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THE JOY OF ENACTED VIRTUE:  
TOWARD THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN TO THE EASTERN ORTHODOX  
PRIESTHOOD

A Dissertation

By

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## Abstract

There is compelling reason to change the traditional practice of the Orthodox Church and begin taking active steps towards the inclusion of women in all the ministries of the church, including the sacramental priesthood. According to the French Orthodox theologian Élisabeth Behr-Sigel, initial responses to the issue contradict patristic views of the priesthood and undermine key aspects of Orthodox Christology, soteriology, and theology of icons. This dissertation extends the work of Behr-Sigel by carefully reading traditional texts, images, and liturgy in light of contemporary concerns.

Five claims support women's participation in the priesthood. First, Gregory of Nazianzus and John Chrysostom present the priesthood as an *eikon* of the "new humanity" exemplified in Christ, in which we see embodied and enacted *charisms*, capabilities, functions, and virtues. Second, these *charisms*, capabilities, and virtues are evoked by multiple, contextual models and metaphors, none of which requires or prioritizes a male-bodied presider. Instead, as both a model and symbol, the presider serves as a dynamic *eikon* of the virtuous relationships that characterize the fuller humanity into which all are called via *theosis*. Third, iconic theology and practice consistently affirm the use of diverse media (included sexed persons) through which we see our "new humanity" embodied in unique persons who enact virtuous relationships. Denial of uniqueness and reduction to a particular quality or material is a form of blindness, a fixed rather than iconic "gaze." Fourth, the liturgy is an icon of the reign of God made visible through patterns of actions, that is ritual practices that teach participants how to relate in virtue to both God and neighbor. The liturgy is a primary locus for the 'social construction' of virtuous persons-in-relation, and its practices either permit or prevent us from recognizing the unique irreducibility of our neighbor in both our ecclesial and human community. Fifth, the liturgical exclusion of women is a failure to love rooted in a gaze that fixates on sex rather than the unique and gifted human person before us. The church fails to enact its own eschatological hope when it reduces its members to a particular quality or capability. This failure is not, however, the last word. The church, through its theology and practice is that place where we become who we are. Therefore, it is called to recognize its participants as persons, to encourage their gifts, to receive their gifts, and as a community, offer those gifts for the life of the world.

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# Introduction

These are the thoughts which a few of us submit to the Church and, within the Church, to those who are responsible for representing the tradition of the apostolic faith by exercising the charism of authority. We are in no hurry. We are not claiming any rights. Within the Church, everything is grace. We realize that the ordination of women, if misunderstood by the faithful, is liable to cause disastrous divisions. But we believe that it is the responsibility of pastors to teach the faithful, under the guidance of the Spirit who, according to Christ's promise, will lead his disciples into the fullness of truth (Jn 16.13).<sup>1</sup>

- Élisabeth Behr-Sigel

## Five Claims

It is my contention that there is compelling, ethical reason to change the traditional practice of the Orthodox Church and begin taking active steps towards the inclusion of women in all the ministries of the church, including the sacramental priesthood. This contention, the questions that inspire it and the claims that support it are entirely indebted to the work of the “Doyenne of western Orthodoxy,” the French Orthodox scholar Élisabeth Behr-Sigel (1907-2005).<sup>2</sup> The primary claims are summarized immediately below, will be elaborated on at the end of this introduction, and further developed in respective chapters below.

First, the priesthood is an *eikon* of the “new humanity” exemplified in Christ, in which we see embodied and enacted *charisms*, capabilities, functions and virtues. Second,

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<sup>1</sup> Élisabeth Behr-Sigel, “The Ordination of Women: A Point of Contention in Ecumenical Dialogue,” *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (2004): 49-66.

<sup>2</sup> For a biography of her amazing life as a French member of the theologically vibrant Russian emigré community in Paris, see Olga Lossky, and Michael Plekon, *Toward the Endless Day: The Life of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010). To explore in more depth her theological

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these *charisms*, capabilities and virtues are evoked by multiple, contextual models and metaphors, none of which requires or prioritizes a male-bodied presider. Instead, as both a model and symbol, the presider serves as a dynamic *eikon* of the virtuous relationships that characterize the fuller humanity into which all are called via *theosis*. Third, icons and the theology that undergirds them consistently affirm the use of diverse mediums (included sexed persons) through which we see our “new humanity” embodied in unique persons who enact virtuous relationships. Denial of uniqueness and reduction to a particular quality or material is a form of idolatry, a fixed rather than iconic “gaze.” Fourth, the liturgy is an icon of the reign of God made visible through *patterns of actions*, that is, ritual practices that teach participants how to relate in virtue to both God and neighbor. The liturgy is a primary locus for the ‘social construction’ of Orthodox persons-in-relation, and its practices either permit or prevent us from recognizing the unique irreducibility of our neighbor in both our ecclesial and human community. Fifth, liturgical exclusion based on the reduction of unique persons is a failure to love rooted in an idolatrous gaze that fixates on sex (or any number of other possible attributes) rather than the unique and gifted human person before us. Reduction within and on the part of the ecclesial body of Christ is no less idolatrous than the same reduction enacted between individuals. The church fails to enact its own eschatological hope when it reduces its members to a particular quality or capability. This failure is not, however, the last word. We can choose to practice, to see and receive the *charisms*, capabilities and virtues of all persons by adopting inclusive liturgical practices, which include the ordination of appropriately gifted women as well as men.

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contribution, see Sarah Hinlicky Wilson, “Woman, Women, and the Priesthood in the Thought of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel” (PhD Diss, Princeton Theological Seminary, 2008).

## Key Questions

These five claims result from the primary questions of this dissertation: What or who is symbolized by the priesthood, and who may stand in this place before the assembly of the faithful? While this dissertation focuses on the liturgical symbol of the presider, it will be clear that a third question threads its way through this work: is liturgical symbolism the only, or even primary, function of the liturgical leader? The fourth question, implied in the claims presented above, is this: can a woman bear the liturgical symbolism and functions of the presider? These questions spring from Behr-Sigel's gracious insistence that the ordination of women remain an open question for Orthodox, an insistence that rested on her conviction that the answers initially offered by Orthodox theologians in the four decades since the issue arose were inadequate and dangerously reductive.<sup>3</sup> These initial responses, often simply variations on a theme, limit metaphors of the ministerial priesthood to a few male models, tie icons of Christ to the medium of biological maleness, and reduce the unique diversity of humanity to biological sex and supposedly corresponding gendered *charisms* capabilities, virtues and roles. These *theologoumena*, according to Behr-Sigel, have no basis in scripture, and stand in contradiction to patristic views of the priesthood, as well as Christology, anthropology, soteriology and trinitarian theology.<sup>4</sup>

By carefully reading Orthodox texts, images and liturgy in light of contemporary concerns, this dissertation defends the five claims I made above. These claims extend the theological position at which Behr-Sigel arrived by the end of her long life. In this

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<sup>3</sup> Orthodox attention to the subject began in the sixties and seventies, usually in the context of World Council of Churches meetings. The main lines of response will be discussed below.

<sup>4</sup> Élisabeth Behr-Sigel, "The Ordination of Women: Also a Question for the Orthodox Churches," in *The Ordination of Women in the Orthodox Church*, Risk Book Series (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2000). First published in French as Élisabeth Behr-Sigel, "L'Ordination De Femmes: Une Question Posse Aussi Aux Églises

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introduction, I will briefly summarize elements of Behr-Sigel's contribution to the debate, note the approaches of other theologians whose thought influences the direction of this dissertation, and elaborate on my five claims. I will not present a complete history of the debate as this task has already been admirably carried out by Leonie Liveris.<sup>5</sup> She brings to attention a wide range of scholarship, which unfortunately remains unknown to most Orthodox, highlights the discrepancy between the development in the thought of scholars initially opposed to ordination of women, their thoughtful revisions (not necessarily reversals), and the hierarchs who ignore or marginalize such discussions.

## Approaches

### Élisabeth Behr-Sigel

The work of Élisabeth Behr-Sigel exemplifies the careful, thoughtful revision of an initial opposition to female ordination. After forty-three years of scholarship on Russian spirituality and literature, Behr-Sigel was invited in 1976 by the World Council of Churches to give the keynote address at a conference in Agapia, Romania, the first-ever gathering of Orthodox women on the topic of women in Orthodoxy and society.<sup>6</sup> This was for her a new project, reluctantly accepted.<sup>7</sup> At sixty-nine, Behr-Sigel began her reflections in line with those of her friend and fellow-theologian Paul Evdokimov (1900-1969), emphasizing distinct

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Orthodoxes," in *Communion Et Réunion: Mélanges Jean-Marie Roger Tillard*, ed. Gillian R. Evans, and Michel Gourgues (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> Leonie B. Liveris, *Ancient Taboos and Gender Prejudice: Challenges for Orthodox Women and the Church*, Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology and Biblical Studies (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Selected presentations and reports appear in Constance J. Tarasar, and Irina Kirillova, *Orthodox Women, Their Role and Participation in the Orthodox Church: Report on the Consultation of Orthodox Women, September 11-17, 1976, Agapia, Roumania* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1977).

<sup>7</sup> "Introduction" in Élisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women in the Church*, trans. Steven Bigham (Redondo Beach, CA: Oakwood Publications, 1991), 5.

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“feminine charisms.”<sup>8</sup> Behr-Sigel’s intellectual biographer, Sarah Hinlicky Wilson, traces the development of her thought. Initially, Behr-Sigel freely adopted Evdokimov’s theology that suggests a “mysterious relationship, an analogy, on the one hand between the masculine principle and the Word who expresses, orders and structures and on the other between the feminine principle and the Spirit who incarnates, inspires and consoles.”<sup>9</sup> Yet just a decade later, Behr-Sigel rejects an interpretation of “complementarity” that expressly values “women’s charisms” while at the same time reinforcing restrictive roles and functions.

Reviewing the “evolution” in her own thinking,<sup>10</sup> Behr-Sigel notes that the otherness of women, once rooted in the assumption of the physical and intellectual inferiority of women,

has been replaced by the notions of the otherness and complementarity of men and women. Each sex has its own domain and its own specific, but complementary virtues. Though these ideas should apparently be less offensive to women than the notion of their inferiority, are they not, however, just a mystification which leads to a new form of discrimination?<sup>11</sup>

By the 1988 Rhodes Consultation on the Place of Women in the Orthodox Church, Behr-Sigel openly defended the possibility of the ordination of women to the priesthood.<sup>12</sup> She

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<sup>8</sup> Evdokimov’s primary work on the subject is Paul Evdokimov, *La Femme Et Le Salut Du Monde: Étude D’Anthropologie Chrétienne Sur Les Charismes De La Femme* (Paris: Castelman, 1958). In 1994 it was translated into English as Paul Evdokimov, *Woman and the Salvation of the World: A Christian Anthropology on the Charisms of Women*, trans. Anthony P. Gythiel (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1994). According to a private letter from his wife to Fr. Michael Plekon, the translation and publication at such a late date into English was unfortunate, since by the late 1960s his own ideas on the subject had changed. Unfortunately, his sudden death prevented him from turning his notes into a revised edition. Tomoko Faerber-Evdokimoff, 1988. Additional material on Evdokimov and his views of sex and gender include Peter C. Phan, “Gender Roles in the History of Salvation: Man and Woman in the Thought of Paul Evdokimov,” *Heythrop Journal* 31 (1990): 53-66; Michael Plekon, “Le Visage Du Père En La Mère De Dieu: Marie Dans Les Écrits Théologiques De Paul Evdokimov,” *Contacts* 47, no. 172 (1995): 250-69; Christopher P. Klofft, “Gender and the Process of Moral Development in the Thought of Paul Evdokimov,” *Theological Studies* 66, no. 1 (2005): 69-95.

<sup>9</sup> Élisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women in the Church*, 126 Wilson provides an excellent summary of Evdokimov’s thought in her first chapter, “Evdokimov on Women.” The rest of her work is an equally excellent record of the progression of Behr-Sigel’s thought on the subject. See Sarah Hinlicky Wilson, “Woman, Women, and the Priesthood in the Thought of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel.”

<sup>10</sup> Élisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women in the Church*, 17.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>12</sup> The Conclusions to the Rhodes Consultation, as well as a number of the presentations can be found in Gennadios Limouris, ed. *The Place of Woman in the Orthodox Church and the Question of the Ordination of Women*, Interorthodox Symposium: Rhodes, Greece (Katerini, Greece: Tertios Publications, 1992).

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did this without denying the existence of either biological or psychological differences between men and women. As Wilson notes, Rhodes and beyond represent the mature position of Behr-Sigel's thought on the ordination of women, elements of which she repeated and refined over the following fifteen years.<sup>13</sup>

## Personalism

By maintaining the importance of bodily and possibly psychological difference, Behr-Sigel pursues a line of thinking close to the thought of the Russian thinkers Vladimir Sergeevich Soloviev (1853-1900) and Sergei Nikolaevich Bulgakov (1871-1944), and the Franco-Russian Evdokimov.<sup>14</sup> The latter two theologians especially emphasize the importance of persons-in-relation, a now classic emphasis of Orthodox trinitarian theology due in large part to the work of John Zizioulas. All three take trinitarian relationality farther than Zizioulas does, discerning "inside the divine sphere a bipolarity analogous to the tension between the masculine and feminine inside humanity."<sup>15</sup> Bulgakov posits *Sophia* as a feminine essence of both world and humanity within God.<sup>16</sup> Evdokimov views the Holy

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<sup>13</sup> Sarah Hinlicky Wilson, "Woman, Women, and the Priesthood in the Thought of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel," 143.

<sup>14</sup> It is also one which, perhaps not incidentally, aligns with the "difference" feminism exemplified by French philosophers such as Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray.

<sup>15</sup> Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, "The Otherness of Men and Women in the Context of a Christian Civilization," in *The Ministry of Women in the Church* (Redondo Beach, CA: Oakwood Publications, 1991), 45.

