

## **Theological Presuppositions and Logical Fallacies in much of the Contemporary Discussion of the Ordination of Women<sup>1</sup>**

*Valerie A. Karras  
Eden Theological Seminary and  
University of Missouri-St. Louis*

**Abstract:** Discussions regarding the reestablishment of the ordained female diaconate and the question of the ordination of women to the priesthood have led to a variety of arguments based on new or adapted perspectives in the areas of theological anthropology and liturgical theology, as well as differing opinions on the parameters of static permanency versus acculturation with respect to ordained orders. Unfortunately, many of these arguments come from *a priori* opinions that women should not and cannot be ordained, with the result that the attempt to create theological argumentation to support an already-decided view has had unintended, negative consequences with respect to such diverse topics as incarnational soteriology as it relates to women and the symbolic and iconic function of the priest in the liturgy. This paper will provide an overview of some of these arguments and offer a cursory critique of them.

In 1978 I considered the ordination of women priests to be an impossibility. Now I am much more hesitant. ...What I would plead is that we Orthodox should regard the matter as essentially an open question. Let us not imagine that in this area everything is clarified and finally settled; for manifestly it is not, either for us Orthodox or for other Christians.—*Kallistos Ware, Bishop of Diokleia*<sup>2</sup>

The question of the ordination of women to the priesthood ... must become for us [Orthodox] a question that is asked “from the inside.” This question requires of us all an interior freedom and a deep communion with the vision and will of God, in a prayerful silence.—*Anthony Bloom, Metropolitan of Sourozh*<sup>3</sup>

An Orthodox woman who is competent to do so can occupy a New Testament teaching post in a prestigious theological faculty such as that of Thessalonica. She is, however, not permitted to read the gospel in the worship of the people of God. An Orthodox theological conference declares unanimously that “any act denying dignity to the human person, any discrimination between men and women based on sex is a sin”. But, following a custom that has progressively been established in the Orthodox Church, women remain barred from the altar.—*Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, French Orthodox theologian*<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The opening quotes here also appeared in my article, “Orthodox Theologies of Woman and Ordained Ministry,” in *Thinking through Faith*, ed. Aristotle Papanikolaou and Elizabeth Prodromou (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2008), 113-58.

<sup>2</sup> Kallistos Ware, “Man, Woman and the Priesthood of Christ,” in *Women and the Priesthood*, new ed., Thomas Hopko, ed. (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1999): 5–53, at 7.

<sup>3</sup> Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, “Preface to the French Edition,” in Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women in the Church*, Fr Steven Bigham, trans. (Redondo Beach, CA: Oakwood Publications, 1991): xiii–xiv, at xiv.

<sup>4</sup> Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, “Women in the Orthodox Church,” in Elisabeth Behr Sigel and Kallistos Ware, *The Ordination of Women in the Orthodox Church* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2000): 1–10, at 8. The embedded quote

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. English speakers, excuse me for a moment while I greet those in Thessaloniki and elsewhere in Greek.

Καλημέρα σας, κυρίες και κύριοι. Με συγχωρείτε για τα λάθη που κάνω στα ελληνικά, αλλά θέλω προσωπικά να πω «συγχαρητήρια» στον κ. καθηγητή Ευάγγελο Θεοδώρο για αυτή την επάξια αναγνώριση και να δώσω τις θερμές μου ευχαριστίες στον κ. καθηγητή Πέτρο Βασιλειάδη για και τη πρόσκληση να σας μιλήσω σήμερα και τη βοήθειά του με τη τεχνολογία για να κάνω αυτή την εγγραφή βίντεο.

No women in the Eastern Orthodox churches today are ordained to any of the so-called “major orders” of deacon, presbyter (priest), and bishop.<sup>5</sup> Historically, women have never been ordained to the priesthood or episcopacy.<sup>6</sup> Even in early Christianity and in the Byzantine Church, where women were fully ordained and ranked as deacons,<sup>7</sup> their liturgical functions occurred primarily in the private, female spheres of parish life (e.g., taking the Eucharist to sick women in their homes). With the exception of (1) their ordination and reception of the Eucharist at the altar (2) their assistance in the physical rites of baptism of adult women converts, and (3) their chanting at matins (and perhaps other services) in the Great Church of Hagia Sophia, we

---

is from “Conclusions of the Consultation: Report,” in *The Place of the Woman in the Orthodox Church*, ed. Gennadios Limouris (Katerina, Greece: Tertios Publications, 1992): 21–34, at 28.

