

UNIT 3C: MINISTRIES AND MISSION

82: Men and Women in the Church

Summary

This lecture explores the Orthodox Christian perspective on gender roles within the Church, addressing feminist theology, scriptural teachings, and historical practices regarding men and women in ministry.

- **Feminism and God the Father:** Feminism varies widely, with some advocating equality in Church roles and others rejecting traditional Christianity as patriarchal. Orthodox theology challenges Freud's idea that God the Father is a human projection, emphasising God as the ultimate Father beyond human analogy. Attempts to reframe God as Mother are seen as pagan and incompatible with Orthodox tradition. Motherhood is honoured in the Theotokos, who exemplifies sanctified motherhood without contradicting the Father's primacy.
- **Moderate feminism and Orthodox response:** While equality of opportunity is supported, Orthodox teaching questions erasing gender distinctions in function and ministry, emphasising physiological and psychological differences that influence roles in society and Church.
- **Jesus Christ's approach to women:** Jesus radically included women in his ministry, teaching and supporting them despite cultural norms. However, he maintained an all-male group of Twelve Apostles, reflecting a distinction in roles rather than inequality. Women were active in evangelism and ministry but not in ecclesiastical authority or sacramental ministrations.
- **Women deacons in early Church:** St. Paul acknowledged women deacons such as Phoebe, and early Church Fathers praised their ministry. The female diaconate was ordained in the East until the medieval period and has seen recent revival, including official re-establishment by the Patriarchate of Alexandria in 2017. This development has yet to have been more widely adopted in the Church.
- **Male bishop and presbyterate roles:** St. Paul's writings restrict liturgical authority and teaching roles to men, justified by theological and scriptural principles regarding creation and order. Women's ministry is recognised but subordinate in authority. This tradition continued in the post-Apostolic Church with no acceptance of women bishops or presbyters.
- **Contemporary theological debates:** Some modern Orthodox theologians advocate for restoring women deacons more widely and reconsidering priestly ordination for women, suggesting cultural rather than theological objections. Calls for extensive reconsideration of women's roles in Orthodoxy have been made. These questions, in places, remain quite contentious in the Church.
- **C.S. Lewis on gender and priesthood:** Lewis argued that representing God in priesthood involves gendered symbolism rooted in the Fatherhood of God and the feminine Church, warning that reversing these roles would create a fundamentally different religion. He emphasised that gender distinctions in personhood are integral and not interchangeable without loss.
- **Orthodox synthesis on gender:** Orthodox teaching holds men and women equal in dignity but distinct in function and relation, with male-only episcopate and presbyterate justified on

theological and anthropological grounds. Changes to this order would require an Ecumenical Council.

- **Bibliographic references:** The lecture concludes with scholarly sources on women's roles and ordination in Orthodoxy, reflecting ongoing dialogue and study.

God the Father, Feminist Theology and Gender Relations

Feminism is difficult to define, and feminists are by no means agreed on what feminism is. For some, feminism is merely an attempt to redress inequality of opportunity between the sexes in employment and gender roles in the family and community. For others, feminism is a battle against the alleged repression of all things feminine by men, the only solution for which is all out gender war until the ground is recovered. There are religious variants of feminism based on the first view which are content to secure interchangeability of function between men and women at all levels of Church life. For these, working towards the first, a (legitimate) female Pope is a sacred task. Other more militant religious feminists, basing their views on the second model of gender war, regard Christianity as inescapably patriarchal and oppressive. These seek a new religion with some ties to Jesus but essentially rehabilitating the goddess cult of former times.

This part of the lecture is not seeking to address every variant of feminism, both moderate and radical, secular and faith based. Such a comprehensive approach would entangle us in a morass of social comment, half-baked theories and contentious subjectivity. Rather, the goal of this lecture is a more modest but crucial investigation into the alleged patriarchal dominance of monotheism, particularly in the Person of the Father as named, invoked and theologised.