<sup>16</sup> Bulgakov here is clearly influenced by Vladimir Soloviev. Soloviev is one of the first prominent Russian intellectuals whose influence on the theology of subsequent Orthodox Franco-Russian and North American Russian theologians is still evident. He is considered the father of Russian sophiology whose two central ideas are the humanity of God (*bogochelovechestvo*), and Sophia. Bulgakov, cofounder and the first Dean of the Institute of St. Sergius, colleague and teacher of many famous Russian theologians of the twentieth century (Vladimir Lossky, John Meyendorff, Alexander Schmemmann), was a brilliant and highly controversial theologian. His theology was condemned by both the Moscow Patriarchate and the Synodal Church (the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad - ROCOR - which is now in restored communion with the Moscow Patriarchate) in the "Sophia Affair" of 1935. Leading the charge was George Florovsky (1893-1979), but Vladimir Lossky supported the condemnation. Bulgakov's work is now experiencing a resurgence in popularity, due in part to the recent availability of his work in English. His systematic trilogy has just been translated: Sergei Nikolaevich Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002); Sergei Nikolaevich Bulgakov, *The Friend of the Bridegroom: On the Orthodox Veneration of the Forerunner*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003); Sergei Nikolaevich Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004). Perhaps the best current introduction to

Spirit as “the divine archetype of a femininity defined as dynamism of life and sanctification, as hypostatic, personal, maternity” embodied on the human level by the Theotokos.<sup>17</sup> In North America, this view is maintained with some variation by Thomas Hopko.<sup>18</sup>

Behr-Sigel acknowledges the positive contribution of this line of thinking. First, it derives “from a noble and generous vision of femininity.”<sup>19</sup> Evdokimov in particular writes in response to Simone de Beauvoir, and is one of the few Orthodox theologians who saw in early feminism the expression of a valid concern for the status of women in church and society. Second, the otherness of men and women is grounded in the trinitarian persons. As we will see, Zizioulas picks this up in his later work in order to emphasize difference as an essential part of humanness that must be affirmed within mutual relations. Finally, Behr-Sigel affirms that these theologians introduce feminine symbolism into a God-language otherwise overwhelmingly dominated by masculine symbols. However, she ultimately considers as speculative the “*theologoumena*, the personal opinions” of Evdokimov and Hopko, which must be affirmed only as much as they are in line with Christological,

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the thought of Bulgakov and his Russian theological predecessors is Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov: Orthodox Theology in a New Key* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000).

<sup>17</sup> Élisabeth Behr-Sigel, “The Otherness of Men and Women,” 45. Evdokimov acknowledges the problem that Christ, who took on our *humanity* cannot be the primary (though he is rather inconsistent here) embodiment of maleness. Instead, as in the icon of the *deisis*, Christ sits between the two archetypes of masculinity and femininity, the Theotokos and John the Forerunner. See Paul Evdokimov, *Woman and the Salvation of the World*, Chapter 13, “The Theotokos: Archetype of the Feminine,” and Chapter 14, “St. John the Baptist: Archetype of the Masculine.”

<sup>18</sup> Hopko first published his views in 1975. In 1977 he responded to criticisms of his first article. Thomas Hopko, “On the Male Character of Christian Priesthood,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 19, no. 3 (1975): 147-73; Thomas Hopko, “On the Male Character of the Christian Priesthood: A Reply to Criticism,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (1977): 161-67. The initial article was also published in the first edition of Thomas Hopko, and Kallistos Ware, eds. *Women and the Priesthood*, 1st (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1983). Upon editing the second edition, Hopko significantly revised his argument, relegating to a footnote the suggestion that an area of important further study is the association of gender with members of the Trinity. See: Thomas Hopko, “Presbyter/Bishop: A Masculine Ministry,” in *Women and the Priesthood*, ed. Thomas Hopko (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1999). Behr-Sigel never responds to this significant revision, though given Hopko’s continued insistence on the submission of women to men based on a ‘headship’ model, she would hardly affirm his arguments. What remains the same in both articles is the assumption, without adequate defense, that the priesthood is a “masculine ministry.”

<sup>19</sup> Élisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women in the Church*, 46.



trinitarian, and biblical theology.<sup>20</sup> “Each person,” says Behr-Sigel in 1984, “is ineffably unique and called upon to serve God and men according to his or her own vocation and special charisms. These are certainly colored by the person’s sex, but not determined by it.”<sup>21</sup>

Behr-Sigel’s use of the term “person” is significant, for the first failure of Evdokimov and Hopko is on the level of anthropological “personalism.” Ironically, Evdokimov makes this clear in an essay on the Theotokos, a figure whom he considered the ideal *woman*. As Behr-Sigel notes, however, in Orthodox theology Mary is the ideal *human* whose openness to God indicates our highest human vocation, the call to holiness.<sup>22</sup> Rejecting Evdokimov’s Jungian archetypal interpretation of Mary as “Woman” and John the Baptist as “Man,” Behr-Sigel asks: “Is it not dangerous to turn the masculine and feminine principles into personal realities to the detriment of the basic category of *person* as the image of God in man (*anthropos*)?”<sup>23</sup> The most significant difference between these *theologoumena* and the anthropology of many patristic authors is that for many of “these Fathers, sexual differentiation comes second to the creation of man as a unity and is in fact secondary. In the eyes of modern interpreters, sexual differentiation is essential and grounded in God’s very being.”<sup>24</sup> Modern interpreters of sexual differentiation, e.g., Evdokimov and Hopko, “tend in places towards a view of all persons as being determined by their sex, which stands in contradiction to the patristic and biblical idea of the human

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>22</sup> Élisabeth Behr-Sigel, “Marie, Mère De Dieu: Mariologie Traditionnelle Et Questions Nouvelles,” *Irénikon* 58 no 4 1985 (1985): 451-70. Reprinted and translated into English as Élisabeth Behr-Sigel, “Mary, the Mother of God: Traditional Mariology and New Questions,” in *The Ministry of Women in the Church* (Redondo Beach, CA: Oakwood Publications, 1991).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Élisabeth Behr-Sigel, “The Otherness of Men and Women,” 46.

person as created in the image of God to grow into God's likeness, i.e., as Gregory of Nyssa states, marked by a mysterious freedom."<sup>25</sup>

For Behr-Sigel, the key category is "personhood," which is the unique, diverse and free expression of a humanity that "is one in the diversity of persons," a doctrine of humankind she attributes directly to the Cappadocians and Maximus the Confessor, though clearly influenced by the patristic work of Vladimir Lossky.<sup>26</sup> Utilizing the excellent patristic scholarship of Nonna (Verna) Harrison, Behr-Sigel argues that sexual difference is relativized, not denied.<sup>27</sup> Behr-Sigel relies on Harrison's argument that we must regard as more fundamental than Christ's maleness his saving and unifying assumption of human nature, shared just as fully with women as with men.<sup>28</sup> To do otherwise jeopardizes the salvation of women, and the possibility of their likeness unto God, a key element of *theosis* that we will examine in the first chapter. However, sexual relativism has its own dangers. This "personalist spiritualism," says Behr-Sigel, "carries within it its own risk of deviation, that of an ascetical angelism that both despises and fears sexuality. Because women are for men the figures of sexual eros, they risk being swallowed up in this scorn and fear."<sup>29</sup> In their laudable efforts to emphasize the unity of humanity and their common vocation, late-ancient theologians "affirm the spiritual equality of men and women. They have the tendency, however, of expressing this equality in terms of a moral and psychological unity

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<sup>25</sup> Élisabeth Behr-Sigel, "The Ordination of Women," 17.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 42. There is no evidence that she was influenced by John Zizioulas's similar work. She worked primarily in French and Russian, rather than Greek and English, and her interlocutors were her fellow Parisian Orthodox.

<sup>27</sup> Élisabeth Behr-Sigel, "The Otherness of Men and Women," 47; Élisabeth Behr-Sigel, "The Ordination of Women," 40.

<sup>28</sup> Developed in Nonna Verna Harrison, "Orthodox Arguments Against the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood," *Sobornost* 14 (1992): 6-23. This article is also available in *Women and the Priesthood*, ed. Thomas Hopko (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1999).

<sup>29</sup> Élisabeth Behr-Sigel, "The Otherness of Men and Women," 47.

that shapes the female according to the mold of the male.”<sup>30</sup> She acknowledges that both Evdokimov and Hopko are reacting against these “excesses.”<sup>31</sup>

### **Reifying the difference**

It is clear, however, that the elevation of sex over person leads to other theological problems beyond a betrayal of theological personalism. Behr-Sigel, ever-gracious, notes that for Evdokimov, the ordination of women was not at the center of his concerns. Rather, he was “the herald and prophet in contemporary Orthodoxy of the royal priesthood of all the baptized.”<sup>32</sup> Behr-Sigel respects Evdokimov’s valuation of difference, and his attempts to elevate the feminine. In effect, however, the dichotomy between masculine and feminine and their supposedly “natural” attributes, “is a repetition, dressed out in romantic rhetoric, of age-old stereotypes that see women’s destiny as being called to a holiness of ‘being’ - a holiness to an extent passive - in the service of men, who are active and creative.”<sup>33</sup> Behr-Sigel charges Hopko, who takes Evdokimov’s line of thinking and applies it much more rigorously to the question female priests, with projecting the “natural” roles of men and women onto God, creating a hierarchy within the Trinity in which men imitate Christ in self-sacrificial and self-emptying love, and women silently and invisibly submit to Christ in the same manner as the Holy Spirit does in order to help men attain their calling. The priest according to Hopko, makes present the male Christ/Logos, an embodied symbol that the ontologically “other” woman simply cannot fulfill, just as the Holy Spirit cannot fulfil the

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 42. This criticism is hardly unique to either Orthodox theology or Behr-Sigel. Beginning most significantly with Beauvoir, feminists have critiqued philosophy and theology for its androcentric perspective. For many feminists who emphasize difference, even if they have very different perspectives regarding difference as binary (Luce Irigaray) or multi-facetious (Judith Butler), their central critique of feminisms which deemphasize difference is precisely that it tends to value characteristics typically associated with males, only reaffirming the devaluing of women in a different form.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>32</sup> Élisabeth Behr-Sigel, “The Ordination of Women,” 17.

task of Christ.<sup>34</sup> Behr-Sigel rejects outright the absolutizing and reifying of sexual differences by projecting them into God via Christ or the Holy Spirit.

## Final Objections

Behr-Sigel's increased emphasis on personalism and her growing conviction that the theology of Evdokimov and Hopko sacrifices Orthodox trinitarian, Christological, and soteriological theology on the altar of an exclusively male priesthood leads, after many years, to her decisive rejection of a liturgical symbolism that prioritizes maleness. Behr-Sigel consistently notes that the gendered symbols that permeate Orthodox theology are embodied by both men and women at different points in the liturgy. The church as bride of Christ is filled with male brides, and as the body of Christ has female members. No longer convinced as she was in 1976 by the "iconic" argument that gives weight to Jesus' masculinity as specially significant for liturgical symbolism, Behr-Sigel questions the assumption that the priest represents only Christ. The priest also represents the church, and so is both bride and bridegroom. The symbolism of the church "is never rigorously 'natural.'"<sup>35</sup> Symbolism serves to indicate something other than the symbol itself. Behr-Sigel agrees (in part) with the argument of Harrison, that all humanity is receptive before God, a relationship typically symbolized by a bride in relation to a bridegroom.<sup>36</sup> The problem is

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 26-27. Here she is responding to Hopko's initial article on the topic, Thomas Hopko, "On the Male Character of Christian Priesthood."

<sup>35</sup> Élisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women in the Church*, 22.

<sup>36</sup> "In part" because the essay by Harrison which initiates the fruitful dialogue between the two women contains what Behr-Sigel considers an "*volte-face*." Harrison here, and in a number of subsequent essays, clearly demonstrates that there is no patristic correlation between Christ-male or Holy Spirit-female. Further, she repeatedly argues that in virtue, men and women are called to identical lives before God. Gender is simply not relevant to Christology, the Trinity, or soteriology. And yet at the end of the essay, Harrison defends a male priesthood on traditional and symbolic grounds, a switch which surprises more than just Behr-Sigel. See Nonna Verna Harrison, "Orthodox Arguments Against the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood," and Behr-Sigel's response, "The Ordination of Women: An Ecumenical Problem: A Reply to a Reply," *Sobornost* 15, no. 1 (1993): 20-26.

not whether humanity is receptive in relation to God, but whether the symbolism of bride and bridegroom, masculine giver and feminine receiver, retains its integrity in light of its tie “to a biological process of procreation, that is now out-of-date and known to be incorrect.”<sup>37</sup>

Wilson rightly emphasizes that Behr-Sigel does not attack the use of symbols. Instead, she questions whether the symbols continue to convey their intended meaning given radically different modern (and post-modern) cultural assumptions regarding femininity and masculinity.<sup>38</sup>

In the end, Behr-Sigel cannot hold together maleness and the iconic role of the priest for four reasons. First, emphasizing the maleness of the priest detracts from the common humanity of Christ, jeopardizing Christology, Incarnation and soteriology. Second, it inappropriately separates the priest from the church whom he also represents in his function as leader of the community (a point developed by Kallistos Ware in his revised contribution to the debate).<sup>39</sup> Third, icons, whether made of paint and wood or flesh and blood are in no way literal, lifelike portraits. They point to and participate in the person of Christ. In baptism, a woman is “made Christ-like” and can lend her hand and tongue to the tasks of Christ through the grace of the Holy Spirit.<sup>40</sup> Fourth, the priest is not only a liturgical symbol, but is a presider and pastor exercising specific *charisms* and capabilities that are granted to persons without regard to sex.<sup>41</sup> These reasons form the body of Behr-Sigel’s rejection of an exclusively male priesthood.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>38</sup> Sarah Hinlicky Wilson, “Woman, Women, and the Priesthood in the Thought of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel,” 164-65.

<sup>39</sup> Kallistos Ware, “Man, Woman and the Priesthood of Christ,” in *Women and the Priesthood*, ed. Thomas Hopko (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1999).

<sup>40</sup> Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, “The Ordination of Women,” 42.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 40-43. This insight appears to be the result of Behr-Sigel’s appropriation of John Erickson’s presentation at Rhodes, available in two locations: John H. Erickson, “The Priesthood in Patristic Tradition,” in *The Challenge of Our Past: Studies in Orthodox Canon Law and Church History* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s

By the time of her death at ninety-six, Behr-Sigel had openly advocated for the possibility of the ordination of women for almost twenty years, making her case with grace and patience. Her final position prioritizes an “Orthodox personalism” in which the person is unique, irreducible, free, and ‘other.’ She maintains the importance of sexual difference without reducing individuals to their biological sex or gendered expression. She rejects the notion that the priesthood is a “masculine ministry” and the exclusion of women from the priesthood based on a prioritizing of the maleness of Christ. Women too, are icons of Christ. Her work exemplifies a thoughtful transition and gracious change of heart. In her earliest reflections on the place of women in the Church, each of these elements supplied for her adequate reason to *exclude* women from the priesthood. By the end of her life, they were reasons to *include* women. The work of her final years took the form of short essays and presentations. She never published a single, sustained reflection on her final position, leaving this work to others, perhaps, as she said in an interview, to the energetic scholars in the United States.<sup>42</sup>

## "Neo-theological" Complementarity

The clash between the reifying and relativizing of sexual difference is not only evident in Behr-Sigel. The “*theologoumena*” of Evdokimov and Hopko earns them, and K. Paul Wesche, the ironic title of “neo-theologians” from Valerie Karras.<sup>43</sup> Her criticism of

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Seminary Press, 1991); John H. Erickson, “The Priesthood in Patristic Tradition,” in *The Place of Women in the Orthodox Church*, ed. Gennadios Limouris, Interorthodox Symposium: Rhodes, Greece (Katerini, Greece: Tertios Publications, 1992).

<sup>42</sup> Interview with the *St. Nina Quarterly*, from unpublished transcripts.