<sup>5</sup> This may change in the future due to the October 8, 2004 decision of the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece to reinstitute the female diaconate, although the synod decided to limit it initially to a few remote women’s monasteries. Nevertheless, some bishops seek the revival of a full, ordained pastoral ministry for women. Phyllis Zagano, a professor of religious studies at Hofstra University, penned a short article on this synodal decision for the online version of the Catholic magazine *America*. In it, she quoted from the Athens News Agency, noting that “Chrysostomos, bishop of Peristeri, said, ‘The role of female deacons must be in society and not in the monasteries.’” Other members of the Holy Synod agreed and stressed that the role of women deacons should be social—for example, the care of the sick.” Phyllis Zagano, “Grant Her Your Spirit,” <[www.Americamagazine.org](http://www.Americamagazine.org)>, February 7, 2005; reproduced on the Orthodox News website sponsored by the Orthodox Christian News Service, <[www.orthodoxnews.netfirms.com/158/Your.htm](http://www.orthodoxnews.netfirms.com/158/Your.htm)>, vol. 7, no. 6, February 8, 2005.

In the early twentieth century, St Nektarios of Aegina ordained to the diaconate two nuns in the women’s monastery he founded on the island. When questioned about this by Archbishop Theoklitos of Athens, the saint replied that they were really akin to subdeacons; however, they chanted petitions and read the Gospel during services, which are liturgical functions of the deacon but not of the subdeacon. See Kyriaki Karidoyanes FitzGerald, *Women Deacons in the Orthodox Church: Called to Holiness and Ministry* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998): 151–52.

Among the Oriental Orthodox churches, the Coptic Church in Egypt has consecrated (non-ordained) deaconesses, whose ministry includes religious education and pastoral service. In the Armenian Apostolic Church from the mid-nineteenth century until about two decades ago, some nuns were fully ordained as female deacons, exercising the same liturgical functions and being vested identically (except for the addition of a veil) to their male counterparts.

<sup>6</sup> A few scholars—most notably Giorgio Otranto, Mary Ann Rossi, and Karen Jo Torjesen—have interpreted epigrammatic titles such as *presbytera* or *episcopa*, a badly damaged Roman catacomb fresco, and an ambiguous papal letter as evidence that women were ordained to the offices of presbyter and bishop, but their theories have not been widely accepted within the scholarly community. Giorgio Otranto, “Note sul Sacerdozio Femminile Nell’antichità in Margine a una Testimonianza di Gelasio I” *Vetera Christianorum* 19 (1982): 341–60; Giorgio Otranto, *Italia Meridionale e Puglia Paleocristiane: Saggi Storici* (Bari: Edipuglia, 1991); Mary Ann Rossi, “Priesthood, Precedent, and Prejudice: On Recovering the Women Priests of Early Christianity” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 73–93; and Karen Jo Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests: Women’s Leadership in the Early Church and the Scandal of Their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1993). For a critique of these arguments, see Valerie A. Karras, “Priestesses of Priests’ Wives? The *Presbytera* in Early Christianity” *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 51:2-3 (2007): 321-45.

<sup>7</sup> See the discussion of the nature of the historical female diaconate in a later section of this article.

have no extant evidence of female deacons' participation in public worship beyond their ministry in women's monastic churches and within the women's areas of parish churches and cathedrals.<sup>8</sup>

There is nothing surprising about this. The Church's historical division according to sex of public and private diaconal ministries paralleled the gendered division of functions in almost all aspects of life in the late antique and Byzantine societies in which Orthodox Christianity developed. However, in contemporary Western societies, the roles and functions of women are undifferentiated from those of men in virtually every area except within some churches, including the Orthodox Church, where women are entirely excluded from ordained orders.

When questions and challenges were initially raised in the modern era both within and outside of Orthodoxy about this exclusion, the most common response was simply that this was the tradition of the church. However, there are many traditions in the Church, and not all of them are theologically based and immutable in nature. In fact, some more recent "traditions" of the past few decades or even centuries conflict with older practices and sometimes even with canonical or nomo-canonical legislation.<sup>9</sup> Thus, it has become common for Orthodox theologians to distinguish between "traditions" with a small "t" (that is, liturgical and other practices which may be rooted in the needs, experiences, or culture of an Orthodox people in a given time and place) and "Tradition" with a capital "T" as a manifestation of the underlying theology and spirituality of the Orthodox Church throughout time and irrespective of place.<sup>10</sup>

