

The Three Widows

If we had been visiting a church beside the Nile soon after the year 300, what kind of a parish ministry might we have found? For an answer, let us turn to the fragmentary document known as the Apostolic Church Order. This begins by mentioning the bishop, who is not yet a distant administrator but still the immediate head of the local community, the normal celebrant at the Sunday Eucharist. He is assisted in the parish worship by two or more presbyters, by a reader, and by three deacons. Thus far there are no great surprises, except that the reader seems to rank higher than the deacons. The parochial staff is larger than is customary today; but, apart perhaps from the bishop, most of the others are doubtless earning their own living with ordinary jobs. The Apostolic Church Order does not stop, however, with the deacons. After them it goes on to speak of three widows, 'two to persevere in prayer for all who are in temptation, and to receive revelations when such are needed; and one to help the women who are ill'.⁽¹⁾

There are surely several things to interest us here. First of all we observe the size and diversity of the local parish ministry. There is no clericalism, no concentration of responsibility exclusively in the hands of a single full-time 'professional'. Next we see that the ministry includes women as well as men. The three widows are not just elderly ladies who arrange the flowers and prepare cups of tea, but they constitute a specific ministry or order recognized by the Church; they are more or less equivalent—although not actually given such a title—to the deaconesses mentioned elsewhere in early Christian sources. While one of the three is entrusted with charitable or social work, the other two have tasks immediately connected with prayer and worship. It is noteworthy that the particular role assigned to them is the ministry of intercession and prophecy. Although it is the calling of every Christian, male as well as female, to pray for others and to listen to God, yet woman by virtue of her gift for direct and intuitive understanding seems especially blessed to act as intercessor and prophet. It is no coincidence that the symbolic figure of the Orans on the walls of the catacombs, representing the Christian soul waiting upon the Spirit, should take the form of a woman.

But the widows, although they intercede and receive revelations, do not act as celebrants at the Eucharist. On this point the Apostolic Church Order is entirely clear: 'When the Master prayed over the bread and the cup and blessed them, saying, "This is my Body and Blood", he did not allow women to stand with us.'⁽²⁾ Here the Apostolic Church Order agrees with the constant testimony of the universal Church, Eastern and Western, from apostolic times onwards: women are entrusted with a wide variety of ministries, but they do not perform the consecration at the Eucharist. To quote the standard code of Eastern church law, the Nomocanon of Photius: 'A woman does not become a priestess.'⁽³⁾

To an Orthodox Christian it seems not so much ironic as tragic that, at the very moment when Christians everywhere are praying for unity, we should see a new chasm opening up to divide us. And in Orthodox eyes, at any rate, it is a chasm of horrifying dimensions. 'The ordination of women to priesthood', writes Fr Alexander Schmemmann, 'is tantamount for us to a radical and irreparable mutilation of the entire faith, the rejection of the whole Scripture, and, needless to say, the end of all "dialogues"; and he goes on to speak about 'the threat of an irreversible and irreparable act which, if it becomes reality, will produce a new, and this time, I am convinced, final division among Christians'.⁽⁴⁾ According to another Orthodox spokesman, Fr Thomas Hopko, the acceptance of women priests involves 'a fundamental and radical rejection of the very substance of the biblical and Christian understanding of God and creation . . . The decisions taken by the Episcopal Church in America at its General Convention in Minneapolis ... can only be considered by an Orthodox Christian as disastrous.'⁽⁵⁾ These are strong words. Yet Fr Schmemmann and Fr Hopko are both of them priests with a long pastoral experience in the West, who have within their own communion the reputation of being, in the best sense, progressive and open-minded. Why do they and other Orthodox feel so deeply?

In common with the recent Roman Catholic statement on 'Women and the Priesthood' (Inter Insigniores, 15 October 1976), we Orthodox are influenced chiefly by two factors: the witness of Tradition and the 'iconic' character of the Christian priesthood. Beyond this we appeal also to the 'order of nature', to what the Apostolic Constitutions, when discussing the ministry of women, term the 'Ἀκολουθία τῆς Φύσεως.' ⁽⁶⁾

But, when employing these three interdependent lines of argument, it is essential to make careful distinctions:

- (1) Tradition is not to be equated with custom or social convention; there is an important difference between 'traditions' and Holy Tradition (with a capital T).
- (2) The ministerial priesthood or priesthood of order is not to be confused with the royal priesthood exercised by all the baptized.
- (3) The order of nature does not signify fallen human nature, which is in reality profoundly unnatural; it signifies true human nature as first created by God, the undistorted image as it existed before the Fall.

The Appeal to Tradition

'We should hold fast', writes St Vincent of Lérins, 'to what has been believed everywhere, always and by everyone.'(7) If ever there was a practice that contravened the Vincentian Canon, it is certainly the ordination of women to the priesthood. Christ, the apostles and ministers of the early Church, as well as their episcopal and presbyteral successors throughout the ages, were men and not women. In a matter of such grave importance, do we have the right to act differently from them?

This appeal to Tradition requires, however, to be handled with care. The New Testament, we are sometimes told, does not encourage Christians to think that nothing should be done for the first time. Loyalty to Tradition must not become simply another form of fundamentalism. Tradition is dynamic, not static and inert. It is received and lived by each new generation in its own way, tested and enriched by the fresh experience that the Church is continually gaining. In the words of Vladimir Lossky, Tradition is 'the critical spirit of the Church'.(8) It is not simply a protective, conservative principle, but primarily a principle of growth and regeneration. It is not merely a collection of documents, the record of what others have said before us, handed down automatically and repeated mechanically; but it involves a living response to God's voice at the present moment, a direct and personal meeting on our part, here and now, with Christ in the Spirit. Authentic traditionalism, then, is not a slavish imitation of the past, but a courageous effort to discriminate between the transitory and the essential. The true traditionalist is not the integrist or the reactionary, but the one who discerns the 'signs of the times' (Matt. 16.3)—who is prepared to discover the leaven of the gospel at work even within such a seemingly secular movement as 'women's lib'.

Yet, even when full allowance has been made for all this, it seems altogether insufficient to justify such a drastic innovation as women priests. If there is dynamism in Holy Tradition, there is also continuity. 'Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever' (Heb. 13.8). The Spirit is always active in each new generation of the Church, yet it is the Spirit's role to bear witness to the Son (John 16.13-15); the Spirit brings us not a new revelation, but the eternal and unchanging truth of Christ himself. Nove, non nova, enjoins St Vincent of Lérins:(9) we are not to do or say 'new things', for the revelation imparted by Christ is final and complete; but, guided by the Spirit, we are ever to act and speak 'in a new way', with renewed mind and heart.