<sup>43</sup> Valerie A. Karras, “Patristic Views on the Ontology of Gender,” in *Personhood: Orthodox Christianity and the Connection Between Body, Mind and Soul*, ed. J.T. Chirban (Westport, CT and London: Bergin and Garvey, 1996), 118. In addition to the works already cited by Evdokimov and Hopko, see Kenneth Paul Wesche, “God: Beyond Gender - Reflections on the Patristic Doctrine of God and Feminist Theology,” *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (1986): 291-308; Kenneth Paul Wesche, “Man and Woman in Orthodox Tradition: The Mystery of Gender,” *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 37, no. 2-3 (1993): 213-51.

their work highlights the problem of an anthropology rooted in complementarity. Evdokimov and, following him, Hopko specifically advocate a notion of male-female complementarity inscribed into the very creation of humanity. From the outset, humanity comes in two “modes,” male and female. There is no other way to be human. Building on these two modes, complementarity implies that wholeness, complete humanity, is not found in a single human person, but requires the complement of its “opposite.” On a biological level, *genital* complementarity dictates sexual function, the male penis ‘fits’ into the female vagina. *Gender* complementarity asserts that one set of gendered characteristics is incomplete without the other, complementary, set. The outward focus of the male must be balanced by the inward focus of the female, hardness is balanced by softness, universal by particular, justice by mercy, etc. Notice that genital complementarity assumes that it is possible to directly map *gender*, a set of culturally-based social traits, behaviors and inclinations that tend to be characterized as masculine or feminine, to *sex*, the biological sex of particular persons. Thus, males engage in “masculine” behavior, and females “feminine.” Sex on this view is a fixed and given biological, “natural,” state that produces distinct and equally fixed gendered behavior.

According to Karras, the theologians pursuing this speculative line of thought “have unwittingly introduced an intermediate level of ontological existence between that of essence or nature (οὐσία or φύσις), on the one hand, which all of the Fathers concur is human regardless of whether it is male or female, and its concrete manifestations in a person or *hypostasis* (πρόσωπον or ὑπόστασις).”<sup>44</sup> Biological sex, according to Karras, is a part of our particular existence, our *hypostasis*, and has no ontological, therefore permanent, content or value. The “neo-theologians” on the other hand appear to posit that biological sex is a part

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of our *ousia* rather than just our *hypostasis*, introducing an “intermediate level,” or what John Behr refers to as a “third term” between nature and *hypostasis*.<sup>45</sup>

Here, Karras is actually being rather generous to this group of “neo-theologians” since they do not actually posit an intermediate level. Instead, they argue that sex is not only hypostatic, but ontological. There are two *eternal* “modes” of human *being*, male and female. The use of the term “modes” raises an intra-trinitarian problem akin to modalism. In the Trinity, the three unique persons with one nature cannot be adequately described as ‘modes’ or ways of being since the ‘modes’ do not perdure, they flow and fade one into the other. Yet human modalism posits two impermeable ways of being human, a sort of platonic, ontological ideal of two generic ‘humans,’ male and female. Which of these two ontologically distinct humans is made in the image (singular, not dual) of God? Which of these modes of humanity was taken on in the Incarnation? And what is the consequence for the mode not assumed by Christ? The argument that divine persons within the Trinity correspond to sexual difference in human beings is indeed, as Karras adamantly states, “neo-theology.” This theology is rightly intolerable to Karras, who focuses on the way it conceptually restricts the free expression of the trinitarian persons. Karras’s solution is to argue that sex is a particularity that has no ontological status, as human persons “we are called to transcend our biological necessity,” a freedom that is restricted by our biology.<sup>46</sup>

## Shared Assumptions

Ironically, Karras and the “neo-theologians” share certain assumptions regarding sex and gender: first, there is a one-to-one correspondence between sex and gender; second,

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<sup>44</sup> Valerie A. Karras, “Patristic Views on the Ontology of Gender,” 118.

<sup>45</sup> John Behr, “A Note on the ‘Ontology of Gender,’” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 42, no. 3-4 (1998), 369.

<sup>46</sup> Valerie A. Karras, “Patristic Views on the Ontology of Gender,” 118.



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there is no movement or flexibility in this correlation (i.e., what is masculine is *always* masculine and male); third, that the differences are such that they serve as complements (or negatively, opposites); and fourth, that complete humanity must require both. In short, our biology and gender are static and binary. For Evdokimov and Hopko, this rigid correlation leads them to advocate a position consistent with their assumption that this correlation is eternal: roles, functions, capabilities and virtues must correspond to those available to one's given sex and gender. One *should* enact the gender that corresponds to one's sex.

Movement outside these boundaries amounts to a rejection of one's ontological self. For Karras, the answer is to reject the ontological status of sex or gender, a line of thinking developed in a recent article in which she follows a number of the patristic theologians who believe that in the eschaton we will no longer exist as male and female.<sup>47</sup> She argues that our focus should instead be on implementing roles and relationships that reflect humanity as we *will be*, an "*eschatological humanity*" that will be "transformed into a non-biological, though still physical, mode of existence that fulfills God's original, non-sexed plan for human nature."<sup>48</sup>

### A "third" way?

Like Behr-Sigel, however, I cannot so easily dismiss sexual difference, precisely because our lived experience is *always shaped by our sexed existence*. We are not simply free to be something other than we are, which includes biological existence. We are free within a dynamic social and biological context to which we cannot be reduced, but from which we

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<sup>47</sup> Valerie A. Karras, "Orthodox Theologies of Women and Ordained Ministry," in *Thinking Through Faith: New Perspectives From Orthodox Christian Scholars*, ed. Aristotle Papanikolaou, and Elizabeth H. Prodromou, The Zacchaeus Venture Series: Volume 1 (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008). She specifically notes Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* I.4 (10), Gregory of Nyssa, *De hominis opificio* 17.2-3 (PG 44:188B-189B), John Chrysostom, *Hom. on Colossians* 6.4 (PG 62:342), Maximus the Confessor, *De ambigua* 41 (PG 91:1309B), and the East Syrian Aphrahat, *Demonstrations* 12, 13.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 135.

cannot simply escape. Behr questions the adequacy of the dual model of nature versus person, asking,

... is it a part of the truth of Christianity that anything which cannot be conceptualized in these ways is not to be accepted as a part of 'reality' and to be ruled out of court? If one cannot place the male/female differentiation either on the level of hypostasis or nature (and if there is to be no third term in this model), does this mean that male/female is without ontological significance, ultimately unreal, or does it point to an inadequacy in the model?<sup>49</sup>

The dual model of nature versus hypostasis forces the shared assumptions that polarize the discussion: biological (or "natural") stasis and binary reducibility. John Behr takes no clear position on the argument, instead only raising issues of "methodological import."<sup>50</sup> By implication, he appears to think that the dual model is inadequate, but he offers no alternative to either the dualism to which he seems to object, or to the introduction of a "third term" that conflates persona with sex/gender in order to posit ontological gender. This last is an option that, with Karras, I reject.

Behr asks who it is we want to be, "embodied, fleshly and sexual beings, or purely personal beings transcending our biological mode of existence to which, it is claimed, sex and gender exclusively belong?"<sup>51</sup> My answer is this: a biological and sexual person whose uniqueness includes by cannot be reduced to rigid assumptions regarding the shape and function biology or gender (or class, ethnicity, nationality...) ought to take. An obvious, and perhaps at some point necessary, step would be to attempt to develop an anthropology based on some third term, or a new philosophical model. However this is not the step I will take. Rather, I will 'leap the horns of the dilemma,' landing in the arena of symbolism and

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<sup>49</sup> John Behr, "A Note on the 'Ontology of Gender,'" 369.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 371. However, Behr may tip his hand a bit given his rather unflattering description of Karras' article as "strident," a word too frequently used in reference to women who assertively object to a patriarchal status quo.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

metaphor. On a conceptual level, Orthodox theology appears to assume a rigid correlation between gendered expressions and behaviors and sexed bodies. However, by looking closely at texts, images and liturgy, it is clear that gendered language and gendered roles are multidimensional and fluid in the Orthodox theological tradition. As “verbal icons,”<sup>52</sup> our textual, iconic and liturgical symbolism points towards a “new humanity,” which is called to embody virtue and utilize gifts, capabilities and virtues for the benefit of the other. Like Behr-Sigel, I believe our unique and irreducible personhood is shaped but not dictated by our biological sex or our expressed gender. It is my suspicion that the dual model of nature versus person simply does not hold up in our textual, iconic or liturgical practice. Our *lex credendi* does not correspond to our *lex orandi*, and vice versa.

## Five Claims Examined

The brief summary of the elements of the debate above, in particular the work of Behr-Sigel, shapes the claims that undergird my contention regarding the possibility of ordaining women to the Orthodox priesthood. Chapters two through four develop these five claims. The first chapter presents foundational aspects of Orthodox theology upon which the next three chapters build their arguments. In it, I discuss an Orthodox anthropology of the human person, the importance of metaphorical theology as a primary method of Orthodox discourse, the ‘hermeneutical’ framework within which I make my arguments, and the role of virtue as a primary ‘mode’ of Orthodox theological ethics.

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<sup>52</sup> This phrase will be discussed in Ch. 1.3.3. CHECK

## Capability, Virtue, and Metaphor

The second chapter, “Virtuous Priesthood,” provides patristic support for Behr-Sigel’s rejection of the argument that the priesthood is a “masculine ministry.” By examining the texts written by Gregory of Nazianzus and John Chrysostom, the first theologians to ‘systematically’ address the priesthood, it becomes clear that the priesthood is a ministry that requires capabilities and *charisms* essential to priestly tasks, among which teaching correct theological doctrine, preaching and pastoral discernment dominate. Equally essential is the priest’s practice of virtuous relationships that are essential to *theosis*, a practice that allows the gathered community to ‘see’ enacted virtue. This, then, is my first claim, that priesthood is an *eikon* of our “new humanity” exemplified in Christ, in which we see embodied and enacted *charisms*, capabilities, functions and virtues. My second claim, that metaphorical language must remain multifaceted and fluid in its application to both the priesthood and sexed bodies, arises from the form of discourse utilized by the Nazianzen and Chrysostom. Both theologians, to differing degrees, repeatedly use *multiple* metaphors to evoke the capabilities, functions and virtues necessary for effective exercise of the priesthood. Together, these metaphors form a rich picture of the priesthood and the priest. The occasional gendered metaphors used by Gregory and John serve the same purpose as all the other metaphors and have no clear correlation to the sex of the presbyter. As we will see, gendered metaphors illustrate the manner in which the priest relates as a parent, mother *and* father, to members of the community. The patristic emphasis on the priest as an *eikon* of a new humanity first embodied in Christ challenges the singular emphasis on the priest as an essentially liturgical symbol. Further, it demonstrates that the supposedly central symbol of “maleness” and its associated traits play no part in the theology of Gregory or Chrysostom. Behr-Sigel’s intuition that the priestly tasks and role as liturgical symbol could be embodied

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by a female as well as a male body is substantiated by an examination of patristic texts that emphasize the priest as carrying out before the people of God the shared work of becoming fully human.

## Virtuous Icons and Idolatry

“The Glory of Embodied Diversity,” chapter three, builds on the role of the liturgical presider as an icon of a new, virtuous, humanity by examining iconic images and the theology that undergirds them. Iconodule theology is incorrectly used by those who think that an iconic argument eliminates the participation of sexed females as icons of Christ. Rather, iconodule theology consistently affirms the use of diverse physical mediums (paint or flesh) through which the divinity present in each unique and irreducible person is ‘seen.’ Through diverse, saintly bodies, the beholder sees and is invited to participate in the virtuous life of the saint. Icons have consistently illustrated (intentionally or not) that the practices and virtues integral to *theosis* are common to all believers regardless of biological sex or cultural assumptions regarding gender. Icons evidence the complexity and particularity of virtue in practice, and in its social context. In icons, we see our “new humanity” uniquely embodied in each and every person who pursues holiness through virtue. In short, a properly iconodule theology of participation expresses an Orthodox ethic of fuller humanity uniquely embodied in each irreducible person. An iconodule ethic of fuller humanity affirms Behr-Sigel’s personalist commitment to difference without reduction to any particular quality, including biological sex. This ethic simultaneously rejects as inconsistent and unfaithful to iconodule theology any “neo-theological” move that reduces virtues, roles and capabilities to gender and sex. Such a reduction is idolatry, a fixed gaze filled by flesh rather than an iconic gaze that looks towards the one in whose image we are all created.

## Virtuous Liturgy

The fourth chapter, “Virtuous Liturgy” turns to liturgical practice and theology in order to develop my final claims, that the liturgy is an icon of the reign of God made visible through patterns of actions, that these patterns form participants as relational persons according to the relations enacted in the liturgy itself, and that the exclusion of women from visible participation in all aspects of liturgical movement teaches an ethic of reduction rather than recognition of human persons as unique, irreducible and dynamic. In this chapter, I move from a focus on the individual as a person of virtue to the liturgical construction of the person through virtuous relationships, from the *theosis* of the individual to *theosis within*, and dependent upon, the community. In the ritual of Eucharistic gathering, we learn how to relate to one another as persons. At their best, these shared liturgical practices ‘habituate’ us into virtue. The liturgy is a place where we become people of love, justice and mercy. It is a key place where we learn the virtues that perfect us in our relations. The language and shape of the Orthodox liturgy is beautifully suited to this idea, reflected in the great liturgical theologies of the twentieth century. Yet there has been no accounting for the consequence of the practice of liturgical exclusion of women. Thus, I challenge the virtually unquestioned assertion that our liturgical life as it presently exists fully encourages the *theosis* of unique, irreducible and dynamic human persons, especially as it relates to their sex. A liturgy that fails to include capable and virtuous women fails to enact its own eschatological hope. A church that does not seek to encourage *theosis* in its members in every way possible, that refuses receive all the gifts available to the community, fails to be church. It fails to love.

## Summary

In the concluding chapter I recap the arguments, briefly address the question of steps forward and the potential for division within the Orthodox churches. I also outline further theological, ethical and ecclesiological questions that must be addressed in moving forward. I am not claiming that we must change our practice *now*. I am claiming that we must start on the path towards such a change, for the sake of the life of the church, its men and women, and for the life of the world for whom we exist.