The first person in the modern era to address this issue from a psychoanalytic perspective was Sigmund Freud. A lot of water has gone under the bridge since Freud grappled with the tortured neuroses and psychoses of his repressed Viennese patients. Modern psychiatry no longer doffs its cap to the "Great Master" as once before. Nonetheless, Freud's assessment of Christian belief in God the Father is

pivotal in order to understand feminism's varying reactions against it.¹

Freud argued that the invocation of the "Father" was a projection by humans of an idealized elusive fatherhood onto the Godhead. We, (some of us that is), have had such atrocious fathers on earth, that we seek by way of compensation an ideal Father in Heaven. This religious projection is, in fact, a reaction to a neurosis. Freud contended that if we learned how to deal with the neurosis, namely our half-concealed hatred for our human fathers, then the need to call God "Father" would vanish. In fact, for Freud, much of religion was really a projection of our disappointment and pain onto the canvass of Heaven. Freud's characterization was so popular because it was so plausible at first hearing. Clearly, God is not male, (or female). Did not Christ himself teach that: "God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and Truth?" (John 4:24). Freud would not even admit that God was LIKE a father. For Freud, God was the *illusion* of an ideal Father, made necessary by our anxieties and hurts. The suggestiveness of this approach led many to conclude that since our experience of human fatherhood was sometimes cruel and corrupting, we should hesitate before calling God "Father" for fear of making eternal and immeasurable the pain of knowing God in the hearts and lives of those abused by their own fathers. This clearly made Jesus the archetypal neurotic in the eyes of Freud. It was he who started the whole "Father-thing" off!

Following on from Freud, religious feminists have suggested that since all God-talk is clearly symbolic, non-realist and derived from human experience, we should invoke God as "Mother" instead or as an alternative. "Mother" is warm and kind, deeply imbued with the dark warmth and comfort of the earth, the breast and the womb. These are much the same feminists of course who have no compunction in ripping human life from the womb in abortion and more generally deprecate domestic motherhood as demeaning. Earth-Mother apparently, like the wolf in Little Red Riding Hood, has sharp teeth and ferocious claws.

¹ For a compilation of Freud's ideas about fathers see:
http://www.azquotes.com/author/5164-Sigmund_Freud/tag/father

We all shrink of course from such perversions of fatherhood and motherhood and yet the logic of Freud's analysis is inexorable. If paganism is to be resisted, (as a moderate feminist might argue), then God must re-envisioned as "Parent" or perhaps "It." In Orthodox terms this is a very unsatisfactory solution—indeed, completely unacceptable. God the Father is so anchored in Scripture and the Apostolic Tradition that any attempt to deconstruct that is bound to create a new religion or at the very least enter into uncertain territory. Orthodoxy, however, has a quite different strategic response to Freud's challenge. It exposes his basic premise of Fatherhood-projection by highlighting the apophatic method of Christian theologising.

Notice how Freud starts. He takes something which is patently obvious for transcendent monotheists, namely, that God is not literally a male person but then proceeds to deny the truth that God is Father, as if this followed from the first premise. God, of course, can be Father without being male, but only by recognising that all religious language is qualified and refined by the conviction that God is so utterly **UNLIKE** anything created. Therefore, God is not like a father, He is, in the First Person, the Father, the Source, the Fount of all that is, with the Son eternally begotten from Him and the Spirit proceeding forth. There is an "outgoingness in Love" in God which makes "Father" the most singular and apt hypostatic expression. True, there is an analogy in respect of human fatherhood, but it is an analogy to human fatherhood, not from it. This truth lies at the very heart of the absurdity of feminism's attack on God the Father. The Father is not imaged from our human fathers, (for that would be to make God in our own image, an idol); rather, human fatherhood in its highest expression has been imaged or derived from God the Father. In other words, we are made in the image of God. As St Paul says in Ephesians 3:14-15: "For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and on earth is named."