What does this imply, so far as the ordination of women is concerned? Although Jesus never said anything about this, either for or against, his actions speak for themselves. In the words of a French Calvinist. Jean-Jacques von Allmen:

The New Testament, in spite of the chance of total renewal which it provides for women as well as for men, never testifies that a woman could be, in a public and authorized way, representative of Christ. To no woman does Jesus say, 'He who hears you, hears me.' To no woman does he make the promise to ratify in heaven what she has bound or loosed on earth. To no woman does he entrust the ministry of public preaching. To no woman does he give the command to baptize or to preside at the communion of his Body and Blood. To no woman does he commit his flock.(10)

We are confronted here by the question of our obedience to Christ: are we as Christians to remain faithful to his example or not? Do we accept the 'givenness' and finality of the revelation in Jesus Christ, and do we believe in the

apostolic character of the Church? Do we wish to belong to the same Church as that which Christ founded? In the words of a leading Orthodox theologian, Fr John Meyendorff:

The Church today claims to be 'apostolic'. This means that its faith is based upon the testimony of Christ's eyewitnesses, that its ministry is Christ's and that it is defined in terms of the unique, unrepeatable act of God, accomplished in Christ once . . . No new revelation can complete or replace what Jesus Christ did 'when the fullness of the time was come' (Gal. 4.4). The Gospel of Christ cannot be written anew because 'the fullness of time' came then and not at any other time. There is a sense in which all Christians must become Christ's contemporaries. Therefore, the very 'historical conditioning' which characterizes the Gospel of Christ is, in a sense, normative for us. The twentieth century is not an absolute norm; the apostolic age is.(11)

Here, then, is the first and fundamental argument that the Orthodox Church employs. Faced by the unanimous and unvarying practice of Christ's Church from apostolic times up to our own, we in the twentieth century have no authority to alter the basic patterns of Christian faith and life.

Our appeal as Orthodox is not to Scripture alone nor to Tradition alone, but to both at once. (12) We do not appeal simply to the fact that Christ chose only men to be apostles, but to the fact that for more than nineteen centuries Christ's Body the Church has never ordained any except men to the priesthood and episcopate. Our appeal is to the total life of the Church over two thousand years—and not only to what was said but to what was done. It is of course true that the apostles whom Christ chose were not only males but circumcised Jews. Almost at once, however, in the lifetime of virtually all the chief eyewitnesses of the Word, of all those who were qualified in a unique sense to share 'the mind of Christ' (1 Cor. 2.16), the Church decreed circumcision and the other requirements of the Jewish law to be no longer binding (Acts 15.23-9). All ministries were henceforward open to Jews and Gentiles equally. But neither the apostles themselves nor their successors have admitted women to the priesthood. The difference between the two cases is immediately apparent, and it is enormous.

Our arguments against the ordination of women, then, are not based solely upon certain statements in the Pauline Epistles, taken in isolation, such as 1 Corinthians 14.34-5 or 1 Timothy 2.11-12, important though these texts undoubtedly are. We appeal rather to the manner in which the scriptural revelation as a whole has been interpreted, applied, and lived. Scripture and Tradition, here as always, are inseparable and 'correlative', to use the language of the Anglican-Orthodox Agreed Statement signed at Moscow in 1976.(13) Tradition is nothing else than the internal continuity that exists between the New Testament and the subsequent thought and life of the Church. The ordination of women as priests is excluded precisely because it conflicts with this living continuity.

But, if this appeal to Tradition is to be properly understood, three underlying presuppositions need to be rendered explicit.

(1) Jesus Christ is not only complete man but true and perfect God. He is within history, but also above history. We do not see in him merely a human teacher, bound by the conventions of his age; he is the Word of God, from whose lips we hear not private opinions soon to grow outdated, but the eternal truth. Indeed, far from being subservient to contemporary customs, Christ often showed a striking independence. He told his disciples, 'You have heard what was said by the men of old; but I say to you . . .' (Matt. 5.21-2); he claimed to be master of the Sabbath, openly breaking the accepted regulations; he ate with tax-collectors and sinners; to the astonishment of his followers he spoke with the Samaritan woman, and in general ignored rules normally observed by a Jewish rabbi of the time in his dealings with the female sex. Thus if the Son of God had wanted to appoint women as apostles, he would have done so, whatever the existing conventions within Judaism or elsewhere in the ancient world. And the fact that he did not choose them as apostles must remain decisive for us today. Are we to assert that the incarnate Word and Wisdom of God was mistaken, and that we at the end of the twentieth century understand the truth better than he did?

(2) The second point is a corollary of the first. As Christ's Body, as 'pillar and ground of the truth' (1 Tim. 3. 15), the Church is more than a fallible human association. Christ has promised, 'The Spirit of truth will guide you

into all truth' (John 16.13): errors may arise among members of the Church but they never finally prevail, for we have Christ's assurance that the truth will prove in the long run invincible. Are we to believe that this promise of Christ has failed? Are we to say that, in excluding women from the priesthood, the Church has erred for nearly two thousand years, unjustly denying to half the human race its legitimate rights? But, so it is argued, the Church made precisely such a mistake in regard to slavery. If it took the Church eighteen centuries to recognize the evils of slavery, why should it not have taken the Church one century more to end the unjustifiable subservience of women? On closer investigation, however, the parallel proves far from exact. The distinction between male and female is part of the order of nature; that between free men and slaves is not. As St Basil (d. 379) remarks, 'No man is a slave by nature': (14) slavery only came into existence subsequent to the Fall. The distinction between male and female, by contrast, existed prior to the Fall and is inherent in human nature as originally created by God (Gen. 1.27). Furthermore, several Fathers, most notably St Gregory of Nyssa (d. c. 395), inveighed vehemently against slavery as an evil—a necessary evil, perhaps, yet an evil none the less. (15) But not a single Father ever spoke of the limitation of the priesthood to men as a necessary evil. As Fr John Saward rightly concludes, 'The . . . argument from the example of slavery will not stand up to close examination.' (16)

(3) On many minor details of church life, so it might be argued, our Lord perhaps gave no specific instructions, leaving later generations free to resolve these matters as they might think best. But—and this is our third presupposition—the admission of women to the priesthood is not a minor detail. It vitally affects our understanding both of priesthood and of human nature. If women can and should be priests, then their exclusion for two millennia is a grave injustice, a tragic error. Are we to attribute a mistake of this magnitude to the Fathers and the ecumenical councils, to the apostles and the Son of God?

An Argument from Silence?

Sometimes it is claimed that the appeal to Tradition is nothing more than an argument from absence or silence, and therefore lacking in cogency. It is true, so the argument runs, that there is nothing in Scripture and Tradition that explicitly enjoins the ordination of women to the priesthood; yet equally there is nothing which explicitly forbids it. The question has not been seriously posed until our own day, and thus remains open.