# Chapter 1: Foundations

Metaphor has been the basis of religious language for Christianity from its earliest theological writings, the Scriptures, precisely because of metaphor's capacity to open realms of meaning. By its power of suggestion, metaphor can speak without strictly limiting the content of its sense. When used in religious language, metaphor functions as a verbal icon: the revelatory efficacy and power of a religious metaphor depend upon its essential participation in the truth to which it points. The image is fundamentally related to its prototype, which is both its source and beyond the capacity of the image to contain. Thus a religious metaphor is meaningful to the extent that it is grounded in its divine prototype, but by its nature it cannot reduce the divine to a simple definition or identity.<sup>1</sup>

- Susan Ashbrook Harvey

## 1.1: Introduction

This chapter presents the foundational aspects of Orthodox theology used to develop an interpretation of Orthodox texts, images and liturgy that offers a compelling ethical argument for the full inclusion of women in all the ministries of the church. Excepting the final section, there are no new arguments in this chapter, and much of the material will be quite familiar to the regular reader of Orthodox theology. Each section below defines terms and methods that are crucial to the arguments I develop in subsequent chapters. The chapter begins by summarizing the Orthodox anthropology of the human person as unique, irreducible, relational and dynamic. The second section defines and describes metaphorical theology as a crucial method of Orthodox discourse, and then identifies three essential metaphors: the image and likeness of God, *theosis*, and sin. The third section addresses the interpretive framework of this dissertation as a work of



contemporary theological ethics, which utilizes traditional Orthodox sources such as patristic writing and iconographic interpretation, but does not presume to be a work of patristics or iconology. The chapter concludes by positing virtue ethics as the primary ‘mode’ of Orthodox ethical discourse. It may seem strange to end rather than begin a dissertation in ethics with its chosen method of ethical analysis. However, there is no consensus yet regarding a methodology of Orthodox ethics. My choice of virtue ethics only makes sense in light of the theological elements discussed in the preceding sections. This chapter does not present a unified Orthodox theory of ethics, but gathers strands from which to weave together an ethical argument that incorporates the Orthodox tradition of virtue, icons and liturgical practice.

### 1.2: Human Person

The purpose of this dissertation is to make a compelling ethical (as well as liturgical and iconological) argument for the ordination of women to the priesthood in the Orthodox church. The arguments against their inclusion involve assumptions regarding how women may (or may not) represent, act and relate as sexed (that is, female) and gendered (that is, having supposedly ‘feminine’ attributes and behaviors) human beings. At root, these are issues of anthropology and gender, a relatively undeveloped area of Orthodox theology. Just as anthropological theories of the natural law undergird the Catholic moral tradition, so too should an Orthodox anthropology shape Orthodox ethics. This dissertation views anthropological questions through the lenses of Orthodox textual, iconic and liturgical traditions. Specifically, this dissertation is concerned with the ethical dimension of how we

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Ashbrook Harvey, “Feminine Imagery for the Divine: The Holy Spirit, the Odes of Solomon, and Early Syriac Tradition,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 37, no. 2-3 (1993), 114.

*relate* to one another as human persons both through and as icons, and in and as a result of our liturgical practice. The breadth and fluidity of the unique capabilities, virtues and roles of men and women seen through these lenses offer important insights regarding the virtuous relationships formed between sexed and gendered human persons. These lenses of texts, icon and liturgy focus the trajectory of an Orthodox ethics and anthropology that is as yet incomplete.

Incomplete does not mean non-existent. The twentieth century has seen a tremendous surge in reflection on the human person coming from a wide-range of disciplines and religious traditions. Orthodox theologians are no exception, challenged as they are to articulate and develop their view of the human person more precisely in light of a cross-cultural religious encounter with western theologies and philosophies. Most (though not all) Orthodox theologians share a view generally known as “personalism,” articulated in varying ways by Vladimir Lossky, John Zizioulas, Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, Olivier Clément, Kallistos Ware, and Christos Yannaras.<sup>2</sup> Personalism’s core tenets posit the human person as *unique, irreducible, relational* and *dynamic*. John Zizioulas in particular emphasizes these aspects of personhood through two terms that resonate throughout the Orthodox tradition,

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<sup>2</sup> This list is hardly complete, but these writers have offered the most explicit and accessible reflections on the topic. Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974); Christos Yannaras, *The Freedom of Morality*, trans. Elizabeth Briere, vol. 3, Contemporary Greek Theologians (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984); John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, vol. 4, Contemporary Greek Theologians (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985; reprint 1997); Kallistos Ware, “The Human Person as an Icon of the Trinity,” *Sobornost (incorporating Eastern Churches Review)* 8, no. 2 (1986): 6-23; Élisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women in the Church*; Élisabeth Behr-Sigel, “The Otherness of Men and Women.”; John Zizioulas, “On Being a Person: Towards an Ontology of Personhood,” in *Persons, Divine and Human* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991a); Élisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Place of the Heart: An Introduction to Orthodox Spirituality*, trans. Stephan Bigham (Oakwood Publications, 1992); Kallistos Ware, “In the Image and Likeness’: The Uniqueness of the Human Person,” in *Personhood: Orthodox Christianity and the Connection Between Body, Mind, and Soul*, ed. John T. Chirban (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1996); Olivier Clément, *On Human Being: A Spiritual Anthology* (New York: New City Press, 2000); Kallistos Ware, “The Holy Trinity: Paradigm of the Human Person,” *Trinity* (2003): 227-38; Christos Yannaras, *Person and Eros* (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2007). For an excellent review of personalism and its origins in Russian

*hypostasis* and *ekstasis*. In this section, I will expand on each of these elements of human personhood primarily though not exclusively through the theology of Zizioulas, who of all those listed above, has engaged in the most extended and coherent discussion of personhood in Orthodox theology.<sup>3</sup> Along the way, I will indicate where sex and gender enter (or fail to enter) into the discussion.

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theology and philosophy, see Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Personhood and Its Exponents in Twentieth-Century Orthodox Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology* (Cambridge Univ Pr, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> In terms of Zizioulas's reflections on personhood, Aristotle Papanikolaou compares the thought of Lossky and Zizioulas, noting their common ground and important differences. Regarding the person, Papanikolaou strongly argues for the greater coherence of Zizioulas's thought over Lossky. It is Lossky, however, a member of the Russian émigré milieu in Paris, who had the most influence on figures such as Behr-Sigel, Clément and Ware. See Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Divine Energies Or Divine Personhood: Vladimir Lossky and John Zizioulas on Conceiving the Transcendent and Immanent God," *Modern Theology* 19, no. 3 (2003): 357-85; Aristotle Papanikolaou, *Being With God: Trinity, Apophaticism, and Divine Human Communion* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006). Zizioulas's primary work in this regard is the well-known *Being as Communion*. More recently the edited volume *Communion and Otherness* gathers essays published subsequent to *Being as Communion*, and includes a few new contributions. See John Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: T & T Clark, 2006). For an overview of Zizioulas's theology, see Aristotle Papanikolaou, *Being With God*. Zizioulas derives his Trinitarian theology from his reading of the Cappadocian writers, primarily Gregory Nazianzen. His interpretation has not gone unchallenged and there is no consensus within or without the Orthodox world that his interpretation of the Cappadocians is correct. See especially Sarah Coakley, ed. *Re-Thinking Gregory of Nyssa* (Blackwell, 2003). Papanikolaou defends Zizioulas not as an accurate interpreter of patristic theology but as thoughtful contributor to contemporary theology and philosophy in light of patristic trajectories. "His attempt to give further expression to the realism of divine-human communion through twentieth-century notions of person is analogous to the patristic co-opting of Greek philosophical categories to express the same principle. Zizioulas is doing exactly what these writers did insofar as he is thinking about the authoritative texts of the tradition in light of the questions, challenges, and prevailing philosophical currents of his time. The alternative is either the hermeneutically impossible bracketing of all that the interpreter has read and experienced as they approach the patristic texts in the hope of distilling the pure 'essence' of the text itself; or to judge contemporary Orthodox theology as authentic based on its faithful reiteration of patristic texts, i.e., a form of patristic fundamentalism. The latter, however, is not consistent with the approach of the patristic writers themselves, who did more than simply reiterate their predecessors." Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Is John Zizioulas an Existentialist in Disguise? Response to Lucian Turcescu," *Modern Theology* 20, no. 4 (2004), 605. Harrison notes that most patristic anthropologies are Christological, not Trinitarian. We are made according to the image which is Christ. However, she cogently argues that while many of the ingredients for a connection between the human *imago Dei* and the relational Trinity are present by the fourth century, they are hardly named explicitly given that the doctrine of the Trinity itself was only then being definitively conceptualized. See Nonna Verna Harrison, "Human Community as an Image of the Holy Trinity," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 46, no. 4 (2002): 347-64; Nonna Verna Harrison, "Greek Patristic Foundations of Trinitarian Anthropology," *Pro Ecclesia* 14, no. 4 (2005): 399-412. Papanikolaou has recently addressed this very issue, arguing that Zizioulas's notion is Christological rather than Trinitarian. See Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Personhood and Its Exponents in Twentieth-Century Orthodox Theology."

### 1.2.1: Hypostasis as Particularity

The person as an *hypostasis* indicates human uniqueness as both particular and unrepeatable. Fundamentally, each individual person is constituted by a unique set of *hypostatic* attributes that literally “stand under” a person. Often perceived as “natural,” these attributes include “qualities and capacities of any kind: biological, social or moral.”<sup>4</sup> *Hypostatic* attributes, if understood in isolation from other persons, describe *what* a person is: male or female, rich or poor, good or bad. However, Orthodox theology resists defining an individual human person according to her “biological *hypostasis*,” those natural capabilities or qualities that constitute every person but to which she cannot be reduced.<sup>5</sup> According to Zizioulas, the perennial question “who am I?” is a cry of self-assertion seeking definition, consciousness and articulation in the face of a given and already existing world.<sup>6</sup> This “triumphalistic,” “doxological/eucharistic” cry asserts *being* (existence) and simultaneously recognizes the limits of being in the face of the reality of non-existence.<sup>7</sup> The ingredient “I” in the question “implies a sort of uniqueness, a claim of being in a unique and unrepeatable way. Many things ‘are’ but no one else is me (or you, etc.). This assertion is absolute: not simply because nothing else is ‘me’, but also because nothing else can ever be me.”<sup>8</sup> Instead,

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<sup>4</sup> John Zizioulas, “On Being a Person,” 45.

<sup>5</sup> John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 50ff. Zizioulas continues, “...the ecstatic activity which leads to his birth is bound up with the ‘passion’ of ontological necessity, in the fact that ontologically nature precedes the person and dictates its laws (by ‘instinct’), thus destroying freedom at its ontological base. This ‘passion’ is closely connected with createdness, that is, with the fact that man as a person confronts, as we have already seen, the necessity of existence. Consequently it is impossible for created existence to escape the ontological necessity in the constitution of the biological hypostasis: without ‘necessary’ natural laws, that is, without ontological necessity, the biological hypostasis of man cannot exist.” Ibid., 53-54.

<sup>6</sup> John Zizioulas, “On Being a Person: Towards an Ontology of Personhood,” in *Communion and Otherness*, ed. Paul McPartlan (London: T & T Clark, 2006), 100.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 101.

a person is a “who” not a “what,” and wants “to exist as a *concrete, unique and unrepeatable* entity.”<sup>9</sup>

In order to conceptually defend “who” we are, Zizioulas distinguishes between natural qualities and unique personhood:

Personhood is about hypostasis, i.e. the claim to uniqueness in the absolute sense of the term, and this cannot be guaranteed by reference to sex or function or role, or even cultivated consciousness of the “self” and its psychological experiences, since all of these can be classified, thus representing qualities shared by more than one being and not point to absolute uniqueness. Such qualities, important as they are for personal identity, become ontologically personal only through the hypostasis to which they belong: only by being my qualities they are personal, but the ingredient “me” is a claim to absolute uniqueness which is not granted by these classifiable qualities constituting my “what,” but by something else.<sup>10</sup>

Behind this insistence on separating “who” from “what” is an adamant opposition to modern anthropologies that characterize persons as “individuals” whose attributes can be categorized and quantified and whose relationships can be determined by laws or formulas that do not account for the radical particularity of persons. Zizioulas, in a comment commended by Nonna Harrison in part for its rarity among Orthodox, condemns the biological and cultural essentialism that responds to the woman who asks, “who am I?”, by saying, “you are a woman.” According to Zizioulas, “this is an answer of ‘what’, not of ‘who’.”<sup>11</sup> This concern with individualistic reductions of unique persons echoes the objections voiced by many contemporary philosophers and theologians, Orthodox among them. If by “individual” we mean to completely identify a person with their qualities, then Orthodox theologians such as Vladimir Lossky or Christos Yannaras are correct in their

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<sup>9</sup> John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 46. Zizioulas repeatedly uses the word “concrete” in *Being and Communion*. However, in his 1991 summary of his argument regarding personhood, he appears to replace “concrete” with “particularity,” the term I will use throughout. See John Zizioulas, “On Being a Person.”

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 45, emphasis in the original.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 110; Nonna Verna Harrison, “Zizioulas on Communion and Otherness,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 42, no. 3-4 (1998), 276-77.

negative evaluation of “individuality,” though perhaps unfair in singling out “the West.”<sup>12</sup>

### **Relational Particulars**

As Harrison discerningly notes, what is really at stake is not the question of individuality per se, or the natural qualities and attributes that constitute a person, but the accompanying view of the person as isolated and self-enclosed, or autonomous. If a person is simply a collection of repeatable “whats,” then she exists as that collection regardless of who or what is around her. She needs no one, and is shaped by no one. The chief theological concern is the separation of uniqueness and relationality. Here Orthodox theologians share common ground not only with many post-modern theologians, but feminist philosophers as well as feminist, mujerista and womanist theologians. The centrality of relationship to human personhood precludes any understanding of a person that isolates her from dependance on and influence by others. The isolated individual is a fantasy. “However,” reminds Harrison, “individuality can also mean the set of natural particularities that every human person simply has. This kind of individuality is intrinsic to human existence and indispensable to human functioning.”<sup>13</sup> The value of a particularity is not intrinsic, but according to how it is used. Particular qualities are the “artistic media... through which the person expresses his/her unique presence and activity and interacts with other persons as they give themselves and receive each other in love. This means that however ineffable and transcendent the *hypostasis* is, it needs natural particularities in order to

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<sup>12</sup> Christos Yannaras, *The Freedom of Morality*; John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*; Christos Yannaras, “Human Rights and the Orthodox Church,” in *Orthodox Churches in a Pluralistic World* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> Nonna Verna Harrison, “The Maleness of Christ,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 2 (1998), 117. “Natural” here means given, whether sociological or biological.

function as a person.”<sup>14</sup> Envisaging human qualities as “artistic media” by which personhood is expressed provides a helpful bridge between an iconodule defense of wood and paint icons and a similar defense of unique personhood expressed in and through bodies. Here the important point is that the possession of particularities does not define the entirety of the person, but particularities do distinguish one person from another by their unique variations of concrete embodiment.