Now, there is a gaping hole in this presentation. If Genesis teaches, (which it does), that the image of God is manifest in men and women as created, then why cannot *motherhood* as well as fatherhood be derived from God in such a manner as

to legitimise God as Mother as well as Father? The answer to this lies in God's creative power. God creates without dependency on another, for he is sovereign and free and acts in the first instance alone. "Let it be," as He says, "and it is." This is not the action of a divine Mother. Mothers, in a human sense, act co-operatively and in a receptive manner. This does not make motherhood any less holy. Orthodox venerate matter as the creative and fecund principle of life, but this life comes in the first instance from the "outside" as it were, from the Father. To derive motherhood from the Godhead rather than anything created would be to give God a womb and to make the Universe "her" Body. This is the very essence of paganism; and it has resurfaced again recently in the works of such feminist Roman Catholic theologians as Rosemary Radford Ruether.²

For Orthodox Christians, motherhood is exemplified in the Theotokos, the Mother of God, the first and highest sanctified creature of the Lord who, being without form, took humanity upon Himself from her. In so doing, the Word and the Spirit worked but never ceased to depart from the Father who remained the Father. The Mother of God is such an affront to feminists because her role challenges the denigration of motherhood and the abominable fruit it has generated, sour and bitter to the taste—the infanticide of abortion, the trivialisation and degradation of sex, the rape of the earth. The only remedy for all these ills is to renounce Freud and his perversion of the Christian gospel and to return to the truly Biblical teaching concerning God the Father from whom all fatherhood is derived and the Theotokos, the New Eve, from whom Christ received our human nature.

Finally, for this part of the analysis, the question should be raised whether Orthodoxy can support a moderate feminist agenda that would promote equality of function (and, therefore, even, opportunity) in **ALL** realms of human life and work—a feminism which is, shall we say, religiously neutral? It is by no means clear that Orthodoxy can even do that. Consider equality of opportunity in employment. This is a good thing and should be promoted. But what do we make of these

² See Rosemary Radford Ruether, *My Quest for Hope and Meaning: An Autobiography* (Eugene, OR : Cascade Books, 2013).

opportunities in the culture and society that we are building? Do we send women into war as battle-hardened troops in the front line? Do we ask men, similarly, to emasculate themselves by embracing metrosexual androgyny? Do we promote the idea that gender is irrelevant to function? Increasingly, of course, we do just that. However, physiology and psychology suggest that the differences between men and women are real and not, therefore, at least in principle incidental to the quality of our human relationships and those roles in society men and women largely still prefer to assume, notwithstanding the best efforts of egalitarian social engineering? As far as the Church is concerned, should not the ministry she receives and upholds reflect something a little deeper than an otherwise unexceptional equivalence of function and charismatic competency between the sexes?

Jesus Christ: The Foundation for Men and Women in the Church

There can be little doubt that at the time of Christ the position of women in Jewish society had seriously declined since the period of the tribal confederacy over a millennium before when men and women equally could enter the shrine at Shiloh (1 Samuel 1). In the Herodian Temple women were only allowed in as far as the forecourt. In the synagogue they stood apart from the men in a gallery or outer chamber. The attitude of some rabbis was even more reprehensible. Rabbi Jehuda (2nd century A.D.) prayed thus: “Praised be God that he did not create me as a Gentile! Praised, that he did not create me as a woman! Praise, that he did not create me as an ignorant person.” The third thanksgiving in this prayer reflects the unfortunate teaching that women could not understand the Torah nor should they be encouraged to try. Rabbi Eliezer writing about 90 A.D. acknowledged that: “Women are often placed on a level with slaves and children in respect of the fulfilment of certain commandments. This, more than anything else, attests to the inferior position occupied by women, as compared with men, in respect of the Torah.”³

³ For a balanced study of the negative attitude toward women among Jews in first-century Palestinian society, as well as the affirmation of women by both St Paul and Jesus Christ, see