To this it must be answered, first, that we need to listen not only to the words but to the silence of Scripture and Tradition. Not everything is outwardly defined. Certain doctrines, never formally defined, are yet held by the Church with an unmistakable inner conviction, an unruffled unanimity, which is just as binding as an explicit proclamation.

Secondly, it is not in fact correct to say that until our own day the matter was passed over in silence. On the contrary, it was often discussed in the early Church. The Apostolic Church Order, as we have seen, states directly that women are not to officiate at the Eucharist. A hundred years earlier, Tertullian (d. c. 225) was equally definite: 'It is not permitted for a woman to speak in church, nor yet to teach, nor to anoint, nor to make the offering, nor to claim for herself any office performed by men or any priestly ministry.' (17) The Apostolic Constitutions (late fourth century) discuss the ministry of women in some detail, and in the same terms as Tertullian. Women are not to preach nor to baptize, and a fortiori it is implied that they do not celebrate the Eucharist. The reason given is specifically faithfulness to Christ's example—he never entrusted such tasks to women, although he could easily have done so; thus the Church has no power to commission women for work of this kind. (18)

Nor did the question of women priests remain merely hypothetical in the early history of the Church. Various schismatic groups in the second and fourth centuries had women as priests and bishops: the Gnostic Marcosians, for example, (19) and the Montanists, (20) and the Collyridians. (21) When referring to these last, St Epiphanius (d. 403) examines at length the possibility of women priests. 'Since the beginning of time', he states, 'a woman has never served God as priest.' (He means, of course, in the Old Testament; he knew that there were priestesses in the pagan fertility cults.) In the New Testament, although we find female prophets (Luke 2.36; Acts 21.9), no woman is ever an apostle, bishop, or presbyter. Christ had many women among his immediate followers—Mary his mother,

Salome and others from Galilee, Martha and Mary the sisters of Lazarus—yet on none of them did he confer the apostolate or priesthood. ‘That there exists in the Church an order of deaconesses is undisputed; but they are not allowed to perform any priestly functions.’ *Besides deaconesses, the Church has also orders of widows and old women; but we never find ‘female presbyters or priestesses’.* ‘After so many generations’ Christians cannot now start ordaining priestesses for the first time. Such, then, is Epiphanius’ conclusion concerning women and the ministerial priesthood: ‘God never appointed to this ministry a single woman upon earth.’(22)

Most Orthodox today would find Epiphanius’ treatment of the subject both convincing and sufficient. The ordination of women to the priesthood is an innovation, without any sound basis whatever in Holy Tradition. The evidence is explicit and unanimous, and there is nothing further to be said. It has to be admitted, however, that this argument from Tradition will seem inadequate to the majority of Christians in the West, even to many who are themselves opposed to the ordination of women priests. It is not enough for them to be told that it is not in Tradition; they wish to know why it is not. In the words of an Orthodox woman theologian, Mme Elisabeth Behr-Sigel: ‘To those who ask from us the bread of understanding, it is not enough to offer only the stones of certainties hardened by negation.’(23) We need in fact to advance beyond an appeal to the external facts of Tradition and to inquire into its inner content. This will oblige us to consider the delicate subject of priesthood in its relation to sexuality—a theme which most Orthodox theologians prefer to avoid, for here it is dangerous to say too much. But then it is also dangerous to say too little.

Royal Priesthood and Ministerial Priesthood

There are three interdependent truths which need to be kept in balance:

- (1) One, and one alone, is priest.
- (2) All are priests.
- (3) Only some are priests.

One, and one alone, is priest; Jesus Christ, the unique high priest of the New Covenant, ‘the one mediator between God and men’ (1 Tim. 2.5), is the sole true celebrant in every sacramental act. All are priests: by virtue of our creation in God’s image and likeness, and also by virtue of the renewal of that image through baptism and anointing with chrism (Western ‘confirmation’), we are all of us, clergy and laity together, ‘a royal priesthood, a holy nation’ (1 Pet. 2.9), set apart for God’s service. Only some are priests: certain members of the Church are set apart in a more specific way, through prayer and the laying-on of hands, to serve God in the ministerial priesthood.

It is vitally important to preserve a proper balance and distinction between the second and the third forms of priesthood, between the royal priesthood of sanctity and the ministerial priesthood of order. In many of the arguments used to support women priests, so it seems to the Orthodox, these two levels of priesthood are unhappily confused. For instance, St Paul’s words in Galatians 3.28, ‘There is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus’, are often cited out of context in favour of women priests. But in fact, as the preceding sentence shows, Paul is thinking here of baptism, not ordination; this text refers to the royal priesthood of the whole People of God, not to the ministerial priesthood of order.

Women, to an equal degree with men, are created in God’s image; to an equal degree with men, they are recreated in baptism and endued with the charismata of the Holy Spirit in post-baptismal anointing. As regards the second level of priesthood, therefore, they are in every respect as much ‘kings and priests’ (Rev. 1.6) as any man can ever be. This royal priesthood consists above all in the power possessed by each human person, made according to the divine image, to act as a creator after the likeness of God the Creator; each is able to mould and fashion the world, revealing fresh patterns and a new meaning in created things, making each material object articulate and spiritual. The royal priesthood is expressed likewise in the fact that each human person is a ‘eucharistic animal’, capable of praising and glorifying God for the gift of the world, and so of turning each thing into a sacrament and means of

communion with him. Each is capable of offering the world back to its Maker in thanksgiving, of presenting his or her own self, body and soul together, as a 'living sacrifice' to the Holy Trinity (Rom. 12.1).

'Thine own from thine own we offer to thee, in all and for all' (Liturgy of St John Chrysostom): such is the essence of the universal priesthood inherent in all human nature. In terms of this hieratic self-offering, both man and woman equally are priests of the created universe, by virtue of the common humanity that they share. At the same time each exercises this priesthood in a distinct way, for the differences of sexuality extend deep into our human nature and are by no means restricted to the act of procreation.

The human person who expresses most perfectly this royal and universal priesthood is not in fact a man but a woman—the Blessed Virgin Mary. She is the supreme example not just of female sanctity but of human sanctity as such: in the words of G. K. Chesterton, 'Men are men, but Man is a woman.' 'Behold, the handmaid of the Lord' (Luke 1.38): at the annunciation, as throughout her life, the Mother of God exemplifies that priestly act of self-offering which is the true vocation of all of us. This point has been well emphasized by the head of the Greek Orthodox Church in Britain, Archbishop Athenagoras of Thyateira: 'God in his love sent his Son to be a man, whilst in return humanity offered Saint Mary the Virgin to be the cleansed and perfected vessel in which humanity and divinity meet in the God-manhood of Christ.' (24)

It is significant that the movement for the ordination of women should first have emerged in those Christian communities that tend to neglect the Holy Virgin's place in Christ's redemptive work. 'There is no doubt in my mind', says Fr John Meyendorff, 'that the Protestant rejection of the veneration of Mary and its various consequences (such as, for example, the really "male-dominated" Protestant worship, deprived of sentiment, poetry and intuitive mystery-perception) is one of the psychological reasons which explains the recent emergence of institutional feminism.' (25)

The example of the Mother of God shows us how important it is to differentiate between the second level of priesthood and the third. She, in whose person we see perfectly expressed the royal priesthood of the Christian believer, was never a priest in the ministerial sense. Speaking on the level of the royal priesthood of self-offering, the Apostolic Constitutions are able to affirm, 'Let the widow realize that she is the altar of God'; (26) but the very same passage excludes the possibility that the widows, or any other women, could act as ministerial priests.