### **Otherness**

The priority of particularity means that in Christology an important point is not what we see in Christ as ‘general’ but as particular. This may at first glance undermine claims that Christ took on the fullness of all humanity, not simply maleness. However, particularity is far more than a difference between male and female. Rather, particularity distinguishes just as much between males and males as it does between males and females. We will see this quite clearly in Theodore the Studite who develops an understanding of particularity in conjunction with his articulation of iconodule theology. According to Zizioulas, what makes Christ a personal identity is the convergence of the divine and human qualities in the “hypostatic union,” the particularization of his human and divine natures in one distinct person who is the Son. General qualities shared among persons, important as they are, must be become particular, “enhypostasized,” to exist, to “be.” Our ontological self (being *qua* being) does not exist either in an ideal form or an abstract idea that is then inserted into a body. Rather, natural qualities are dependent on becoming particular for their very existence. If we are to speak of a common nature, we can only do so via particularities.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> John Zizioulas, “On Being a Person,” 109. To quote Zizioulas in full: “If this point concerning the priority of the particular in ontology is taken as a *sine qua non* condition, it emerges that in Christology the crucial

In keeping with his trinitarian interests, Zizioulas roots distinction as difference or otherness in the Trinity. This rooting of otherness in God serves to save particularity.<sup>16</sup> trinitarian doctrine (that is, what Zizioulas argues is Orthodox trinitarian doctrine) indicates that “otherness is *constitutive* of unity, and not consequent upon it.... God is simultaneously One and Three.”<sup>17</sup> The clear distinctions between trinitarian persons (there is no “confusion” between and among the three) indicates that difference (otherness) is absolute and ontological (“who” not “what”). Otherness is only perceivable (even conceivable) through relationship. These last points are extremely important: the very ability to recognize persons as distinct, as other, is only possible when they are seen in relationship to another. It is their relationships that indicate the ‘otherness’ of a person, which show us their distinction. In the Trinity, we see the distinction of the persons through names that indicate particular relationships. It is not possible to be different apart from relationship.<sup>18</sup> In theory (a foreshadowing of potential dangers discussed below), “communion does not threaten otherness: it generates it.”<sup>19</sup>

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thing for our subject is not the *communicatio idiomatum* but the hypostatic union. What enables Man in Christ to arrive at a personal identity in ontological terms is that in Christ the natures are, only because they are particularised in one person. In Christ the general exists only in and through the particular; the particular is thus raised to ontological primacy. The 'Who' of Christ is the Son. In Him the two natures give their qualities to the identity without making the identity depend in the primary ontological sense, on these qualities, i.e. in the sense in which our identities ultimately depend - and thus are unable to make the particular 'I' ontologically decisive. The natural qualities are not extrinsic to the identity - the question 'Who am I?' does not aim at excluding natural qualities from the identity of 'I' - but by being 'enhypostasized' these qualities become dependent on the hypostasis for their being; the hypostasis is not dependent on them. Thus the cause of being is the particular, not the general.”

<sup>16</sup> “Personal ontology is an assertion of the metaphysics of particularity. It is the endeavour to raise the particular to the primacy and ultimacy which transcends the changing world of coming and going particularities; to attach fixity to the 'many' as if they were the 'one', i.e. absolute, unique and irreplaceable,” Ibid., 101.

<sup>17</sup> John Zizioulas, “Communion and Otherness,” *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (1994), 353.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.



### 1.2.2: Ekstasis as Relationality

Communion generates otherness because *hypostatic* personhood is *ekstatic*, that is, to be constituted as a person is to ‘stand outside’ or ‘go beyond’ oneself. *Ekstasis* is twofold, freedom *from* created nature *for* the other. The centrality of freedom and its importance to relationship in Zizioulas cannot be overestimated. It is arguably the motivation behind much of his trinitarian theology with its emphasis on the eternal, free relations shared by each unique hypostatic person of the Trinity. We only know of the Trinity because God is *ekstatic*, going out beyond Godself, relating to creation via the Incarnate Logos, through the Spirit. We recognize the persons of the Trinity as distinct because of how they freely relate *to one another*. Because their uniqueness as persons exists only through their free, eternal relationships with one another, the doctrine of the Trinity theologically grounds all *being* in otherness, relation, uniqueness, and freedom. This is crucial as a basis for an anthropology grounded in the Trinity. A *person* made in the image of a trinitarian God is *ekstatic*, free from created nature *for* the other.

This freedom *for* the other undergirds Zizioulas’s frequent use of the phrase “person-in-relation.”<sup>20</sup> This orientation towards the other pervades Orthodox descriptions of the human person. Kallistos Ware states that the *imago* (inclusive of image and likeness) “signifies first an foremost and orientation, a direction, a relationship.”<sup>21</sup> This orientation, according to Ware, is primarily a vertical orientation towards God, by whom we are created for communion and fellowship, but includes a horizontal orientation, relationship with fellow human beings. In short, we are oriented to love God *and* neighbor (Deut 6.5; Luke

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<sup>20</sup> Zizioulas is hardly exclusive in using this phrase. It is common in much twentieth-century philosophy, especially in the work of John Macmurray. John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, 1993).

<sup>21</sup> Kallistos Ware, “In the Image and Likeness,” 3.

10.27; Matt. 19.19, 23:37-39). Full personhood cannot be realized outside of loving the other. We exist more (or less) fully only in relation to others, by loving and being loved. Zizioulas, a figure with whom the term ‘relational ontology’ is practically identified, posits that the “ontological revolution” of the Cappadocian Fathers is to connect being and *hypostasis* such that relationship is constitutive of being: “*To be* and *to be in relation* are identical.”<sup>22</sup> Ware, following the Romanian theologian Dumitru Stăniloae’s (1903-1993) refutation of the Cogito, declares that both *Amo, ergo sum* and *Amor, ergo sum* characterize full human personhood.<sup>23</sup> In our relationships with God and neighbor, we “are called to reproduce on earth the *perichoresis* (interchange of mutual love) that unites the three members of the Holy Trinity.”<sup>24</sup>

### 1.2.3: Ecclesial Recognition

According to Zizioulas, it is only by baptism into and eucharistic participation with Christ, who is the first truly full human person, that we are constituted as persons. It is in the body of Christ, the church, that this constitution occurs.<sup>25</sup> Baptism and Eucharist are the

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<sup>22</sup> John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 89.

<sup>23</sup> Stăniloae: “Insofar as I am not loved, I am incomprehensible to myself.” M.A.C. De Beauregard, *Dumitru Stăniloae: “Ose Comprendre que je t’aime”* (Paris: Cerf, 1983), 24. Cited in Kallistos Ware, “In the Image and Likeness,” 4. Silviu Rogobete notes that for Stăniloae, rationality is a means to a greater end which is love. Confirmation of existence rests not in the Cogito, but in the statement: “I love, therefore I am.” Silviu Eugen Rogobete, “Mystical Existentialism Or Communitarian Participation?: Vladimir Lossky and Dumitru Stăniloae,” in *Dumitru Stăniloae: Tradition and Modernity in Theology*, ed. Lucian Turcescu (Iasi; Oxford; Palm Beach; Portland: The Center for Romanian Studies, 2002). The phrase, “I love, therefore I am” is originally from Patriarch Calistos, PG, 147, 860 AB.

<sup>24</sup> Kallistos Ware, “In the Image and Likeness,” 4.

<sup>25</sup> I am here articulating Zizioulas’s repeated assertion in *Being and Communion* that we only become persons in the church. This enormously problematic assertion is beyond the scope of this work. As Zizioulas later argues, we are constituted by *loving relationships*, which I do not believe are limited to those in the Church. Indeed, the core of my argument is that the church fails to love its *own* people by the exclusion of women, precisely because it denies their full personhood by reducing them to supposedly ‘natural’ qualities. Those same people unrecognized as unique within the church are often recognized, and therefore loved, outside the church. Regardless of whether one believes that true loving relationships are only possible within the church, my challenge stills stands. If it is true that love only occurs within the church, it is even more imperative that we

means of adoption and continuation as sons and daughters of God, entrance into divine life through becoming persons-in-relation. Baptism and Eucharist here are not meant as discrete events in which something just happens that then creates good relationships. Rather, they involve ongoing participation in the community, a participation that will be discussed more fully when we take up the liturgy in Chapter Four. However, it is worth noting now that the dependence of personhood on relationship can be extremely problematic, even dangerous. For example, perceiving women only in relation to fathers and husbands has done little to affirm them as unique persons distinct from other persons, male or female. This communal dependence is only made more problematic by communities that refuse to recognize or allow the unique otherness of individual persons in light of presumptions regarding their shared qualities. This dangerous dependence renders intelligible Liberation Theology's notion of 'non-person.'

Consequently, it is important to note that Zizioulas declares the fundamental relation upon which we are dependent as persons is not one another but God. Baptism is "new birth" into Christ, and just as Christ is freely recognized as unique in and through his relationship with the Father, so are we recognized by *ekstatic* divine love. Zizioulas acknowledges that we cannot divorce "who" from "what" in our created existence. Just as the church exists in creation as an *anticipation* of the coming reign of God, personhood in an absolute sense is about a "claim to *uniqueness*."<sup>26</sup> Just as the eschatological hope of the church is *anticipated* in our practices, we can *claim* a uniqueness that is also, in part, *anticipated*. We may be confident that God sees us as unique, but there is no assurance that we will be similarly recognized either by other individuals or the corporate body that is church. This

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turn away from any way in which we reduce the personhood of our members. Zizioulas speaks of love rather than the church (though he does not exclude the church) in John Zizioulas, "On Being a Person," 111ff.

“not yet” aspect of our relations with one another is a *failure to love*. “In relationships of genuine love,” says Zizioulas,

which are the proper context for the 'experience' of an ontology of personhood, one does not- and should not- identify the other with the help of their qualities (physical, social, moral, etc.), thus rejecting or accepting the other on that basis as a unique and irreplaceable partner in a relationship that matters ontologically (on which one's own personal identity depends). The more one loves ontologically and truly personally, the less one identifies someone as unique and irreplaceable for one's existence on the basis of such classifiable qualities.<sup>27</sup>

This negative point cannot be overemphasized: identifying the other by their qualities *rejects* their unique irreducibility. It is a *failure to love*. To do this within the church, to fail to ‘see’ the uniqueness of the other within the ecclesial body is to fail to love our neighbor, Gregory Palamas offers an example of the way in which Orthodox theology typically uses multiple metaphors to elaborate a concept, in this case, liturgical participation in the eucharist.

Christ has become our brother, by sharing our flesh and blood and so becoming assimilated to us...He has joined and bound us to himself, as a husband his wife, by becoming one single flesh with us through the communion of his blood; he has also become our father by divine baptism which renders us like unto him, and he nourishes us at his own breast as a tender mother nourishes her babies...Come, he says, eat my body, drink my blood...so that you be not only made after God's image, but become gods and kings, eternal and heavenly, clothing yourselves with me, King and God.<sup>28</sup>

Christ, in the eucharist, can be modeled after brother, husband, father and mother. Each of these models is spoken of metaphorically, indicating a particular way in which Christ relates to us through the eucharist. As brother Christ shares our ‘genetics,’ as a husband he is our lover, as our father we bear his familial resemblance, and as our mother he feeds us from his own body. A single liturgical act, that of partaking in the eucharist, puts us in multiple

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 111-12.

<sup>28</sup> Homily 56. John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas* (London: Faith Press, 1964), 177.

relationships with Christ, each uniquely evoked by a metaphor. Despite their literal incongruity, these relationships exist simultaneously.<sup>29</sup> The eucharist, which ‘is’ Christ, is all of these things at once. Likewise, the partaker is also simultaneously a sibling, lover and child. This metaphorical simultaneity, appealing to more than one association, each of which points to something uniquely true about our new relationship with God in the eucharist, is typical of the theological use of metaphors. Metaphors juxtapose the most incongruous of associations in order to awaken our sensibilities to a new truth, or to a reality new to our understanding. Even if we have been told before, metaphors can newly remind us of what we know, but need to know more deeply. Finally, this string of metaphors has a purpose, to persuade hearers to “come...eat...drink.” Why? So that we can become “gods and kings” as Christ is God and King. This network of associations draws us towards *theosis*.*within* the church.

In light of the too-frequent failure to honor the uniqueness of the other, Zizioulas insists on adopting an “*ethical apophaticism*” that refuses to use language which falsely claims to fully understand persons and so results in loss of uniqueness and stagnation in relationships.<sup>30</sup> This apophaticism does not eliminate the possibility of *kataphatic* (‘positive’) knowledge, but as all *apophatic* language does, it forecloses absolute conclusions regarding human personhood. Zizioulas’s insight is not the assertion of an apophatic ethic (an intriguing but difficult idea), but a claim that the relationships that identify (constitute) persons must do so in a way that *affirms* uniqueness, distinction, and otherness. In describing

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<sup>29</sup> Under the most horrific of circumstances, this configuration is of course possible. It is the fact that these are metaphors, verbal icons that point to a way of relating that prevents this from becoming incestuous.

<sup>30</sup> Zizioulas explains, “we cannot give a *positive qualitative content* to a *hypostasis* or person, for this would result in the loss of his absolute uniqueness and turn a person into a classifiable entity.” Zizioulas believes this insistence is in keeping with the refusal of patristic theologians to give positive content to the persons of the Trinity, instead speaking only of how the persons relate to one another. John Zizioulas, “On Being a Person,” 112.

the implications of persons-in-relation for life in the church, Zizioulas constantly speaks of the “affirmation” for otherness in baptism and Eucharist. By this, Zizioulas does not mean that this affirmation is guaranteed, but rather, it is how the body is called to relate to its members:

But the Eucharist does not only affirm and sanctify communion; it also sanctifies otherness. It is the place where difference ceases to be divisive and becomes good. Diaphora does not lead to diairesis, and unity or communion does not destroy but affirms diversity and otherness in the Eucharist. Whenever this does not happen, the Eucharist is destroyed and even invalidated, even if all the other requirements for a "valid" Eucharist are met and satisfied. Thus, a Eucharist which excludes in one way or another those of a different race or sex or age or profession is a false Eucharist. A Eucharist celebrated specially for children or young people or blacks or whites, or students etc., is a false one. The Eucharist must include all these, for it is there that the otherness of a natural or social kind can be transcended. A Church which does not celebrate the Eucharist in this inclusive way risks losing her catholicity.<sup>31</sup>

It is not any kind of relation that is acceptable, but relations that recognize and affirm difference as crucial to the very ‘being’ of a person. The ‘who-ness’ (to recall Dr. Seuss) of a person is not a role or quality, but a unique person shaped by qualities yet never reducible to them. Any exclusion from relationships within the ecclesial community based on particular ‘natural’ qualities that does not reflect the whole unique person destroys communion. Just as important as the negative point emphasized above is its positive converse: to ‘see’ the uniqueness of the other within the ecclesial body is to genuinely love our neighbor, *within* the church.

#### 1.2.4: Dynamism

Finally and *very* briefly, unique, irreducible, persons-in-relation are *dynamic*. Our humanity is expressed via the artistic medium of our body in relationships to others. Our

other-orientation is an active orientation. For Zizioulas, who uses the language of freedom rather than dynamism, we are “free” to become more than we are as reducible individuals. We can *become*. This dynamism is already implied in anticipatory language that acknowledges that we are not yet what we will be. Human persons are in the process of *becoming* fuller human persons. This dynamic quality of human personhood is best explored through the metaphors discussed below, especially the metaphor of *theosis* that is understood as the *ongoing, dynamic transformation* into the likeness (also a metaphor) of God.