When we survey the books, articles, conference papers, blogs, and other venues for discussion of the question of the ordination of women, we often find arguments that originate from an *a priori* assertion that women cannot be ordained, with the argumentation serving as *ex post facto* support for a conclusion which has already been made. Usually, authors do not announce that they have argued backward from an already-arrived at conclusion, but some opponents of women's ordination, e.g., Frs. Lawrence Farley and Chad Hatfield in the U.S., have explicitly said or written that they left their former churches (in their case, the Episcopal Church of the Anglican communion) at least in part over the ordination of women and thus are now opposing women's ordination (to the diaconate as well as the priesthood) within the Orthodox Church. One of the problems with this type of argumentation is that the attempt to argue backward from a predetermined decision can lead not only to awkward and unconvincing argumentation but also to unintended consequences in areas tangential to the core topic.

There are a host of arguments raised by opponents to women's ordination, far too many to survey in this brief presentation, but I wish to examine here a few of the more common ones which have these serious theological consequences. Because it is a new publication which has

---

<sup>8</sup> For a full examination of the evidence regarding the historical ordination and functions of female deacons, see Valerie A. Karras, "Female Deacons in the Byzantine Church," *Church History* 73:2 (June 2004): 272–316.

<sup>9</sup> Most of these newer traditions are late or post-Byzantine, e.g., the wearing of crowns by bishops or the wide-sleeved robes and stovepipe hats worn by many priests and deacons. The former was forbidden while a Byzantine emperor still existed, and the latter developed from Ottoman judicial attire, which itself was adapted from French judicial clothing.

<sup>10</sup> As Vladimir Lossky averred, Tradition is "the critical spirit of the Church": "Tradition and traditions," in his *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974): 141–168, at 156. Kallistos Ware, who cautions that "[t]radition is not to be equated with cultural stereotypes, with custom or social convention; there is a vital difference between 'traditions' and Holy Tradition" (Ware, "Man, Woman, and the Priesthood," 10) advocates a dynamic, critical, and creative appropriation of tradition: "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' (Mt 16:3)—who is prepared to discover the leaven of the Gospel at work even within such a seemingly secular movement as modern feminism." (p. 26)

received exposure on some prominent Orthodox websites, I will frequently be using as a model for these arguments a new book by Father Lawrence Farley entitled *Feminism and Orthodoxy*,<sup>11</sup> together with an article he has written<sup>12</sup> and interview he has given on this topic.<sup>13</sup>

In exploring issues regarding the ordination of women, one of the most fundamental questions is, “ordination to *what?*” The issues surrounding the ordination of women to the diaconate and to the presbytery, or priesthood, are very different for two important reasons: (1) there is a long, well-documented history of women’s ordination to the diaconate, and (2) the diaconate and the priesthood are two very different ministries and orders. I will return to the first issue shortly, but let me first point out, with respect to the first issue, that the conflation of the diaconate with the priesthood is just one of the many problems in terms of liturgical theology which are made by many opponents of women’s ordination.

Although the diaconate has since early times been ranked as what we today call a “major order,” together with the priesthood and the episcopacy, it nevertheless is a quite different ordained ministry. Unlike the presbyter, the deacon does not celebrate the sacraments (*mysteria*) of the church: the deacon cannot baptize, chrismate, give absolution in the sacrament of penance, serve as the celebrant for a eucharistic liturgy, or marry a couple in the sacrament of matrimony. Moreover, the funeral service for a deacon is the service done for a layman as opposed to the funeral service done for a presbyter. The lack in most Orthodox churches today of a full-time, fully functional diaconate with a ministry of *service* to parish communities has only exacerbated the failure of most of our faithful today to recognize and understand the unique character of the diaconate as a ministry and ordained order quite distinct from those of the presbytery and the episcopacy.