Two points about the ministerial priesthood need to be underlined. First, the ministry is not to be envisaged in 'professional' terms, as a 'job' which woman can carry out as competently as man, and which she has an equal 'right' to perform. Still less is the ministry to be conceived in terms of power and domination, as a 'privilege' from which woman is being unjustly excluded. 'It shall not be so among you' (Matt. 20.26). The Church is not a power structure or a business enterprise, but the Body of Christ; the ministerial priesthood is not a human invention devised for the purposes of efficiency, but a gift of God's grace. So far from being a 'right' or 'privilege', the ministry is a call to service, and this call comes from God. In the Church, all is gift, all is grace. When a man is called to the ministerial priesthood, this is invariably a gift of grace from God, never a 'right'.

Secondly, the ministerial priest is not to be seen in secular and pseudo-democratic terms, as a deputy or representative, who is merely exercising by delegation the royal priesthood that belongs to the Christian people as a whole. No: the ministerial priest derives his priesthood not by delegation from the people, but immediately from Christ. As Justin Martyr (d. c. 165) affirms, 'The twelve apostles depend upon the power of Christ the eternal priest'; (27) and the same is true of their successors the bishops. The royal priesthood and the ministerial priesthood are both ways of sharing directly in the priesthood of Christ, and neither is derived by devolution through the other.

The Priest as Icon

But why, we ask, should the ministerial priesthood be limited to men, whereas the royal priesthood is conferred on all alike? Why should God not call women to be priests? The answer lies in the 'iconic' character of the ministerial priesthood. In the prayer before the Great Entrance (the offertory procession) at the Divine Liturgy, the priest

addresses these words to Christ: 'Thou art he who offers and he who is offered.' It is Christ himself who makes the eucharistic offering: as the deacon states at the very beginning of the service, 'It is time for the Lord to act.' 'Our Lord and God Jesus Christ', says St Cyprian of Carthage (d. 258), 'is himself the high priest of God the Father; he offered himself as a sacrifice to the Father and commanded that this should be done in memory of him; thus the priest truly acts in the place of Christ (vice Christi).' (28) 'It is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit who perform everything, teaches St John Chrysostom (d. 407); 'but the priest lends his tongue and supplies his hand.' (29) ... It is not man who causes the bread and wine to become Christ's Body and Blood: this is done by Christ himself, crucified for our sakes. The priest stands before us, doing what Christ did and speaking the words that he spoke; but the power and grace are from God.' (30)

The priesthood, then, is always Christ's and not ours. The priest in church is not 'another' priest alongside Christ, and the sacrifice that he offers, in union with the people, is not 'another' sacrifice but always Christ's own. The ministerial priest, as priest, possesses no identity of his own: his priesthood exists solely in order to make Christ present. This understanding of the ministerial priesthood is clearly affirmed by St Paul: 'We come therefore as Christ's ambassadors; it is as if God were appealing to you through us' (2 Cor. 5.20); 'you welcomed me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus' (Gal. 4.14). St Ignatius of Antioch (d. c. 107) speaks similarly: 'The bishop presides as the image of God.' (31) In the words of Antiochus the Monk (seventh century): 'The priests should be imitators of their high priest [i.e. the bishop], and he in his turn should be imitator of Christ the high priest.' (32) In the consecration service of an Orthodox bishop, the chief officiant prays: 'O Christ our God ... who hast appointed for us teachers to occupy thy throne ... make this man to be an imitator of thee the true Shepherd.'

The bishop or priest is therefore an imitator, image, or sign of Christ the one mediator and high priest. In short, the ministerial priest is an icon. 'Standing between God and men,' writes St Theodore the Studite (d. 826), 'the priest in the priestly invocations is an imitation of Christ. For the apostle says: "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus"' (1 Tim. 2.5). Thus the priest is an icon of Christ.' (33) This notion of the priest as an icon has far-reaching implications:

First, there can be no question of any identification between the priest and Christ, for an icon is in no sense identical with that which it depicts. (34)

Secondly, an icon is not the same as a photograph or a realistic portrait; and so, when the priest is considered as an icon, this is not to be understood grossly in a literal or naturalistic sense. The priest is not an actor on the stage, 'made up' to look like Christ.

Thirdly, according to the principle enunciated by St Basil and used in the Iconoclast Controversy, 'The honour shown to the icon is referred to the prototype.' (35) When we venerate the icon of the Saviour, we do not honour wood and paint, but through wood and paint we honour Christ himself. The same is true of the priest as an icon. He is not honoured in and for himself; all the honour is referred to Christ. In terming the priest an icon, we do not thereby attribute to him any special kind of intrinsic personal sanctity; we do not set him as a human being on a higher level than others. The greatest in the kingdom of heaven are not the clergy but the saints. Here as always, a careful distinction must be made between royal priesthood and ministerial priesthood, between the personal priesthood of sanctity and the iconic priesthood of order.

Fourthly, it is the function of an icon to make present a spiritual reality that surpasses it, but of which it acts as the sign. As an icon of Christ, therefore, the priest is not just a deputy or legal delegate of the people; but neither is he the vicar or surrogate of an absent Christ. It is the purpose of an icon not to remind us of someone who is absent, but to render that person present. Christ and his saints are present as active participants in the Liturgy through their icons in the church; and Christ is likewise present in the Liturgy through his icon the priest.

Fifthly and finally, as an icon of the unique high priest Christ, the ministerial priest must be male. In the words of Fr Alexander Schmemmann, 'if the bearer, the icon and the fulfiller of that unique priesthood, is man and not woman, it is because Christ is man and not woman.' (36) 'For the Eastern Orthodox,' writes Fr Maximos Aghiorgoussis, 'it is

imperative to preserve the symbolic correspondence between Christ as a male and the ordained priest... The ordination of women to the Holy Priesthood is untenable since it would disregard the symbolic and iconic value of male priesthood, both as representing Christ's malehood and the fatherly role of the Father in the Trinity, by allowing female persons to interchange with male persons a role which cannot be interchanged.'(37)

There are two points implicit in these words of Fr Maximos. First, he speaks not only of Christ's 'manhood' but of his 'male-hood'. At his human birth Christ did not only become man in the sense of becoming human [anthropos, homo], but he also became man in the sense of becoming male [aner, vir]. Certainly Christ is the Saviour of all humankind, of men and women equally; at his incarnation he took up into himself and healed our common humanity. But at the same time we should keep in view the particularity of the incarnation. Christ was born at a specific time and place, from a specific mother. He did not just become human in an abstract or generalized sense, but he became a particular human being; as such he could not be both a male and a female at once, and he was in fact a male.