### 1.3: Metaphorical Theology

Zizioulas’s appeal to apophaticism is typical among Orthodox. The apophatic caution that permeates Orthodox theology is evident in the priority given to theological poetry as a legitimate, even primary, form of doctrinal discourse. Yannaras makes the connection well:

The apophatic attitude leads Christian theology to use the language of poetry and images for the interpretation of dogmas much more than the language of conventional logic and schematic concepts. The conventional logic of everyday understanding can very easily give man a false sense of a sure knowledge which, being won by the intellect, is already exhausted by it, completely possessed by it. While poetry, with the symbolisms and images which it uses, always exhibits a sense from within the words and beyond the words, a concept which corresponds more to common experiences of life and less to cerebral conceptions.<sup>32</sup>

Key aspects of Orthodox doctrine relevant for this dissertation are primarily expressed in metaphorical language. These include the ‘image of God,’ *theosis* and sin. Without metaphorical language, these crucial elements of Orthodox theology and anthropology

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<sup>31</sup> John Zizioulas, “Communion and Otherness,” 355. Zizioulas is referring to difference (*diaphora*) versus division (*diairesis*), a distinction which goes back to Maximus the Confessor.

<sup>32</sup> Christos Yannaras, *The Elements of Faith* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991). Cited in Andrew Louth, “The Place of *Theosis* in Orthodox Theology,” in *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, ed. Vladimir Kharlamov, and Stephen Finlan (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2006), 41.

would hardly be recognizable. These metaphors are foundational to understanding the host of gendered metaphors that touch on our topic, such as mother and father, husband and wife, bride and bridegroom, body and head, each of which will be treated as they arise through the interpretation of text, image and liturgy in subsequent chapters. First, we must understand what metaphorical language is (and is not), and how it is used in theology.

### 1.3.1: Definition

“A metaphor,” defines Janet Soskice, “is that figure of speech whereby we speak about one thing in terms which are seen to be suggestive of another.”<sup>33</sup> Soskice carefully distinguishes various tropes with a particular concern to clarify the meaning of metaphor. There is a close connection, but not identity, between a model and a metaphor. A model is a structure or frame that can be replicated, an object or state of affairs that can be viewed in terms of another object or state of affairs. A model train is a non-linguistic model, and we can describe the function of the brain in terms of the function of a computer. As Soskice points out, however, when we speak of the neural “programming” of the brain, we are speaking metaphorically based on the brain as somehow related to a computer model.<sup>34</sup> Thus, a metaphor is “suggestive” of a model or models. An analogy designates a relationship, linguistic or not, between two objects (a model and the object modeled, or a structural similarity in arguments). An analogy may stretch the usage of a model but generates “no jolt or strain” and “from its inception seems appropriate.”<sup>35</sup> Further, an analogy does not require any recognition of the model embedded in its use. We do not need to first consider happiness before we can understand the analogy “my cat is happy to sleep.”

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<sup>33</sup> Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 15.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.



While metaphors are entirely linguistic (a “figure of speech”), symbols and images are non-linguistic.<sup>36</sup> Each of these tropes—model, analogy, symbol and image—is a way of communicating, but all are distinct from metaphors.

Metaphors utilize a model or models (and so the two are easily mistaken for one another) in order to “cast up and organize a network of associations. A good metaphor may not simply be an oblique reference to a predetermined subject but a new vision, the birth of a new understanding, a new referential access. A strong metaphor compels new possibilities of vision.”<sup>37</sup> Further, a truly creative metaphor is unique, its subject only accessible through this particular metaphor, no other.<sup>38</sup> By using effective metaphors, speech is not “an ornament to what we already know but is an embodiment of a new insight.”<sup>39</sup> When Gregory Palamas (1296–1359) speaks of Christ who “nourishes us at his own breast as a tender mother nourishes her babies,” the models of a nursing mother and a feeding infant are utilized to evoke a (very possibly new or at least shocking) vision of a tender and nourishing deity who holds us at his breast.<sup>40</sup> Metaphors expand our vocabulary and concepts, and as a result, they “become not only part of our language but also part of the way in which we interpret our world, and the implications of one metaphor are very different from those of another.”<sup>41</sup>

According to Soskice, a satisfactory theory of metaphor, one that clarifies metaphors as distinct from other tropes, takes account of the following elements. First, metaphors are

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<sup>36</sup> We will see that Orthodox theologians do not necessarily obey the grammatical convention regarding the non-linguistic character of symbols and images. Nonna Harrison explicitly conflates metaphor and symbol in order to explain theology as *iconic*, conveying meaning through “verbal images.” This will be discussed more fully below.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 57-58.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Homily 56. John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, 177. Thanks to Teva Regule for bringing this passage to my attention.

neither substitutions for literal speech nor simply emotive utterances. Something real is being said that is not literal. Second, metaphors are “fully cognitive and capable of saying that which may be said in no other way.”<sup>42</sup> Third, the interpretation of a metaphor should include both the intention of the speaker and the reception of the hearer. Fourth, this interpretation includes what is said, the context in which it is said, the shared beliefs of speaker and hearer and “the patterns of inference the hearer employs in determining the speaker’s meaning.”<sup>43</sup> Fifth, the meaning or effectiveness of a metaphor is not found in isolated words, but in their “interanimation,” in the “complete utterances and surrounding contexts.”<sup>44</sup> Finally, “the truth or falsity of the metaphorical claim can only be assessed at the level of intended meaning.”<sup>45</sup> Metaphors appeal to *already existing* beliefs (a “network of associations”) but organize them (or reorganize) them in a manner that results in a new meaning. This new meaning, uniquely accessible through this particular metaphor, is dependent on existing cognitive and emotive associations. When the network of associations change, the meaning of a metaphor (both its intention and reception) changes. Some metaphors may simply be meaningless (hymnic references to Mary as a “heifer” have an odd ring in non-pastoral ears), or become so horrific they are rendered unusable (the term “slave” in the twenty-first century may require more explanation than its beneficial meaning generally warrants). The “shock” of these metaphors is no longer beneficial, they no longer serve the purpose intended and they are hardly receivable whether for contextual or ethical reasons.

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<sup>41</sup> Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 62.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 44-45. Here Soskice is following the “interanimation” theory of I.A. Richards in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 85.

### 1.3.2: Theological Usage

Orthodox theology views metaphorical language as an essential tool for effective interpretation. Using the scriptural exegesis of Gregory of Nyssa as an example, Nonna Harrison emphasizes that the “fruits of exegesis” is the criterion by which a method of interpretation should be chosen. The “usefulness” of a passage may require remaining with the literal meaning of the text, but far more often, it requires going beyond the text into an allegorical, spiritual, or metaphorical interpretation, or better, interpretations. “Accused” of using allegory, Gregory of Nyssa mounts a defense:

Because some members of the Church always think it right to follow the letter of holy scripture and do not take into account the symbolic and allegorical meanings, we must answer those who accuse us of doing so [that is, of using allegory]: there is nothing unusual in searching the divinely inspired scriptures with every means at our disposal. Thus if the literal sense, as it is called, should be of any use, we will readily have the object of our search. But if anything in the hidden, symbolic sense cannot be of use with regard to the literal sense, we will, as the Word teaches and as Proverbs says [1:6] understand the passage either as a parable, a dark saying, an utterance of wise men, or as a riddle. With regards to anagogy, it makes no difference what we call it—tropology or allegory—as long as we grasp the meaning of [scripture's] words.<sup>46</sup>

Gregory lumps together various types of symbolic interpretation as his concern is their function rather than faithfulness to a particular method, literal or metaphorical. In practice, however it is clear that a literal interpretation is rarely adequate in furthering the purpose of exegesis: to gain knowledge of God (contemplation) and acquire the virtues (action).<sup>47</sup> As a hermeneutical principle, interpretation of texts has a function, to further knowledge of God and the practice of virtue.

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<sup>46</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, and Casimir McCambley, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, vol. 12, The Archbishop Iakovos Library of Ecclesiastical and Historical Sources (Brookline, Mass.: Hellenic College Press, 1987). A large portion of this passage is cited in Nonna Verna Harrison, “Allegory and Asceticism in Gregory of Nyssa,” *Semeia*, no 57 (1992), 114-15.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

### 1.3.3: Theological Language

Harrison carefully examines the use of metaphorical language in Orthodox theology in light of the apophatic dimension already mentioned. Too often apophaticism, rightly used as a corrective to reductive literalism or excessive claims about God, merely serves as an excuse to simply unsay without saying, to deny the possibility of any positive language for God.<sup>48</sup> Harrison's response is to emphasize kataphatic, or positive, language. She argues that Vladimir Lossky, who is known for a sometime excessively apophatic approach, follows Dionysius the Areopagite in positing authentic religious language as forming a ladder of ascent towards union with God.<sup>49</sup> Each step of the ladder opens onto another step, knowledge of God opening into the awareness of unknowing in a never-ending process.

This knowing-to-unknowing is characteristic of individuals as well as theological doctrine. Harrison links Gregory of Nyssa's concept of individual *epektasis*, in which an individual person constantly moves into ever-expanding knowledge and relationship with God, to Gregory the Theologian's argument regarding the growth of doctrinal knowledge of God in his famous *Fifth Theological Oration*:

Here, growth towards perfection comes through additions. In this way: the old covenant made clear proclamation of the Father, a less definite one of the Son. The new [covenant] made the Son manifest and gave us a glimpse of the Spirit's Godhead. At the present time the Spirit resides amongst us, giving us a clearer manifestation of himself than before. It was dangerous for the Son to be preached openly when the Godhead of the Father was still unacknowledged. It was dangerous, too, for the Holy Spirit to be made (and

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<sup>48</sup> Nonna Verna Harrison, "The Relationship Between Apophatic and Kataphatic Theology," *Pro Ecclesia* 4 (1995), 318-19. Here Harrison is commenting (gently) on Vladimir Lossky's use of apophaticism as a rebuttal of Catholic neo-Thomists' seemingly excessive claims regarding knowledge of God, and (not so-gently) on Sally McFague's use of metaphor to correct what McFague views as the excessive literalism of the Incarnation. See Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976); Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

<sup>49</sup> Nonna Verna Harrison, "The Relationship Between Apophatic and Kataphatic Theology," 320. See Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 39ff.

here I use a rather rash expression) an extra burden, when the Son had not yet been received. It could mean jeopardizing what did lie within their powers... (*Or.* 31.26).<sup>50</sup>

Frederick Norris highlights the importance of persuasion as a first principle of Greek *paideia* and philosophical rhetoric. God offers only what humans can grasp, offering more as our collective understanding grows. “Gradual revelation” is offered through scripture, liturgy and practice.<sup>51</sup> This “additive process” is inherent in the relationship between kataphatic and apophatic knowledge.<sup>52</sup> Alone, kataphatic knowledge is rigid, limited and closed. It leads only to itself, and as a result, is idolatrous. Orthodox theology, according to Harrison, links concepts in an “open network that always remains unfinished,” a way of speaking that “mirrors the structured openness of God's creation.”<sup>53</sup>

Harrison speaks of kataphatic language as “a window or door opening into the apophatic.”<sup>54</sup> This is precisely how Orthodox refer to iconic images, as windows into the divine. Accordingly, Harrison adopts Susan Ashbrook Harvey’s argument that religious metaphor functions as a “verbal icon”:

Metaphor has been the basis of religious language for Christianity from its earliest theological writings, the Scriptures, precisely because of metaphor's capacity to open realms of meaning. By its power of suggestion, metaphor can speak without strictly limiting the content of its sense. When used in religious language, metaphor functions as a verbal icon: the revelatory efficacy and power of a religious metaphor depend upon its essential participation in the truth to which it points. The image is fundamentally related to its prototype, which is both its source and beyond the capacity of the image to contain. Thus a religious metaphor is meaningful to the extent that it is grounded in its divine prototype, but by its nature it cannot reduce

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<sup>50</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *On God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius*, Popular Patristics Series (Crestwood, N.Y: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 293.. Cited in Nonna Verna Harrison, “The Relationship Between Apophatic and Kataphatic Theology,” 329.

<sup>51</sup> Frederick W. Norris, *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning: The Five Theological Orations of Gregory Nazianzen*, vol. 13, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae (New York: E.J. Brill, 1991), 206-07.

<sup>52</sup> Nonna Verna Harrison, “The Relationship Between Apophatic and Kataphatic Theology,” 329.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 320.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 321.

the divine to a simple definition or identity.<sup>55</sup>

The teaching of the Seventh Ecumenical council establishes not only a parallel between the narrative of the Gospel and its iconic depiction, which, therefore, has “definite theological content,” but, as Harrison posits, “this conciliar definition is saying something equally important about the words of Scripture and by extension all other words which express the Church's faith, particularly in liturgical texts and patristic writings. It is saying that they are actually verbal icons.”<sup>56</sup> Harrison reminds her readers that the noted theologian Georges Florovsky speaks of dogma as a “logical image, a ‘logical icon’ of divine reality.”<sup>57</sup>

Knowledge, for Orthodox, is to “see” God, which is to both understand (as much as is possible within our limits) as well as participate in God. A kataphatic icon, whether one of word or image (or virtually any other practice or material that can point beyond itself) uses the familiar to jolt us into something new. Orthodox theological language as “imagistic and conceptual, has an iconic character and purpose” to reveal the divine.<sup>58</sup>

### 1.3.4: "Dead" Metaphors

The emphasis in both Harvey and Harrison on the “purpose” and “meaningfulness” of a verbal (or imagistic) icon implies that a metaphor or an icon can fail. Soskice contrasts literal and non-literal language, which includes but is not limited to metaphors.<sup>59</sup> Literal utterances are generally “accustomed” or “conventional,” there is no jolt into a new vision.

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<sup>55</sup> Susan Ashbrook Harvey, “Feminine Imagery for the Divine: The Holy Spirit, the Odes of Solomon, and Early Syriac Tradition,” 114. A portion is cited in Nonna Verna Harrison, “The Relationship Between Apophatic and Kataphatic Theology,” 322.

<sup>56</sup> Nonna Verna Harrison, “Word as Icon in Greek Patristic Theology,” in *Constructive Christian Theology in the Worldwide Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 58.

<sup>57</sup> Georges Florovsky, *Creation and Redemption* (Belmont, Mass.: Nordland Pub. Co., 1976), 29. Cited in Harrison, 1995, #225@322

<sup>58</sup> Nonna Verna Harrison, “The Relationship Between Apophatic and Kataphatic Theology,” 325.

<sup>59</sup> For instance, she says, “I will return” can be literal, or a non-literal threat. The latter use does not make it a metaphor Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 69..

“Dead metaphors” are metaphors that seem literal. They have become so commonplace that no dissonance or tension can be recognized in them, they can be easily paraphrased and so are no longer unique, and the model or models on which it draws are lost or difficult to recall.<sup>60</sup> They no longer function in any way as metaphors, though they clearly once were (“the leg of a table”). Likewise, a verbal or visual icon whose intent is to convey and persuade a person to live the new vision it offers is no longer iconic when the intent behind the icon is lost, when it no longer opens us to new meanings and an expanding relationship with God. The very problem indicated by Harrison, the exclusive use of kataphatic language, is that it claims to know fully, and so is at rest, still, static. Metaphorical language is one element of verbal iconography that arranges associations in a manner that opens onto new visions of God. Like a visual icon, its use can become idolatrous. As an additive process, metaphors accrue meaning. Soskice reminds us that the very history of a metaphor makes a metaphor “emblematic,” a “gloss upon gloss, use and re-use of the figures which comprise an interweaving of meanings so complex that the possible readings are never exhausted.”<sup>61</sup> The inexhaustible meanings of metaphors are layers of verbal icons “connected by innumerable ties of intertextuality, and they comprise a total pictures that is not arbitrary but is in actuality the entire life of the church on earth, which is one vast icon of the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>62</sup> Nonna Verna Harrison, “The Relationship Between Apophatic and Kataphatic Theology,” 331.