To return to the first issue, I find it incomprehensible, given all the research and publications done over the past century which have illuminated the historical record and subjected it to close examination, that anyone could still attempt to argue against the incontrovertible *fact* of the history of fully-ordained female deacons in the late antique and Byzantine-era church. Certainly, no such argumentation can be done with intellectual honesty. For example, in an interview with Fr. Chad Hatfield, chancellor of St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, Fr. Lawrence Farley ignores historical evidence that runs contrary to his theory that the female diaconate “did not exist for the first two hundred years of church history,”<sup>14</sup> and claims, for example, that the Apostle Paul’s reference to Phoebe as a *diakonos* in Romans 16:1 should be translated in the generic sense of “servant” rather than the specific sense of “deacon,” although this interpretation is at odds both with the exegeses of early Christian writers as disparate as Origen and St. John

---

<sup>11</sup> Lawrence Farley, *Feminism and Orthodoxy: Quiet Reflections on Ordination and Communion* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> “A Second Look at the Rejuvenation of the Ministry of the Ordained Deaconess,” in “Soundings” on *Orthodox Christian Network*, posted December 4, 2014. < <http://myocn.net/second-look-rejuvenation-ministry-ordained-deaconess/>>

<sup>13</sup> “Deaconesses,” podcast and transcript, in “Voices from St. Vladimir’s Seminary” on *Ancient Faith Radio*, posted December 3, 2014. <<http://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/svsvoices/deaconesses>>

<sup>14</sup> For example, a famous letter Pliny the Younger wrote to the emperor Trajan in about 112 CE mentions that two women “whom the Christians call deacons [*ministrae*]” had been arrested and tortured. Davies, “Deacons, Deaconesses,” 2-3, says that “nothing certain can be deduced from Pliny’s account. The two slave girls may have been called δίακονοι, but this does not necessarily imply that they belonged to an official order nor, if such an order were in existence, that it was known outside the confines of Bithynia.” Gryson, *The Ministry of Women*, 14-15, and Martimort, *Deaconesses*, 25-6, are similarly cautious. However, the ambiguity surrounds the functions and understanding of whether it is an “office”; that δίακονος was used as a title for certain women in the apostolic and sub-apostolic church is not in dispute.

Chrysostom, who understood Phoebe to be a deacon,<sup>15</sup> and with epigraphical evidence describing a fourth-century female deacon as a “second Phoebe.”<sup>16</sup> (I note in passing that the association of ordained female deacons with Phoebe is also made explicitly in the second prayer in the Byzantine deaconess’s ordination rite.<sup>17</sup>)

With respect to the ordination rite for the female deacon, Fr. Farley follows a similar methodology to Catholic theologian Aimé-Georges Martimort, underplaying the significance of major ritual elements that are similar or identical in the ordination rites of male and female deacons, and instead emphasizing the few trivial differences between them (e.g., that the male deacon knelt on one knee while the female deacon stood), arguing that these minor differences are sufficiently significant to reduce the female diaconate to a lesser order, if an ordained order at all.

Such intellectual dishonesty has unintended consequences in that it distorts the liturgical theology underlying the ritual for the sacrament of holy orders. Two of the most crucial distinctions between the ordination rites for major and minor orders, for example, are that the ordinations of deacon and presbyter occur within the altar area and during the eucharistic liturgy; by contrast, ordinations to lower orders (subdeacon, reader, etc.) occur outside of the altar and outside of the liturgy. These distinctions reflect the integral eucharistic functions of presbyter and deacon, which is also why their placement within the liturgy reflects each order’s particular eucharistic role: the presbyter is ordained just prior to the *anaphora* with its climax in the consecration, while the deacon – who does *not* act as celebrant of the eucharistic liturgy – is ordained *after* the *anaphora* but prior to the distribution of the eucharist, an act in which he *will* participate.

These central liturgical functions are also reflected in the presbyter’s and deacon’s reception of the eucharist at the altar, whereas those ordained to lower orders receive the eucharist with the laity. Fr. Farley minimizes the significance of this rubric as well, noting that, while the male deacon was given the chalice so that he could then distribute the eucharist to the faithful, the female deacon “gave it right back” and thus, according to him, “was given the Chalice symbolically.” Fr. Farley thereby ignores both the reality of the female deacon’s having received the eucharist at the altar with the other clergy, and that this reception signified her liturgical as well as pastoral role in distributing the eucharist, albeit specifically to women in their homes.

This raises another interesting issue. It is clear from church manuals and other historical documents that the female deacon did not serve the same public liturgical functions as the male deacon: for instance, while deacons of both sexes took the eucharist to the homes of sick members of their respective sex, only male deacons distributed the eucharist during the liturgy. Fr. Farley argues that this lack of a *public* eucharistic function for female deacons somehow undermines the diaconal reality of their order. Simultaneously, he criticizes the recent document titled the “Call” by St. Catherine’s Vision for proposing that the ordination requirements and diaconal functions of a restored female diaconate be equivalent to those of the male diaconate.