Secondly, men and women are not interchangeable, like counters, or identical machines. The difference between them, as we have already insisted, extends far more deeply than the physical act of procreation. The sexuality of human beings is not an accident, but affects them in their very identity and in their deepest mystery. Unlike the differentiation between Jew and Greek or between slave and free—which reflect man's fallen state and are due to social convention, not to nature—the differentiation between male and female is an aspect of humanity's natural state before the Fall. The life of grace in the Church is not bound by social conventions or the conditions produced by the Fall; but it does conform to the order of nature, in the sense of unfallen nature as created by God. Thus the distinction between male and female is not abolished in the Church.

We are not saved from our masculinity and femininity, but in them; to say otherwise is to be Gnostic or Marcionite. We cannot repent of being male and female, but only of the way in which we are these things. Grace co-operates with nature and builds upon it; the Church's task is to sanctify the natural order, not to repudiate it. In the Church we are male and female, not sexless. Dedicated virginity within the church community is not the rejection of sex, but a way of consecrating it. In the words of Fr John Meyendorff, 'The Christian faith, as held by the Church, is not a negation of nature but its salvation. The "new creation" does not suppress the "old", but renews and transfigures it.'(38) He goes on to quote the words of an Orthodox statement at an Anglican-Orthodox consultation held in America in 1974: 'God created men as "male and female", establishing a diversity of functions and gifts; these functions and gifts are complementary but not at all interchangeable ... There is every reason for Christians to oppose the current trends which tend to make men and women interchangeable in their functions and roles, and thus lead to the dehumanization of life.' C. S. Lewis saw this danger many years ago: 'As the State grows more like a hive or an ant-hill it needs an increasing number of workers who can be treated as neuters. This may be inevitable for our secular life. But in our Christian life we must return to reality.'(39)

Such, then, is the Orthodox understanding of the ministerial priesthood. The priest is an icon of Christ; and since the incarnate Christ became not only man but a male—since, furthermore, in the order of nature the roles of male and female are not interchangeable—it is necessary that the priest should be male. Those Western Christians who do not in fact regard the priest as an icon of Christ are of course free to ordain women as ministers; they are not, however, creating women priests but dispensing with priesthood altogether.

The Value of Symbols

Some will remain unconvinced by this argument from the iconic character of the priesthood, because it involves an appeal to symbolism. 'Do not offer us symbols,' they will object, 'but give us a proof, based on logical reasoning.' It must in answer be at once admitted that the rightness of our symbols is not something that can be logically demonstrated. A symbol can be verified, lived, prayed—but not 'proved'. Church life, however, is not to be reduced to Euclidean geometry; while our reasoning powers should be employed to the full, we cannot grasp spiritual truth exclusively through syllogisms. Symbols and archetypes provide a vital key for the comprehension of literature and art; and they are no less important in religious faith and prayer. A symbol has the advantage of being far easier to

understand than a verbal explanation, while at the same time conveying truths too profound to be formulated in words. In worship, as in family life, there is a 'deep symbolism of actions and things',⁽⁴⁰⁾ reaching down to the hidden roots of our being. If this symbolism is ignored or outraged, our relationship alike with God and with other humans will be fatally impoverished.

In our subconscious there are certain symbols and archetypes which are not invented but given. The same is true of the symbols revealed in Holy Scripture and used in Christian worship. We 'prove' these symbols; all we know is that God has set his ⁽⁸³⁾ seal upon certain images and not upon others. We have been taught to say 'Our Father who art in heaven', and not 'Our Mother who art in heaven'; the second person of the Holy Trinity is God the Son, not God the Daughter; Christ is the New Adam, not the New Eve; he is the Bridegroom and the Church is his Bride—the relationship cannot be reversed. These symbols are 'given', and they are absolutely fundamental.

Needless to say, our symbolic theology must be balanced by the use of apophatic or negative theology. God in himself is neither masculine nor feminine, since he infinitely transcends any such categories. Yet it does not therefore follow that we are free to apply to him whatever symbols we please. On the contrary, if we were to substitute a Mother Goddess for God the Father, we would not simply be altering a piece of incidental imagery, but we would be replacing Christianity with a new kind of religion.⁽⁴¹⁾ The male character of the Christian priesthood forms an integral element in this pattern of revealed, God-given symbolism which is not to be tampered with. Christ is the Bridegroom and the Church is his Bride: how can the living icon of the Bridegroom be other than a man?

Diversities of Gifts

If our conclusion thus far has a negative appearance, this is because the wrong question was posed in the first place. Rather than ask, 'Can women be priests?', we ought to be asking, 'What are the distinctive gifts conferred by God on women, and how can these gifts be expressed in the Church's ministry?' Instead of trying to ordain women as priests, Christians today need to explore and develop the special forms of service in the Church that women are best able to perform. The question is not 'Do women have a role of leadership in the Church?', but 'What is the nature of that role?'

It is one of the chief glories of human nature that men and women, although equal, are not interchangeable. Together they exercise a common ministry which neither could exercise alone; for within that shared ministry each has a particular role. There exists between them a certain order or hierarchy, with man as the 'head' and woman as the partner or 'helper' (Gen. 2.18); yet this differentiation does not imply any fundamental inequality between them. Within the Trinity, God the Father is the source and 'head' of Christ (1 Cor. 11.3), and yet the three persons are essentially equal; and the same is true of the relationship of man and woman. The Greek Fathers, although often negative in their opinion of the female sex, were on the whole absolutely clear about the basic human equality of man and woman. Both alike are created in God's image; the subordination of woman to man and her exploitation reflect not the order of nature created by God, but the contra-natural conditions resulting from original sin.⁽⁴²⁾ Equal yet different according to the order of nature, man and woman complete each other through their free co-operation; and this complementarity is to be respected on every level—when at home in the circle of the family, when out at work, and not least in the life of the Church, which blesses and transforms the natural order but does not obliterate it.