### 1.3.5: Living Metaphors

Gregory Palamas offers an example of the way in which Orthodox theology typically uses multiple metaphors to elaborate a concept, in this case, liturgical participation in the Eucharist.

Christ has become our brother, by sharing our flesh and blood and so becoming assimilated to us...He has joined and bound us to himself, as a husband his wife, by becoming one single flesh with us through the communion of his blood; he has also become our father by divine baptism which renders us like unto him, and he nourishes us at his own breast as a tender mother nourishes her babies...Come, he says, eat my body, drink my blood...so that you be not only made after God's image, but become gods and kings, eternal and heavenly, clothing yourselves with me, King and God.<sup>63</sup>

Christ, in the Eucharist, can be modeled after brother, husband, father and mother. Each of these models is spoken of metaphorically, indicating a particular way in which Christ relates to us through the Eucharist. As brother Christ shares our 'genetics,' as a husband he is our lover, as our father we bear his familial resemblance, and as our mother he feeds us from his own body. A single liturgical act, that of partaking in the Eucharist, puts us in multiple relationships with Christ, each uniquely evoked by a metaphor. Despite their literal incongruity, these relationships exist simultaneously.<sup>64</sup> The Eucharist, which 'is' Christ, is all of these things at once. Likewise, the partaker is also simultaneously a sibling, lover and child. This metaphorical simultaneity, appealing to more than one association, each of which points to something uniquely true about our new relationship with God in the Eucharist, is typical of the theological use of metaphors. Metaphors juxtapose the most incongruous of associations in order to awaken our sensibilities to a new truth, or to a reality new to our understanding. Even if we have been told before, metaphors can newly remind us of what

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<sup>63</sup> Homily 56. John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, 177.



we know, but need to know more deeply. Finally, this string of metaphors has a purpose, to persuade hearers to “come...eat...drink.” Why? So that we can become “gods and kings” as Christ is God and King. This network of associations draws us towards *theosis*.

### 1.3.6: Summary

To summarize the key aspects of metaphor for this dissertation: A metaphor draws on a network of associations that cause a jolt or strain in conventional meanings. A metaphor offers a new vision or insight that can only be seen through this particular metaphor. Meaning is drawn not simply from an isolated word, but from the whole utterance in its entire context. As a form of Orthodox religious language a metaphor functions as a verbal icon, participating in but neither fully describing nor enclosing its prototype, persuading the hearer or beholder towards knowledge of God and acquisition of the virtues. For the purposes of my argument, I will assume that the religious metaphors addressed function (or ought to function) as verbal icons in a manner similar though not identical to visual icons (or images). Metaphors specific to the priesthood will be discussed in the context of my argument, as will their success or failure as verbal icons that have a purpose. Here, however, I will discuss three foundational metaphors: the image of God, *theosis* and sin.

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<sup>64</sup> Under the most horrific of circumstances, this configuration is of course possible. It is the fact that these are metaphors, verbal icons that point to a way of relating that prevents this from becoming incestuous.

### 1.3.7: Key Metaphors

#### Image of God

Certainly the primary theological ‘description’ of humanity is through a metaphor, humanity as the εἰκὼν τοῦ Θεοῦ, the “image” or “icon” of God. From its introduction in the book of Genesis in which God makes humankind “in our image, according to our likeness” (Gen 1.26),<sup>65</sup> this metaphor has drawn on and created an immense network of associations, the exegesis of which is hardly possible here. My focus will be on how Orthodoxy understands the human person in light of this particular metaphor.

#### *Image*

The Orthodox theological tradition is wisely hesitant to precisely identify what constitutes the image of God in humanity. “Tradition holds,” says Epiphanius of Salamas (d. 403), “that every human being is in the image of God, but it does not define exactly in what this image consists.”<sup>66</sup> Following the insertion of “and” into the Septuagint translation of Genesis 1.26, many Orthodox theologians distinguish between the *image* (κατ’ εἰκόνα) and the *likeness* (καθ’ ὁμοίωσιν) of God.<sup>67</sup> In this interpretation, the *image* refers to those qualities we have simply by virtue of being human, while the *likeness* refers to dynamic qualities we gain through grace-filled effort, *askesis*. Regardless of the validity of the textual distinction,

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<sup>65</sup> In the Septuagint, the Greek word for “image” is εἰκὼν: “ποιήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον κατ’ εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ καθ’ ὁμοίωσιν.”

<sup>66</sup> *Panarion* 70, 3, 1; *Ancoratus*, 55, 4-5. Quoted in Kallistos Ware, “In the Image and Likeness,” 2.

<sup>67</sup> In the NRSV, Genesis 1:26 reads: “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness....” The LXX reads: καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεὸς ποιήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον κατ’ εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ καθ’ ὁμοίωσιν. While this is most certainly an extension of Hebrew poetic parallelism, the presence of “and” suggests to some theologians a contrast between image and likeness. Irenaeus is the first to make a distinction, arguing that while the perfect person has both image and likeness, the imperfect person has only the image (*Adv. Haer.*, V, vi, 1; V, xvi, 2). Clement of Alexandria and Origen both give ‘likeness’ a future orientation (Clement, *Stromata*, ii, 22, 131, 5; Origen, *On First Principles*, iii, vi, 1). The distinction is maintained by Maximos the Confessor (*On Love*, iii, 25).

the conceptual distinction serves to highlight perceived innate and dynamic qualities of our shared humanness. Among the first set are those faculties associated with the mind: rationality, freedom of choice and the capacity to discern spiritual realities.<sup>68</sup> Kallistos Ware more broadly characterizes these as “our conscious self-awareness; our powers of reason, introspection, and intuitive insight; our conscience; and our sense of good and evil.”<sup>69</sup> He is careful to emphasize, perhaps in light of a tendency to privilege cognitive reason above other ways of knowing, that the components of self-awareness include both the conscious and unconscious, feelings and emotions, all of which may come forth in our dreams rather than our conscious and reasoning mind.<sup>70</sup> Likewise, Stăniloae emphasizes the irreducibility of the *imago* to a single element: “No single component of the human being possesses the quality of being image by itself alone, but only in so far as the whole person manifests himself through each part and action.”<sup>71</sup>

### *Likeness*

Stăniloae’s comment also highlights important aspects of the conceptual distinction of image from likeness. While the image is sure, innate, likeness is *potential*. A “whole person” must “manifest” (note that this is a verb) qualities “through each part and action.” We *become* whole persons in an active, intentional and often difficult process. As a heuristic

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and John of Damascus. However, Gregory of Nazianzus, Theodore of Cyrus, Symeon the New Theologian make no such distinction. See Ware’s discussion in *Ibid.*, 6-7.

<sup>68</sup> Nonna Verna Harrison, “Human Community as an Image of the Holy Trinity,” 347.

<sup>69</sup> Kallistos Ware, “In the Image and Likeness,” 8.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. The World: Creation and Deification*, trans. Ioan Ionita, and Robert Barringer, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2000), 87-88. Note that this citation is somewhat problematic. In an earlier article, Stăniloae argues that the divine image in humanity consists of the externalization of divine Reason at the level of human reason. He certainly modifies the cognitive tendencies of this view of the *imago* by further arguing that reason is used to love, it is a means of communication in relationship. However, the article chronologically precedes his dogmatic work. See Dumitru Stăniloae, “Jesus Christ, Incarnate Logos of God, Source of Freedom and Unity,” *Ecumenical Review* 26 J1 (1974): 403-12.

device, *likeness* expresses those dynamic qualities that we gain (as a gift of the grace of God) and attain (through our effort to work with the grace of God) over the course of our life. Likeness for Stăniloae is the active part of the human “task” incipient in our image, “it is in deification that the image finds its own fulfillment as the highest possible *likeness* with God.”<sup>72</sup> Likeness is “the entire path along which the image develops the agency of the human will stimulated and assisted by the grace of God.”<sup>73</sup> The seemingly innate qualities of the *image* such as intuition, discernment or rational thinking do not simply appear fully developed and mature in each human person. Rather, they are developed, strengthened, and properly oriented by participation in the perfections of divinity: the immortality symbolized by the tree of life (Gen. 2.9); the exercise of a fruitful and nourishing authority in creation (Gen 1.28); the virtues of goodness, wisdom, justice, mercy, compassion, and love; and finally, human creativity.<sup>74</sup> As we will see below, a primary way of speaking about attaining likeness is as growth or participation in virtue. There are certainly other ways to frame ethics, theological anthropology, or theologies of priesthood and embodiment. Yet the virtuous life is inherently relational, dynamic, always unique, necessarily free, and as we shall see, never reducible to gender. The *practice* of virtue by participation is one of the primary ways in which early Christian theologians expressed *theosis*.

### *Preserving Mystery*

It must be emphasized that the Orthodox reticence to clearly delineate the content of the image of God is rooted, unsurprisingly, in Orthodoxy’s consistent efforts to preserve the otherness, the transcendence, and the mystery of God. Thus, typical attempts to unpack

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<sup>72</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. The World: Creation and Deification*, 89.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Nonna Verna Harrison, “Human Community as an Image of the Holy Trinity,” 347.

the phrase speak in very general terms. Harrison suggests “that the *imago Dei* is multidimensional and cannot be limited to one defined characteristic. Accordingly, as St Gregory of Nyssa has suggested, the human being is a mystery that images divine incomprehensibility.”<sup>75</sup> Definitions of the *imago dei* are consistently open-ended, reflecting a “diversity of approaches to the continuing mystery of personhood.”<sup>76</sup> “The human person,” offers Ware, “is an icon of God, a finite expression of God’s infinite self-expression.”<sup>77</sup> In humanity, and especially in the most fully “human” of all humans, Christ, we see finitely aspects of God’s infinity. All that is good and present in human persons is a finite and limited vision of that which in God is infinite and unlimited. Here again is the kataphatic opening onto the apophatic. It is not that we can say nothing, but that what we say is limited.

It is precisely because an emphasis on “mystery” frustrates virtually all attempts to speak definitively about the human person that it is crucial. At first this may seem unintuitive since at its worst, apophaticism confuses and obfuscates attempts to speak of common needs and qualities of a life lived well. At its best, however, apophaticism rejects “the ultimacy of our concepts” and inspires “a babbling overflow of symbols and similes.”<sup>78</sup> Apophaticism posits a *limit* on what can be said, and how it is best spoken of, not a demand for complete silence. Just as we cannot fully know the divine archetype in whose image we are made, we cannot fully know ourselves. Often, theologians reverse this; it is precisely because we do not know ourselves fully that we cannot presume to know the divine. Something of the unknowability of God is reflected in humanity. This willingness to speak

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 348. She is referring to Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Humanity* 11.3, PG 44.156.

<sup>76</sup> Kallistos Ware, “In the Image and Likeness,” 3.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>78</sup> Andrew Louth, “The Place of *Theosis* in Orthodox Theology,” 41, 42.

positively in a non-ultimate way is particularly important when discussing sex and gender. The tendency among many contemporary Orthodox is to presume very clear male and female ways of being in the world: men are external focused, creative and assertive while women are interiorized, nurturing and receptive. Not only do many real men and women fail to fit within this schema, but the point of my argument in the following pages is that the Orthodox tradition approvingly witnesses to men and women who do *not* fit into these neat categories, whose saintly qualities do not correspond to ‘correct’ gendered behavior. The “deep unanimity” of belief that we truly are created in the image of a deity who will remain a mystery to us, Ware reminds us, leaving “room for creative contrasts and complementarity.”<sup>79</sup>

### *Relationship*

Orthodox theologians fundamentally maintain that a trinitarian *imago Dei* not only orients us towards relationship with God and our neighbor, but indicates that we only manifest those qualities that comprise our image and likeness *in relationship*. If the divinity after which we are created is personal and relational, so too must human beings be personal and relational. “For nothing is so proper to our nature as to share our lives with each other, and to need each other, and to love our own kind” says Basil the Great.<sup>80</sup> This is not simply a matter of general human dependence and inter-dependence, but a realization that it is only possible to exercise reason and intuition, freedom and discernment, and to acquire the virtues in and through relationships with others. We actualize, manifest, or make real the image and likeness of God in a dynamic process of growing in and through relationships.

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<sup>79</sup> Kallistos Ware, “In the Image and Likeness,” 3.

<sup>80</sup> *Long Rules* 3. Basil, and Verna E. F. Harrison, *On the Human Condition*, Popular Patristics Series (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2005), 117.

We are defined as full human persons not by static categories, but by how we relate in active, outward-oriented (*ekstatic*) relationships of freedom and love. Further, the Orthodox understanding of *eikon*, for which “image” is a general translation, includes a sense of *participation*. Explored in more detail in the third chapter, it is enough to say here that an *eikon* participates in its archetype, the symbol participates in its prototype. The *eikon* of humanity is divinity both incarnated as Christ and eternally relational as Trinity. Being the image and becoming the likeness means participating in divine, *relational* life, which Harrison rightly discerns posits *theosis* as the intersection between trinitarian theology and human anthropology.<sup>81</sup>

### Theosis

*Theosis*, “becoming god,” or deification, is the primary soteriological metaphor in Orthodox theology which interprets both the effects of the Incarnation and the appropriation of human “likeness” unto God. As a metaphor, it attempts to express how, through the gifts of God, we “may become participants of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1.4). The “lesser arch” of salvation, extending from fall to redemption, stands under a “broader conception of divine οἰκονομία,” according to Andrew Louth; the “greater arch” of *theosis* stretches “from creation to deification, representing what is and remains God’s intention: the creation of the cosmos that, through humankind, is destined to share in the divine life, to be

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<sup>81</sup> “This means that human identity is intrinsically constituted as a communion among persons who are defined by their mutual interrelatedness. The image of God in a human person who uses freedom rightly has its full actualization in the likeness of God, or more precisely a dynamic process of growing to be more and more like God. In this context it is essential to note what the early fathers took for granted, that there is no imitation except through participation in the archetype, which comes about through God’s gracious gift of self. This means that bearing the divine image and likeness necessarily also means participating in divine life, that is, participation in the life of the Holy Trinity. Thus, in an authentic trinitarian anthropology theosis will have a central place.” Nonna Verna Harrison, “Greek Patristic Foundations of Trinitarian Anthropology,” 399.

deified.”<sup>82</sup> Like the *imago*, deification has accrued (and created) an immense network of associations. Deification

is God’s honoring of Christians with the title of ‘gods’; it is the believer’s filial adoption through baptism; it is the attaining of likeness to God through gnosis and dispassion; it is the ascent of the soul to God; it is the participation of the soul in the divine attributes of immortality and incorruption; it is the transformation of human nature by divine action; it is the eschatological glorification of both soul and body; it is the union with God through participation in the divine energies.<sup>83</sup>

The “structural significance” of *theosis* for Orthodox theology can hardly be down-played given its embrace, albeit in a variety of forms, by virtually all Orthodox theologians of the twentieth century.<sup>84</sup> Notwithstanding this variety or sometimes outright disagreement, it is worth echoing Aristotle Papanikolaou’s observation that the one clear point of agreement among twentieth-century (and by implication, antecedent) Orthodox theologians is this: human life is about communion with God, “divine-human communion.”<sup>85</sup> Whatever the means of *theosis*, it is fundamentally about describing (without necessarily explaining) divine-human communion.