Into this society was born Jesus Christ who astounded his own teachers with the breadth and depth of his knowledge of the Torah and the traditions of Israel (Matthew 7:29). Even as a child at the age of twelve in the Temple his wisdom astonished the elders (Luke 2:46-47). However, the Messiah was not content simply to teach, preach and deepen a person's appreciation of the Law *theoretically*; he practised what He preached, and this is what upset and offended some people the most. His radical behaviour was nowhere to be seen in greater contrast to the mores of his day than in his relationships with and treatment of women. In this he broke all the religious taboos. He allowed himself to be touched by a female sinner (Luke 7:37 ff.); he did not respect the uncleanness of a woman with a flow of blood (Mark 5:24-34); and he protected an adulteress from the self-righteous judgmentalism of her male accusers (John 8:11). Our Lord conversed with and taught women, causing offence both to rabbis and laymen alike (John 4:27; Luke 10:39; Mark 7:24-30). Women accompanied Christ and supported him in his ministry, and, of course, they stayed with him all the way to the cross, at which point most of his male disciples betrayed or deserted him (Luke 8:1-3; Mark 15:40-41). Women, of course, were the first witnesses to the resurrection, taking the message to their incredulous male associates, (Luke 24:11). It is St Luke both in his Gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles who is most concerned to chronicle Christ's complete lack of discrimination between men and women in his ministry, and it is the women that really stand out in his accounts.

When we bear in mind Christ's revolutionary attitude towards women as recorded in the Gospels, a stance untrammelled and unhindered by societal and religious norms, it is surely noteworthy in respect of the Twelve, that Jesus maintained an all-male preserve, especially when in the light of his common practice he could have so easily included the women and not least, of course, his

Leonard J. Swidler, *Yeshua: A Model for Moderns* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1993), esp. p. 67 ff. Swidler points out that St Paul was firmly rejecting this negative rabbinic attitude toward women in Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free; there is neither male nor female for you are all one in Christ Jesus." These pages are available on the web by pasting into a browser: <https://books.google.co.uk/books?isbn=1556121822> or searching for: "[Yeshua: A Model for Moderns - Page 67 - Google Books Result](#)".

own Blessed Mother; but he did not. The argument that he was necessarily constrained in this by the standards and assumptions of his culture is very weak when we recognise how truly radical he was in renewing and interpreting the Law according to God and not the traditions of men, perhaps even especially *men!*

There is a twofold truth in the Orthodox Christian teaching about gender. Women are the equal of men and gifted by God for the work of his Kingdom in evangelism, prophecy and intercessory prayer. Men, however, are more suited to the oversight of communities and their worship. The idea that both this equality and this distinction creates a fundamentally unjust inequality between men and women is completely unsupportable in the context of our Lord's own practice. Interestingly, St Paul continues in the radical tradition of Christ concerning the role of women in ministry, but with his conservatism in respect of oversight intact. We shall see this approach continued and maintained until about the sixth century when something of the earlier synthesis begins to be lost; but it is to St Paul and his teaching and practice that we now turn. It is in the teaching of St Paul that the question of male oversight comes into clearer focus, not contrary to Christ but elucidating our Lord's own practice and setting the standard for generations to come, even perhaps down to our own day. The question of women deacons will be the first consideration in the light of the teaching and practice of this great Apostle to the Gentiles.

St Paul and Those Who Came after Him

Women Deacons / Deaconesses

St Paul worked with deaconesses, or, if the term is preferred, women deacons. That much is clear. St Phoebe, accredited with being entrusted by St Paul with the delivering of his Epistle to the Romans from Achaia, served the Church in Cenchrea as a deaconess (Romans 16:1). Dorcas of Joppa (Acts 9:36) or St Tabitha the Merciful, as she was later to be known, is also remembered as a deaconess in Tradition, as are St Lydia (Acts 16:14-15), St Tryphena (Romans 16:12), St Priscilla (Romans 16:3-4) and St Junia or Julia (Romans 16:6-7). Clement of Alexandria, St

John Chrysostom, St Theodoret of Cyr and many other Church Fathers commended very highly and explicitly the ministry of women deacons, whose ministries certainly flourished in their own day. A comment from St John Chrysostom is worth quoting in full for it gainsays all those who ever since have sought by degrees to demote women from this holy order. He comments on 1 Timothy 3:11 as follows:

Some have claimed that this was said of women generally, but this is not so, for why should he [St Paul] introduce anything about women to interfere with his subject? He is speaking, rather, of those women who have the dignity of the diaconate: ‘Let deacons be the husband of one wife.’ This is fitting to say of women deacons as well, as this order is also in the highest degree necessary, useful and proper in the Church.⁴

In commenting on Romans 16:1, St John Chrysostom also points out “how many ways St Paul dignifies Phoebe,” by mentioning “her before all the rest and even [calling] her his sister,” as well as mentioning “her rank of deaconess as well.”⁵

In the West, it was soon denied that these women were in holy orders, but in the Christian East, with a closer geographical and cultural proximity to the Apostles themselves, it was never doubted that deaconesses were ordained, at least until the medieval period. The Byzantine rite for the ordination of women deacons parallels that of male deacons exactly. The women were even invested with the orarion (the deacon’s stole) in the altar itself, albeit these deaconesses had catechetical and pastoral ministries, not liturgical ones.

Since the decline of the female order beginning in the 6th Century the office of deaconess has never been abolished in the Orthodox Church. Indeed, St Nektarios

⁴ St John Chrysostom’s homily on women deacons is cited in part in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture New Testament IX*, Peter J. Gorday (ed.) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), p. 175. However, the key last sentence, “... this order [of women deacons] is also in the highest degree necessary, useful and proper in the Church,” is not given. This is in keeping with the policy of the editors of all of the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, both Old and New Testaments, that as “an ecumenical project” controversial texts are avoided, especially in the context of how to govern the Church.

⁵ St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans 30*, cited in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture New Testament VI*, Gerald Bray (ed.) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), p. 369.

of Aegina is believed to have ordained a nun to this order in 1911. Many claim this happened, but others take the view that he ordained a subdeaconess instead. Since 1952 the Church of Greece has maintained a school for deaconesses but without as yet ordaining any. However, on 17th February 2017 the Patriarchate of Alexandria re-established the ministry of deaconesses at a Hierarchical Liturgy in the Missionary Centre of Kolwezi.⁶ In the contemporary Orthodox Church the historical reality and present propriety of a renewed female diaconate is, therefore, not only entirely uncontroversial but also now an actual reality. This was established beyond doubt in recent times at the 1988 Inter-Orthodox Symposium on Rhodes which also commended a rejuvenation of the diaconate as a whole and by implication this necessitates a review of future female diaconal roles.⁷

The Male Bishop / Presbyter

St Paul is seen by some to contradict himself in both teaching and practice concerning the status and ministry of women. Notwithstanding his high esteem for the deaconesses and female supporters who worked with him and supported him, his stance seems quite different when he addresses the issue of women in the liturgical assembly. They are to be subordinate to the men in teaching and authority (1 Timothy 2:12), silent (1 Corinthians 14:34-36) and veiled (1 Corinthians 11:3-16). This cannot be attributed simply to a local problem of rowdy or chatty women disturbing the Liturgy, because St Paul justifies his teaching with theological principles of gender identity and relations derived mainly from Genesis. Men were created before women, from pre-existing male flesh rather from the dust of the earth; and the Fall has triggered a tension in the male-female relationships arising from Eve's forwardness and Adam's weakness. The subordination of women to men

⁶ <http://basilica.ro/en/patriarch-theodoros-of-alexandria-performs-first-consecration-of-deaconesses/>

⁷ Further consideration of the diaconate and the female diaconate in particular may be found in a paper submitted by Archpriest Gregory Hallam to the Episcopal Assembly of Orthodox Bishops for Great Britain and Ireland in 2011, here:-
https://www.aidanorthodox.com/_files/ugd/459d3c_486b1fa375954aa681e1253fe4015c01.pdf

in the home, the Church and the world is seen as a combination of natural endowment (subsequently: St Efrem, St Ambrose, St Augustine) and post-lapsarian [after the Fall] economy (St John Chrysostom). In the Church it is proper for women to exercise charismatic gifts of prophecy, intercession and pastoral support but not so as to have authority over men. To be fair to the Apostle, he does lay upon men an even greater responsibility of sacrificial love for women analogous to Christ's love for his own body, the Church even if he does at the same time teach that the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the Head of the Church (Ephesians 5:22-33). Equality in Christ in baptism, where there is neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, slave nor free (Galatians 3:27-28) does not mean for St Paul any equivalence in ministerial roles between men and women when this concerns male authority and headship. It must not be thought either that such apostolic teaching is limited to St Paul. St Peter enjoins the same teaching as well (1 Peter 3:1-7).