Much current propaganda for the ordination of women priests seems to envisage the priesthood as virtually the only possible form of ministry in the Church. It is assumed that, because women are not allowed to be priests, they are in consequence being left with no proper role to play in church life. The diversity of ministries, such as we find for example in the Apostolic Church Order, is all too often overlooked. The present campaign for women priests may thus be seen as 'the bitter fruit of the clericalization of the Church',⁽⁴³⁾ 'a typically western and medieval form of clericalism'.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Women are being wrongly led to seek priestly ordination, because other forms of ecclesial service have been neglected. But this point has a relevance for men as well: often men assume that, if they 'have a

vocation', it must be to the priesthood, because they do not think in terms of any other type of ministry. We need to recover the full Pauline vision of the Church as unity in diversity.

Among the Orthodox thinkers who in the recent past have written about the distinctive gifts and ministry of women are Nicolas Berdyaev,(45) Fr Lev Gillet,(46) Olivier Clement,(47) and above all Paul Evdokimov.(48) Their views are carefully summarized in a recent article by Mme Behr-Sigel, who wisely warns against the danger of thinking in terms of 'cultural stereotypes'.(49) Certainly the whole subject requires much more thorough investigation on the Orthodox part. We need to hear the voice not merely of the male theologians but of the Orthodox women themselves. An encouraging start—but no more than a start—was made by the Consultation of Orthodox Women, held at Agapia, Romania, on 11-17 September 1976.

Brief mention may be made of four among the ministries that Orthodox women are or could be fulfilling:

(1) Although in the New Testament no woman was chosen to be an apostle, the Orthodox Church recognizes a number of women as isapostolos, 'equal to the apostles': for instance, St Mary Magdalene, the Martyr Thekla, St Helena, mother of the Emperor Constantine, and St Nina, the missionary who converted Georgia.

(2) Women 'equal to the apostles', acting as preachers and missionaries, have never been common in the past; but there is a more hidden form of ministry which Orthodox women have never ceased to perform—that of the priest's wife. Within Orthodoxy the parish priest is in principle always a married man; when for special reasons a parish is put in charge of a monk or a celibate priest—there are in fact extremely few unmarried clergy who are not in monastic vows—this is definitely to be regarded as an exception to the standard rule. The fact that the parish priest has a wife is not to be seen as merely accidental or peripheral to his pastoral work; nor should the priest's wife merely be someone who happens to have married a fixture clergyman. Her status in the parish is indicated by her title: in the Greek Church the priest is called presbyteros or pappas and his wife presbytera or pappadia; in the Russian Church the priest is 'little father', batushka, and his wife is 'little mother', matushka. If the woman in the home acts as giver and protector of life, the priest's wife is called to do this throughout the parish. Just as the priest is father not to his own children solely but to the entire community, so the priest's wife is called to be mother alike in her own family and in the parochial family as a whole. Yet she is not ordained for this task, but is simply realizing in a particular manner the royal priesthood that is the common inheritance of all. Her maternal vocation has to be exercised with the utmost discretion, not so much through anything she says or does, as through what she is.

(3) **There is, however, one form of the ordained ministry to which women are certainly called, and that is the ministry of deaconesses.** The members of the Agapia Consultation pleaded for a 'reactivation' of this ancient order, which in the Orthodox Church has fallen into disuse since the twelfth century.(50) They spoke of the ministry of the deaconess as a 'life-time commitment to full vocational service in the Church ... an extension of the sacramental life of the Church into the life of society'.(51) Already, in the Russian Church before the Revolution, there were several schemes for a full restoration of the order of deaconesses, although in the end nothing was done.(52) Since 1952 the Church of Greece has had a School for Deaconesses—the present building was opened in 1957—but the members are not actually ordained. I am told, however, that ordained deaconesses exist within the Coptic Church of Egypt.

There is a difference of opinion among contemporary Orthodox as to the exact status of deaconesses in the early Church. Some regard them as essentially a 'lay' and not an 'ordained' ministry.(53) But others point out that the liturgical rite for the laying-on of hands received by deaconesses is exactly parallel to that for deacons: this implies that deaconesses receive, as deacons do, a genuine sacramental ordination—not just a χειροθεσία but a χειροτονία.(54) All Orthodox are agreed, however, that there is a sharp distinction between the diaconate and the priesthood. The deacon, and a fortiori the deaconess, cannot perform the consecration at the Eucharist, cannot bless the people, and in general does not act as a liturgical icon of Christ. There is a special funeral office for priests, but when a deacon dies the burial service is the same as for a layman. **The existence of deaconesses within the Church is thus in no sense a justification for women priests. As the Agapia Consultation insisted, 'The office of deaconess is distinct and not new, nor can it be considered as a "first step" to the ordained priesthood.'**(55)

In the Teaching of the Apostles, a Syriac work of the early third century, it is suggested that the deacon has a special link with the second person of the Holy Trinity, and the deaconess with the third person: 'The deacon stands in the place of Christ; and do you love him. And the deaconess shall be honoured by you in the place of the Holy Spirit.'⁽⁵⁶⁾ The implications of this idea have been developed, in a fascinating but somewhat speculative manner, by Paul Evdokimov;⁽⁵⁷⁾ a similar line of thought can be found in an article by Fr Thomas Hopko.⁽⁵⁸⁾ While it would be unwise to base too much on this one passage from the Teaching of the Apostles, taken in isolation, here certainly is a theme to be explored more fully when considering the charismata of woman. In early Syriac sources, and very occasionally in the Greek tradition, the Holy Spirit is pictured in feminine symbolism: the Syriac author Aphrahat (early fourth century), for example, speaks of the Christian's relationship with 'God his Father and the Holy Spirit his Mother'.⁽⁵⁹⁾ If man serves in a special way as an icon of the Saviour, has not woman a distinctive role as an icon of the Paraclete?

(4) Much has been said in recent years about the importance in the Orthodox tradition of the spiritual father, of the charismatic 'abba' or 'elder', styled *geron* by the Greeks and *starets* by the Russians. But is there not a place also for spiritual motherhood? The role of spiritual guide is closely linked to the gifts of intercession and prophecy; and these, as we noted at the outset, are in a special sense the charismata of woman.

Not that the idea of spiritual motherhood is new. In the *Gerontikon* or 'Sayings of the Desert Fathers', alongside some 127 spiritual fathers there are three 'ammas' or spiritual mothers, Theodora, Sarah, and Synkletika; and these 'ammas', although in a minority, are set upon an equal footing with the great 'abbas' such as Antony, Arsenios, or Poemen. The monk Isaias, around the year 1200, even compiled a *Meterikon* or collection of the 'Sayings of the Mothers', parallel to the *Paterikon* or 'Sayings of the Fathers'; as yet unpublished in Greek, this *Meterikon* was translated into Russian by Bishop Theophan the Recluse and published in at least three editions.⁽⁶⁰⁾

There is no lack of material for such a work. Indeed, in the history of monasticism it was the women who acted as pioneers rather than the men. It is customary to treat St Antony of Egypt as the father of Christian monasticism. Yet we read that, when he first decided to give up his possessions and to embrace the ascetic way, he entrusted his younger sister to the care of a parthenon, a 'convent' of virgins.⁽⁶¹⁾ Long before Antony had settled in the desert as a hermit, or his younger contemporary Pachomius had established the first coenobitic monasteries for men, fully organized communities for women were already in existence.