Farley and others opposed to the reinstatement of an ordained female diaconate within Orthodoxy typically argue that, since the segregation of the sexes which gave the female

---

<sup>15</sup> Origen, *Commentary on Romans*, 10, 17 (PG 14: 1278ABC); John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, 30, 2 (PG 60: 663C-664A).

<sup>16</sup> An epigram from the Mount of Olives for a deacon named Sophia describes her as a “second Phoebe”, indicating that the fourth-century Palestinian church also understood the word to refer to a specific office rather than as a generic adjective. See Ute Eisen, *Women Officeholders*, 158-60.

<sup>17</sup> Bar. 163.3; *Barberini*, 185-6; *Euchologion*, 218.

diaconate its primary functions no longer exists in most of the modern world, the rationale for an ordained female diaconate has died together with this social convention. Such a line of argument is remarkable in its irony since it is based on a dynamic, enculturated understanding of how holy orders should be organized and function, a flexible understanding of the nature of ordained ministries which runs directly contrary to the adherence to a static notion of tradition which in almost every other respect characterizes the opponents of women's ordination.

I am in agreement with these opponents that the rules of eligibility and the specific parameters of diaconal ministry can and should be flexible, but they should be flexible enough to allow the Orthodox diaconate to function as fully as possible with the best ministers possible in our contemporary society. In fact, I would argue the opposite to opponents of a modern female diaconate with respect to *how* that flexibility and acculturation should be understood today. If we examine the cultural context of the historical female diaconate, we cannot fail but be astonished that, in a society where women served almost no public roles and held no public offices, the Church nevertheless not only employed women to serve the pastoral and liturgical needs of its female faithful but ranked them among its major orders of clergy, fully ordaining them in a rite virtually identical to that of their male counterparts. That they were indeed ranked among the major orders of clergy is perhaps most clearly seen in Justinian's Novel 6 regulating specifically the ordinations of only the three major orders of clergy – bishops, presbyters, and deacons, “male and female” – especially since Justinian explicitly referred to these three orders, as a group, as the “priesthood” (ἱεροσύνη) in his prefatory comments in the novel.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the ordination rite for the female deacon in the Byzantine church was virtually the same as for the male deacon, and it was always placed directly after the rite for the male deacon in Byzantine *euchologia* regardless of whether the ordination rites for clergy were organized in ascending or descending order. This indicates that the female deacon was considered to be of the same rank as the male deacon. Even the more rigid rules of eligibility with respect to age and marital status for female deacons versus their male counterparts, and the stricter penalties for female deacons' misconduct, evidence both the Byzantines' discomfort with female clergy and simultaneously their recognition that these women were *indeed* clergy.

Therefore, the appropriate question should be: “Given that, even in a patriarchal, segregated society where women had no public roles, the church fully ordained women to the diaconate with a ministry that paralleled the public/private segregation of the sexes that existed in other areas of life, why is the church today *not* ordaining women to the diaconate, and, furthermore, not ordaining women and men to a diaconate with the same eligibility requirements for ordination and the same diaconal ministries and functions, reflective of the integration of women and men in today's society?”

But, of course, the opposition of some to the ordained female diaconate in the Orthodox Church today arises from an ulterior fear, one which Fr. Lawrence Farley articulated in his interview with Fr. Hatfield: “If the Orthodox Church wants to ordain women deaconesses, and call them deacons and vest them and put them in the altar, this will, within a generation, overcome the *sole remaining barrier* to women's ordination to the presbyterate and the episcopate [emphasis added].” This is an astounding statement. As I noted near the beginning of my presentation, the diaconate and the presbyterate (or priesthood) are two very distinct orders. Furthermore, the church already *has* a thousand-year history of calling women ordained to the diaconate “deacons,” not simply “deaconesses,” as though this were a separate order that wasn't *really* an ordained order. Finally, if a millennium-long history of an ordained female diaconate

---

<sup>18</sup> CIC III, 35-6.

was not enough to cause the church to ordain women to the priesthood in the early and Byzantine periods, why is Fr. Farley so fearful that this would now occur within a generation? I suspect that Lawrence Farley and others like him recognize, perhaps unconsciously, that the reason the ordination of women to the diaconate did not lead to the ordination of women to the priesthood had more to do with culture than with theology.

