanatic adherence to heathen views and superstitions. Only if it is possible to gain the women in greater number for the Christian church can we hope to build up a well balanced indigenous church. If we can reach only the men, and if the women, and that usually means the whole household remain shut away from Christianity, then our missionary efforts will be badly handicapped. But to gain the women for the

Christian church we need women mission workers who can get into the homes and speak freely, to those women and endeavor to lead them out of their heathen darkness and free them from the degrading shackles of their heathen practices. Let us repeat it: If the church in the foreign country is really to grow, then we need the family units in the church, and that will mean that also the women must be won for Christianity. And here the work of a Christian deaconess should prove extremely valuable.

High Requirements for Women Workers

From all that has been said, it will be seen that the work of a deaconess on the foreign mission fields calls for specialized training and for a combination of Christian qualities that may be rare. There must be, to begin with, a great deal of consecration and earnest zeal for the Lord and His work. There must also then be a more than ordinary amount of intelligence and sympathy of courage and patience. With all this there must go a constitution of very good health and a winning and pleasing personality so that the confidence of shy and fanatic women and girls may be gained. But we feel sure that the Lord will give this combination of qualities to women who may be trained for the specialized field of endeavor of a deaconess in the foreign mission field.

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