These Pauline norms in gender relations and ministries were carried forward without much comment or disagreement into the post-Apostolic Church.⁸ Occasionally, the Church might address the issue of a sect or heresy (e.g. the Artotyrites), who had received women into episcopal or presbyteral orders. In their arguments against this practice the Fathers never challenged the headship of the male. St Epiphanius of Salamis condemned the Artotyrites (they used bread and cheese in the Eucharist!) for overturning the post-lapsarian order of male-female relations in plain contradiction of Scripture. He seems to have been aware of a number of such groups, for we find him writing in a similar vein against the Antidicomarianites, (who denied the perpetual virginity of the Theotokos), the Collyridians (who worshipped the Theotokos as a goddess) and the Quintillianists (who, like the Montanists, were "Pentecostal" ecstasies).

In modern times, some Christian traditions in the West have tried to sidestep the issue of male authority by supposing that only men can sacramentally represent Christ to the people but this is a novel teaching without precedent in Tradition.

⁸ The evidence includes St John Chrysostom (Homily 20 on Ephesians); Clement of Alexandria (Stromata); and St Irenaeus (Fragment 32).

Indeed, the Eastern rites make clear that Christ alone is the High Priest at the Eucharist. It is necessary to face the fact that in antiquity, and in Christianity and Judaism in particular, it was theologically impossible for women to have authority over men; and, therefore, to claim oversight or episcopal function (from which the presbyterate in turn derives its own authority). This is the sequence of the argument. Since women cannot be bishops, neither can they be presbyters (priests) who stand in the bishop's place and only act with his authority. The diaconate, however, is an order whose purpose is to assist and support the bishop on the one hand and on the other to offer care for and counsel other women (and sometimes men), to pray, and if it is their charism to prophesy and preach, but not in the liturgical assembly. Many women in exercising these subordinate roles nonetheless exceeded in esteem their male counterparts; and it was not uncommon in the first six centuries to receive such women evangelists, prophets and pastoral workers as "equal-to-the-Apostles." This should remove any doubt that the ministry of women was welcomed in the Christian East. Nonetheless, this endorsement of the ministry of women always fell far short of receiving them into the episcopate or presbyterate.

It can now be seen how St Paul's teaching and practice, albeit in different ways and circumstances, reflected the distinctions Christ Himself made between the women with whom he associated and worked and the male Twelve to whom he, as a male Messiah and a human Saviour, committed His own authority. The only question remaining, and, of course, it is a crucial one, is whether such distinctions between men and women in the exercise of authority are truly permanent aspects of the created gender identities and relations or merely relative cultural aspects now transcended in our (allegedly) more egalitarian age. On this question alone hangs the admission of women to the episcopate and presbyterate.

Elizabeth Behr-Sigel (1907-2005) is one of the few contemporary Orthodox theologians who has "called for the restoration of women deacons and further

challenged the theological arguments for denying priestly ordination to women.”⁹

As Father Dr Michael Plekon has noted:

In time Bishop Kallistos (Ware) came to agree with her that much of the contemporary Orthodox argument against the ordination of women is cultural rather than theological and as she [i.e. Elizabeth Behr-Sigel] argued even theological arguments such as female impurity or the physical male resemblance to Christ are not recognised by John Chrysostom or Gregory of Nazianzus, among others...¹⁰

In an entry, “Women in Orthodoxy,” in Father John Anthony McGuckin’s *The Concise Encyclopedia of Orthodox Christianity*, Niki J. Tsironis calls for “an extensive reconsideration of the role of women in the Orthodox Church worldwide.”¹¹

For the Orthodox, very interesting insights are presented for us by a 20th century Christian who was probably Orthodox before his time, or rather before there was an English expression of Orthodoxy to receive him. This is C.S. Lewis, who wrote about the ordination of women long before it became a possibility in the Anglican Church to which he belonged.