And so, in my last few minutes, I would like to briefly lift up what I believe to be the two most problematic theological and liturgical consequences of some of the most common arguments against the ordination of women to the *priesthood* within the Orthodox Church, a very different topic than the ordination of women to the diaconate both because of the lack of an historical female presbyterate and because of the unique nature of the priesthood itself. I am happy to say that I am not alone in my concern on these issues, finding them shared by the participants in the Orthodox-Old Catholic Consultation on the Role of Women in the Church and the Ordination of Women as an Ecumenical Issue, held in Konstancin, Poland, in 1996.<sup>19</sup> Both of these issues derive from a line of argumentation which some Orthodox have borrowed from Roman Catholic thought and which is enunciated in the 1976 papal encyclical *Inter insigniores*. The priest, according to this argumentation, stands *in persona Christi* in the eucharistic liturgy, and reflecting Christ's maleness is requisite to fulfilling this role and symbolism.

One problem connected to this line of reasoning is that it overlooks the primary symbolic role of the presbyter in the eucharistic liturgy: that is, the priest primarily represents the *church*, not Christ. It is true that he certainly images Christ when he turns to the faithful and raises his hand to trace the sign of the cross. However, in the Orthodox Church, unlike the Roman Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council, the presbyter almost always faces in *the same direction* – east – as the rest of the faithful precisely because, primarily, the presbyter functions iconically in the eucharistic liturgy as an image of the *Church*. Almost all of the presbyter's prayers are recited in the first person *plural* (the Οὐδεὶς ἄξιος – “No one is worthy” – being a notable exception). In addition, the so-called “words of institution” (“This is my body ...,” “This is my blood ...”) occur within the context of the entire prayer of the *anaphora*, where the priest summarizes the history of salvation. Moreover, such an argument reifies a gendered symbolism, but reifies it inconsistently, since Christ's physical maleness is essentialized in the priest's symbolic imaging of him, but the Church's “femaleness” as the bride of Christ apparently does not need to be imaged physically in the priest for him to function symbolically as *her*.

The second issue with this line of argumentation is the most problematic because of its unconsidered and unintended soteriological significance. By asserting that only men can truly image Christ and, more importantly, that Christ's masculinity is ontologically significant, the proponents of this argument have enunciated a theological anthropology at odds with the patristic tradition. Because of time constraints, I will not discuss this aspect here, but I have written of it elsewhere, and I refer people especially to the work of Constantine Yokarinis on this topic since he has looked at the issue of gender in theological anthropology with particular application to the question of the ordination of women.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> See the *Anglican Theological Review* 84:3 (2002), edited by Hans von Arx and Anastasios Kallis, for a published version of the papers presented at the consultation and the text of the “Common Considerations” agreed to by the participants on December 13, 1996.

<sup>20</sup> Constantinos N. Yokarinis, “The Priesthood of Women: A Look at Patristic Teaching,” in Kyriaki Karidoyanes FitzGerald, ed., *Orthodox Women Speak: Discerning the “Signs of the Times”* (Geneva; Brookline, MA: WCC Publications/Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1999): 167–176, at 170. For a much deeper and more systematic

Beyond the problematic theological anthropology on which such an argument is based, however, this line of reasoning calls into question the very salvation of women, according to the incarnational soteriology most succinctly enunciated by Gregory the Theologian, that “what is not assumed is not healed.” If Christ’s maleness is somehow not simply a particular characteristic of his hypostasization of human nature but an ontologically essential element of his person, then he has not assumed *female* humanity. Of course, this is ludicrous and, in fact, not one of the church fathers has ascribed any particular significance to Christ’s maleness *per se* beyond his fulfilling the Levitical symbolism of the male sacrificial lamb or that his maleness was in itself a physical proof of the fullness of his hypostasization of human nature.

Obviously, much more could and should be said on these issues and others which, because of time constraints, I have not addressed. Nevertheless, I hope that the issues I have raised in brief here will demonstrate how important it is that, in our discussion of these vital and controversial issues of the reinstatement of the ordained female diaconate and of the possibility of the ordination of women to the priesthood, we not allow sloppy argumentation and theological reasoning to undermine our theology of holy orders, our liturgical theology, our theological anthropology, and our soteriology. That people feel the need to resort to such distorting and unsound arguments is itself, I believe, proof of the theological weakness of the opposition to the restoration of the ordained female diaconate and even the ordination of women to the priesthood.

---

discussion, see Yokarinis’ *Η χειροτονία των γυναικών στο πλαίσιο της οικουμενικής κίνησης* (Athens: Epektase, 1995).