The starets or spiritual father in the Christian East, while commonly a priest-monk, is not always in priestly orders: the great Antony himself, like most of the early Desert Fathers, was never ordained. From this it is clear that the ministry of spiritual direction, although linked closely to the ministerial priesthood of order, is basically an expression of the royal priesthood of sanctity. It is therefore a calling that can be exercised by lay men; and if by lay men, then equally—yet in a different way—by lay women. In the Anglican Church Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941) forms a notable instance of a lay woman invested with this ministry.⁽⁶²⁾ If the order of deaconesses were revived in Orthodoxy, no doubt many of them would act as spiritual mothers; but the role of motherhood in Christ should not be limited to them or to any other specific form of the ordained ministry.

Throughout the contemporary Christian world there is a thirst for spiritual guidance, and at the same time a severe dearth of persons blessed by the Holy Spirit to serve as guides. It is disappointing that in such a situation very little thought is being given to the cultivation of spiritual motherhood. The unhappy controversy about women priests is distracting our thought from the real questions.

Here, then, are four ways in which the ministry of women exists or might be further developed in the Orthodox Church today. Many more examples could of course be given; but enough has, I hope, been said to indicate how rich are the possibilities. In conclusion let us end with two pictures, the first from Greece and the second from Russia. Often in his writings Alexander Papadiamantis (1851-1911) describes the characteristic festivals held in remote chapels in the Greek countryside. Without the participation of the women, these festivals could scarcely be held. It is they who 'prepare and constitute the physical flesh for the cosmic liturgy':⁽⁶³⁾ they have baked the loaves for the Eucharist, they bring with them the wine and oil, the incense and the candles, they decorate the

church and do the singing at the service. Without them the celebration could not take place, just as it could not take place without the priest. Here, in the offering of the Eucharist, man and woman are to be seen cooperating together, and the role of each is essential.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn speaks likewise of the role of women in his piece 'The Easter Procession'. Surrounded by hostile, jeering crowds, the Paschal procession makes its way round the outside of the Patriarchal cathedral in Moscow at Easter midnight. First come two laymen, clearing the way; then follows the churchwarden, carrying a lantern on a pole, 'glancing from side to side with apprehension', and after him come two other men with a banner, also 'huddling together from fear'. At the end of the little procession come the priests and deacons; and they too, in their fear, are 'bunched together, walking out of step', hurrying by as quickly as they can. But between the banner and the clergy come the women, ten of them, walking in pairs, holding thick lighted candles. They have a tranquillity that the men lack:

. . . elderly women with faces set in an unworldly gaze, prepared for death if they are attacked. Two out of the ten are young girls, with pure, bright faces... The ten women, walking in close formation, are singing and looking as solemn as though the people round them were crossing themselves, praying and falling on their knees in repentance. They do not breathe the cigarette smoke; their ears are deaf to the vile language; the soles of their feet do not feel how the churchyard has been turned into a dance-floor.(64)

These ten, walking in the Easter procession, exemplify the women of Russia who, far more than the men, have through their courage kept alive the faith during sixty years of persecution. They prove to us that woman in God's Church is called to be passive, not subordinate, but resolute and creative, as the Virgin Mary was at the annunciation.

Footnotes

1. A. Harnack, *Die Quellen der sogenannten apostolischen Kirchenordnung* (Texte und Untersuchungen ii,5: Leipzig 1886), pp. 22-4; Eng. tr. by J. Owen, *Sources of the Apostolic Canons* (London 1895), pp. 19-21.
2. A. Harnack, *op. cit.*, p. 28; Eng. tr., p. 25.
3. *Nomocanon i*, 37 (ed. G. A. Rallis and M. Potlis, *Syntagma i*, 81: priestess is in Greek *presbytera*).
4. 'Concerning Women's Ordination: Letter to an Episcopal Friend', in H. Karl Lutge (ed.), *Sexuality—Theology—Priesthood* (San Gabriel, n.d.), pp. 12-13.
5. In the periodical of the Orthodox Church in America, *The Orthodox Church*, November 1976, p. 5.
6. *Ap. Const. III*, ix, 4 (ed. Funk, p. 201).
7. *Commonitorium Primum ii* (3) (P.L. 50, 640).
8. *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood 1974), p. 156.
9. *Commonitorium Primum xxii* (27) (P.L. 50, 667).
10. 'Is the Ordination of Women to the Pastoral Ministry Justifiable?', in Lutge, *Sexuality—Theology—Priesthood*, p. 35.
11. *The Orthodox Church*, September 1975, p. 4.
12. Compare the official commentary of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on its decree *Inter insigniores*: 'This brings us to a fundamental observation: we must not expect the New Testament on its own to resolve in a clear fashion the question of the possibility of women acceding to the priesthood' (*The Ordination of Women*, CTS Do 494, p. 8).
13. See K. Ware and C. Davey, *Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue* (London 1977), p. 84.
14. *On the Holy Spirit xx* (51) (P.G. 32, 160D). Cf John Chrysostom, *Homily xxii, I on Ephesians* (P.G. 62, 155).
15. *Homily iv on Ecclesiastes* (P.G. 44, 664C-668A; ed. Jaeger-Alexander, pp. 334-8).
16. *The Case against the Ordination of Women* (Church Literature Association, London 1975), p. 6.
17. *On the veiling of virgins ix*, 1 (C.C. ii, 1218-19).
18. *Ap. Const. III*, vi, 1-2 and III, ix, 4 (ed. Funk, pp. 191, 2(11). Cf. VIII, xxviii, 6 (p. 530).
19. Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies I*, xiii, 2 (ed.-Harvey, i, 116-17). Cf. Tertullian, *De praescr. haer.* xli, 5 (C.C. i, 221).
20. Epiphanius, *Panarion XLIX*, ii, 2; ii, 5; iii, 2 (ed. Holl, pp. 243-4).
21. *Ibid.*, LXXIX, i, 7 (ed. Holl, p. 476). Cf. LXXVIII, xxiii, 4 (p. 473), on the *Antidikomariamitae*.
22. *Ibid.*, LXXIX, ii, 3-vii, 4 (pp. 477-82).
23. 'La femme dans l'Eglise orthodoxe. Vision céleste et histoire', in *Contacts xxix*, 4 (1977), p. 318.
24. 'The Question of the Ordination of Women', in *The Orthodox Herald*, no. 125-6 (May-June 1975), p. 14.
25. *The Orthodox Church*, September 1975, p. 4.