Not a Job—Being Human

With Lewis this lecture returns full circle to the issues raised by invoking God as Father and feminism. Lewis originally wrote about the priesting of women under the title “Notes on the Way,” in *Time and Tide*, Vol. XXIX (August 14, 1948). His first rebuttal of the call for women priests introduces us to the reality of gender in the representational role of the priest. He does not use the “alter Christus / icon of Christ” argument from the Eucharist but, rather more Biblically, draws our attention

⁹ The Revd Dr Michael Plekon, “The Russian religious revival and its theological legacy, pp. 203-217 in Mary B. Cunningham and Elizabeth Theokritoff (Eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp.212-213.

¹⁰ Plekon, p. 213. See E. Behr-Sigel and K. Ware, *The Ordination of Women in the Orthodox Church* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2003), pp. 78-90.

¹¹ Tsironis in McGuckin, pp. 517-521, esp. p. 521.

to the Fatherhood of God and the feminine aspect of the human partnership in the mystical marriage of the covenant with these words:

Suppose the reformer stops saying that a good woman may be like God and begins saying that God is like a good woman. Suppose he says that we might just as well pray to "Our Mother which art in heaven" as to "Our Father". Suppose he suggests that the Incarnation might just as well have taken a female as a male form, and the Second Person of the Trinity be as well called the Daughter as the Son. Suppose, finally, that the mystical marriage were reversed, that the Church were the Bridegroom and Christ the Bride. All this, as it seems to me, is involved in the claim that a woman can represent God as a priest does.

Lewis goes on to claim, quite reasonably, that this reconstruction would lead to an entirely different religion being taught and practised. The alternative would be to demote sexual differentiation as having nothing to say about being human.

His second argument follows this route into a deprecation of the neutering of humanity which would reduce priesthood to the category of a productive job, the theology of the anthill, but not the family. He goes on to say: "We have no authority to take the living and semiotic figures which God has painted on the canvas of our nature and shift them about as if they were mere geometrical figures." AND

A given man may make a very bad husband; you cannot mend matters by trying to reverse the roles. He may make a bad male partner in a dance. The cure for that is that men should more diligently attend dancing classes; not that the ballroom should henceforward ignore distinctions of sex and treat all dancers as neuter.

I think that Lewis is saying that whereas our nature is human, our personhood is not. This is either male or female and there are distinctive aspects to each that cannot be flattened out and interchanged without imperilling what is best preserved in a family that has both a father and a mother. The Church participates by extension

from this family, preserving those distinctive roles, particularly when they point back to God through fatherhood and to the Church through Mary and motherhood.

Lewis concludes his short essay with these words:

With the Church, we are farther in: for there we are dealing with male and female not merely as facts of nature but as the live and awful shadows of realities utterly beyond our control and largely beyond our direct knowledge. Or rather, we are not dealing with them but (as we shall soon learn if we meddle) they are dealing with us.

Many, but not all Orthodox, regard such words as a timely warning. He has the Tradition of the Church on his side, albeit he was not himself Orthodox. The Apostles and Fathers (and for that matter, Mothers) of the Church have insisted that authority and headship belong to the male (as also to God) with nurture and transformation belonging to the female (as also to the Church). The domestic and ecclesiastical expressions of these truths witness to the way that the two genders of humanity, equal in nature but bipolar in personhood, make for an effective personal union both with each other sexually and with God spiritually. We indeed tamper with these realities at our peril.

So, the Orthodox synthesis is as it always has been—men and women in the divine image and likeness, equal in being and dignity, different by function and relation. It is not *of necessity* either irrational or unjust, therefore, to maintain a male-only episcopate and presbyterate. There are sound theological and anthropological reasons for doing so. The burden of proof lies rather with those who wish to make the change. Such a change would not be strictly impossible, but it could only of course be promulgated by an Ecumenical Council of the Church.

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