26. Ap. Const. III, vi, 3 (ed. Funk, p. 191).
27. Dialogue with Trypho xlii, 1 (ed. Otto, p. 140).
28. Letter lxiii, 14 (ed. Hartel, p. 713).
29. Homily (xxvii, 4 on John (P.G. 59, 472)).
30. On the treachery of Judas i, 6 (P.G. 49, 380). Cf. Commentary on Galatians. 4.28 (P.G. 61, 663), on the sacrament of baptism: the words of God are spoken through the priest' (not by him).
31. To the Magnesians vi, 1; cf To the Trallians iii, 1; To the Smyrnaeans viii, 1.
32. Homily 123 (P.G. 89, 1817C).
33. Seven Chapters against the Iconoclasts 4 (P.G. 99, 493C). Cf. Theodore, Letters i, 11 (P.G. 99, 945C).
34. Cf. Ware and Davey, Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue, p. 74.
35. On the Holy Spirit xviii (45) (P.G. 32, 149C). Basil is speaking here about Trinitarian relationships, not about iconography; but in the disputes of the eighth to ninth centuries his words were applied to the holy icons (see John of Damascus, On the Holy Icons i, 21: ed. Kotter, p. 108).
36. 'Concerning Women's Ordination', in Lutge, Sexuality—Theology— Priesthood, pp. 14-15.
37. 'Women Priests?' (Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline 1976), pp. 3, 5.
38. The Orthodox Church, September 1975, p. 4.
39. 'Priestesses in the Church?', from God in the Dock, ed. W. Hooper (Michigan 1970), p. 238 (from an article originally published in 1948).
40. I take this phrase from the decree Inter insigniores (CTS Do 493, p. 11).
41. Very occasionally in the Christian tradition, feminine imagery has been applied to the deity, in particular to the Holy Spirit (see below, note 59). But this is the exception; all the main symbols 'given' to us are masculine.
42. See, for example, Clement of Alexandria, Stromateis iv, 8 (ed. Staehlin, p. 275, 21ff.); John Chrysostom, Sermon ii, 2 and iv, I on Genesis (P.G. 54, 589, 593); Homily xxvi, 2 on 1 Corinthians (P.G. 61, 214-15); Ps.-Gregory of Nyssa, On the Creation of Man (P.G. 44, 276A: ed. Hörner, p. 34, 8ff.); Basil of Seleucia, Oration 2 (P.G. 85, 44A); Procopius of Gaza, On Genesis 2.18 (P.G. 87 (i), 172A).
43. O. Clément, Questions sur l'homme (Paris 1972), p. 119.
44. Fr John Meyendorff, in The Orthodox Church, September 1975, p. 4. 45. See 'The New Middle Ages', in The End of Our Time (London 1933), pp. 117-18.
46. See 'Un Moine de l'Eglise d'Orient', Amour sans limites (Chevetogne 1971), p. 96.
47. See Questions sur l'homme, pp. 114-21 (brief, but highly perceptive).
48. See his important study La femme et le salut du monde. Etude d'anthropologie chrétienne sur les charismes du femme (Tournai/Paris 1958) not yet (alas) translated into English, and long since unobtainable in the French original.
49. 'La femme dans l'Eglise orthodoxe', in Contacts xxix, 4 (1977), pp. 303-9.

50. See the report *Orthodox Women: Their Role and Participation in the Orthodox Church*, published by the World Council of Churches: Sub-Unit on Women in Church and Society (Geneva 1977).

51. *Orthodox Women*, p. 50.

52. See Fr Sergei Hackel, 'Mother Maria Skobtsova: Deaconess Manquée?', in *Eastern Churches Review* i (1967), pp. 264-6.

53. This is the view of the Romanian theologian Prof. Nicolae Chitescu: see his article in the World Council of Churches pamphlet *Concerning the Ordination of Women* (Geneva 1964).

54. See the article by Prof Evangelos Theodorou of Athens University, 'The Ministry of Deaconesses in the Greek Orthodox Church', in *Orthodox Women*, pp. 37-43; also Militsa Zernov, 'Women's Ministry in the Church', in *Eastern Churches Review* vii (1975), pp. 34-9.

Prof Panagiotis Trempeles considers that deaconesses in the early Church 'received, not just a laying-on of hands (cheirothesia) but a real ordination (cheirotomia), being placed on a level somewhat lower than the deacon, but higher than the subdeacon' (*Dogmatiki tis Orthodoxou Katholikis Ekklesias*, vol. iii [Athens 1961], pp. 291-2; Fr. tr. by P. Dumont, *Dogmatique de l'Eglise orthodoxe catholique*, vol. iii [Chevetogne 1968], p. 309).

55. *Orthodox Women*, p.50.

56. *Didascalia Apostolorum*, ed. R. H. Connolly (Oxford 1929), xxv (p. 88); cf. *Ap. Const.* II, xxvi, 5-6 (ed. Funk, p. 105).

57. 'Les charismes de la femme', in *La nouveauté de l'Esprit* (Spiritualité Orientale, no. 20: Bellefontaine 1977), pp. 245-8. Cf. *La femme et le salut du monde*, pp.16, 211.

58. 'On the Male Character of Christian Priesthood', in *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* xix (1975), pp. 155-6.

59. On Virginity against the Jews xviii, 10 (ed. Parisot, col. 839). Cf. also *The Gospel according to the Hebrews*, in M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford 1924), p. 2; *The Acts of Thomas* 7, 27, 39, 50 (James, op. cit., pp. 368, 376, 384, 388); Gregory of Nyssa, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Sermons 6 and 15 (ed. Langerbeck, pp. 183, 468); Macarius, *Homily* xxviii, 4 (ed. Dörries, p. 233), etc. In the West, 'Mother language' is applied to God by Julian of Norwich. These passages should not be over-emphasized. In Syria after the middle of the fourth century, references to the Spirit as Mother become very rare; in the Greek tradition, such references are always exceptional.

60. See I. Hausherr, *Direction spirituelle en Orient autrefois* (*Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 144: Rome 1955), p. 267.

61. Athanasius, *Life of Antony* 3. In terming Antony 'father of monasticism', one should not forget Syria!

62. Incidentally she did not favour giving the priesthood to women. See her essay 'The Ideals of the Ministry of Women', in *Mixed Pastures* (London 1933); cited by V. A. Demant, *Why the Christian Priesthood is Male* (2nd edn, Church Literature Association, London 1977), pp. 20-1.

63. I borrow this phrase from Prof. Christos Yannaras, to whom I owe the ideas in this paragraph.

64. *Matryona's House and Other Stories*, tr. by M. Glenny (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth 1975), pp. 106-7.