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<sup>82</sup> Andrew Louth, “The Place of *Theosis* in Orthodox Theology,” 34-35. This essay appears in a volume which includes contributions from a variety of Christian traditions, and which reflects the ongoing discussion of the relationship between deification as a particularly (though not uniquely) eastern concept, and its relationship to sanctification, salvation, and redemption. Louth here is following Sergei Bulgakov who argues that it is right to think that Redemption is *a* reason for the Incarnation, but it is not the only reason. Redemption is a “particular” reason for the incarnation in light of fallen humanity. But the “general reason” was to unite creation with its creator, a reason which pre-existed fallen humanity. See Bulgakov, *Du Verbe incarné* (Paris: Aubier, 1943), 97-98. A long passage of Louth’s own translation is quoted in “The Place of *Theosis* in Orthodox Theology, 35-36. Note here the assumption that salvation is not only about human persons (fall to redemption - that is, crucifixion and resurrection) but about the fulfillment of *all* of creation in eternity. This view significantly impacts Orthodox environmental ethics.

<sup>83</sup> Norman Russell, “The Concept of Deification in the Early Greek Fathers” (PhD Diss, Oxford University, 1988).

<sup>84</sup> “Structural significance” is from Andrew Louth, “The Place of *Theosis* in Orthodox Theology,” 43. There is no Orthodox theologian I can think of that does not incorporate *theosis* into his or her theological project.

<sup>85</sup> “For the Orthodox churches, the principle of divine-human communion is absolutely nonnegotiable, in modernity, postmodernity, and beyond postmodernity; it is also the most substantial contribution that it can bring to any ecumenical gathering—to remind the world constantly, almost incessantly, that God has created the world for real communion with God, which is effected in Christ and by the Holy Spirit.” Aristotle Papanikolaou, “Orthodoxy, Postmodernity, and Ecumenism: The Difference That Divine-Human



*Metaphor*

Norman Russell identifies two fundamental ways in which the idea of deification is used.<sup>86</sup> As a theme of theology, deification focuses on the mystery of the Incarnation, articulated in formulas of exchange, the classic expression being Athanasius of Alexandria's oft-repeated phrase, Christ "became human that we might become God."<sup>87</sup> As a spiritual teaching, deification refers to our appropriation of the transformed humanity created by Christ, acquiring the divine likeness. Russell contends that early theologians use the language of deification in three ways: nominally, analogically or metaphorically.<sup>88</sup> The metaphorical usage is characterized by two approaches, an ethical approach (a spiritual teaching) in which *theosis* is "the attainment of likeness to God through ascetic and philosophical endeavour, believers reproducing some of the divine attributes in their own lives by imitation," and the realist approach (a theological theme) that assumes a real transformation of a person through (usually sacramental) participation.<sup>89</sup> Among its earliest proponents, the Alexandrians Clement, Origen, Athanasius and Cyril prioritized deification as a gift of God mediated by the church through the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist. This "realist" approach was emphasized over a philosophical tradition that stressed union with the divine as "the

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Communion Makes," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 4, no. 24 (2007), 545. See also Aristotle Papanikolaou, *Being With God*.

<sup>86</sup> These "themes" are summarized in the introduction and discussed throughout Russell's excellent and readable summary of deification: Norman Russell, *Fellow Workers With God: Orthodox Thinking on Theosis* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009).

<sup>87</sup> Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 54. Russell provides a list of the most well known "exchange formulas." See *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>88</sup> "The nominal interprets the biblical application of the word 'gods' to human beings simply as a title of honour. The analogical 'stretches' the nominal: Moses was a god to Pharaoh as a wise man is a god to a fool; or men become sons and gods 'by grace' in relation to Christ who is Son and God 'by nature.'" Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1-2.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

realization of something within oneself.”<sup>90</sup> The person of Jesus also indicates a pattern of virtuous behavior to be pursued within an ecclesial context.<sup>91</sup>

The ethical approach, however, tends to be preferred by the theologians of Cappadocia, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus. Always concerned to preserve some distance between the creator and creation, they concur that we are gods *in principle* by baptism, but all three emphasize the attainment of deification through the practice of virtue.<sup>92</sup> Basil the Great, in contrast to his predecessor Athanasius, argues that the ‘gods’ are not those adopted by baptism “but those who have become more perfect through the practice of virtue,” assisted by the Holy Spirit.<sup>93</sup> One of the overarching themes of this dissertation is the intersection of these two approaches, where virtue is acquired within and by the ecclesial community through its sacramental practices, and the “validity” of sacramental practices depend on whether they encourage the acquisition of virtue.<sup>94</sup>

### *Incarnation*

The fundamental moment of divine-human communion is the Incarnation in which full divinity became fully human, to a purpose. As Irenaeus remarks, in God’s “immense

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 161, 10.

<sup>91</sup> Russell puts forward Cyril of Alexandria as the apex of Alexandrian thought. In his work, we see the four main features which are identified with the Alexandrian approach to deification: “the convergence of transcendence and immanence in Christ and through him, as the representative first-fruits of the human race and also the pattern to be emulated in the believer as well;” reliance on participation as a way of understanding how “becoming can share in Being,” or how contingent beings can exist in divine nature through the work of the Holy Spirit; the rejection of a mediator other than Christ’s humanity; and finally, the centrality of the ecclesial context, a movement “away from divinizing contemplation towards the practice of the virtues and the reception of the Eucharist in the Christian *synaxis*.” Ibid., 203.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 213. Lewis Ayres contends that Gregory of Nyssa’s refusal to use the technical language of deification while clearly positing union with God as the Christian life is due to the contentious debates which led up to the Chalcedonian formulations of the two natures of Christ. See Lewis Ayres, “Deification and the Dynamics of Nicene Theology: The Contribution of Gregory of Nyssa,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 49, no. 4 (2005): 375-94.

<sup>93</sup> Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification*, 213.

<sup>94</sup> John Zizioulas declares that any Eucharist which excludes participation based on qualities such as race, ethnicity, class or sex is “invalid.” This will be extensively discussed in the chapter “Liturgy and Ethics”

love he became what we are, that he might make us what he is.”<sup>95</sup> In Christ, we ‘see’ God. Athanasius’s classic phrase continues: Christ manifested in a body “that we might perceive the Mind of the unseen Father” (*On the Incarnation*, 54).<sup>96</sup> The theology of deification not only clearly identifies Christ with God (a theological point), but serves as a point of exhortation (a spiritual teaching): “Let us become like Christ,” enjoins Gregory of Nazianzus, “since Christ became like us; let us become god’s for his sake, since he for ours became human” (*Or* 1.5).<sup>97</sup> In addition to full divinity, in Christ we see what it is to be fully human without distortion, unobscured by sin, a person who has hit the mark of all that it means to relate to others in the image and likeness of God.<sup>98</sup> “The glory to which [we] are called,” writes Dumitru Stăniloae, is that we “should grow more godlike by growing ever more human.”<sup>99</sup> As we become more like Christ, our humanity is not lost in divinity, but becomes more fully human through our relationships.

This theological and “realist” strand is *ontological* in that it presumes a change in our very possibility of *being* (not only for humanity, but all creation). It is also *dynamic* in that it must be appropriated, through the sacraments, through adoption as a son or daughter through baptism and continuous reception of the Eucharist. Just as the Eucharist is God’s

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<sup>95</sup> Andrew Louth, “The Place of *Theosis* in Orthodox Theology,” 34. He is quoting Irenaeus, *Adversus Hæreses* 5. See also Athanasius, *De Incarnatione* 54.

<sup>96</sup> Athanasius, *On the Incarnation: The Treatise De Incarnatione Verbi Dei* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1996), 93.

<sup>97</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, “Cyril of Jerusalem and Gregory Nazianzen,” *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* II.7 (1893), 2-3/316.

<sup>98</sup> In order to emphasize that deification is not becoming God the Father, but is union with God the Father through God the Son, Panayiotis Nellas uses the term “Christification.” We are made “according to the image” which is Christ rather than directly in the image of God. This involves a complicated discussion of the connotation of the phrase “according to.” The term is somewhat problematic in that deification is understood as human union with God as Trinity, not merely the second person of the Trinity. However, Nellas rightly emphasizes the significance of the Incarnation in enabling and modeling for creation the full union of creator with creature. See Panayiotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ: Orthodox Perspectives on the Nature of the Human Person*, trans. Norman Russell, vol. 5, Contemporary Greek Theologians (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1987). While Nellas’ point is well taken, and I will certainly emphasize along with iconodule theology that all human ‘icons’ point to Christ, I will continue to use the more common language of deification or *theosis*.

gift to us through which our flesh is ‘mingled’ with Christ’s, Stăniloae reminds us that participation in the Eucharist is our reciprocal act of thanks as we bring our gifts back to God, a symbolic act once quite tangible in the liturgy.<sup>100</sup> Through sacramental life, we *participate* in Christ, by which I mean that we share in his attributes, *and* we find our identity in Christ.<sup>101</sup> Sacramental participation is at root *bodily*, something too easily forgotten by Orthodox preoccupation with the “purification, illumination, and perfection of the intellect....”<sup>102</sup>

Yet sacramental life also puts us in relation to one another.<sup>103</sup> It is only by simultaneously emphasizing the ethical strand of *theosis* that relational language does not become, ironically enough, simply another ‘onto’-abstraction. *Theosis*, seen in the Christ of the scriptures, is not simply about an abstracted or idealized relationship or communion with God, but about relating in a particular way. Deification as a “purification of the intellect” neglects the mentioned but unexplained embodied person in relation to others. It does not by itself take into account the scriptural context of deification, Ps 82.6, which “is a call to

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<sup>99</sup> Quoted in Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1979), 87. No reference given.

<sup>100</sup> The complex “offering” of the Eucharist was once tangibly visible in the bringing of bread to the liturgy by worshippers, who then received their offering back to them. This will be discussed in the fourth chapter.

<sup>101</sup> *Methexis*, participation, “occurs when an entity is defined in relation to something else” in an asymmetrical manner. Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification*, 2. Russell uses the example of a holy person whose share in holiness is what makes them holy, but who remains distinct from holiness itself. Holiness here is a way of being in which a person participates, but does not exhaust the possibilities of holiness. *Participation* in this sense indicates a real (not just apparent) and asymmetrical (not equal) relationship. *Likeness* also indicates a relationship, but more analogical than participatory. Again, two holy people resemble one another because they both share in holiness. Russell notes that *likeness* and *participation* form a continuum of relationship. We are *like* God in that we do something that God also does (we are merciful, gracious, slow to anger). We *participate* in God by relating in these particular ways because God *is* mercy, grace, and patience. It is an asymmetrical participation, but participation nonetheless.

<sup>102</sup> Andrew Louth, “The Place of *Theosis* in Orthodox Theology,” 37. This is Louth’s summary of the purpose of the *Philokalia*. Orthodox concern with the *nous* is a direct result of its dominant dialogue partner, Ancient Greek philosophy. Louth, somewhat strikingly, does note the importance of the body in this process.

<sup>103</sup> Again, Louth notes this. His full comment on the purpose of the *Philokalia* is this: “the purification, illumination, and perfection of the intellect—a process that will render it capable of pure prayer, that is, authentic communication with God, in which the intellect or the heart, the spiritual principle of the human

humanity, created in the image and likeness of God, to act in justice as God would act: ‘to defend the cause of the weak and needy, and deliver them from the hand of the wicked.’”<sup>104</sup>

This is after all how a gospel writer defines Jesus’ mission, the *way* in which Jesus, during his lifetime, chose to relate to others, providing for us a living example of humanity-in-relation: “to bring good news to the poor...to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Lk 4:18-19, quoting Is 61.1-2). Relationship according to the incarnated God involves virtues that perfect us in our relations, virtues of justice and restoration, mercy, compassion, generosity and love.

### *Metanoia*

Deification is not a moment but a process, “a reconstitution, a transformation and transfiguration of our human nature involving both the grace of God and a cooperative ascetic struggle.”<sup>105</sup> Deification is the ongoing human response *to* the Incarnation as a *way* of being, not a *state* of being. In the face of modern Orthodoxy’s inclination to a somewhat over-realized eschatology, it is crucial to stress with Stăniloae that Christ

communicates this life and power in their eschatological fullness to the humanity which he assumed, but he communicates them to us by degree through his own humanity, and we receive them as a principle of growth, as a gift and a promise implying eschatological development and therefore hope. For as long as Jesus Christ is ‘full of grace and truth’ and as long as he is the ‘perfect man’, then we have only the first fruits of his fullness (2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:14), and we must grow in him into the perfect man according to the

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person, attains its ultimate goal. This process is not possible apart from the body, nor indeed without attention to communion with others made possible through the body....” Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Michael J. Christensen, “The Problem, Promise, and Process of Theosis,” in *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 24. Christensen is specifically critiquing Louth’s previously cited work.

<sup>105</sup> Andrew Louth, “The Place of *Theosis* in Orthodox Theology,” 37.

measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:13).<sup>106</sup>

In the “broad” sense, deification is the pursuit of virtue through cooperation with the divine powers, a process in which virtues are nurtured and developed by practices that participate in the active grace of God.<sup>107</sup> This stage of deification begins at baptism and continues *for the duration* of spiritual ascent. Deification in the “strict” sense, however indicates not growth through cooperation, but a growth of reception in which our human nature is not intrinsically changed, but our ability to “receive and use” the presence of God is expanded.<sup>108</sup> Stăniloae is clearly concerned to maintain an eternal distinction between humanity and God, and clarify perhaps against critics that deification is never the result of human effort alone. Deified humanity never becomes a source of its own deification.<sup>109</sup> In this life, we anticipate perfection, we taste only slightly of God’s “infinite treasures.”<sup>110</sup> Our ascent is an eternal movement into our potential, never completed, for as we grow in our ability to receive God, God is “revealed...in a greater proportion too.”<sup>111</sup> This process is characterized by Lossky as a process of constant repentance, a state that “corresponds to the apophatic attitude towards God: the more one is united to Him, the more one becomes aware of His unknowability, and, in the same way, the more perfect one becomes, the more one is aware

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<sup>106</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Theology and the Church*, trans. Robert Barringer (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980), 186.

<sup>107</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality: A Practical Guide for the Faithful and a Definitive Guide for the Scholar*, trans. Archimandrite Jerome, and Otilia Kloos (South Canaan, Pa: St. Tikhon’s Seminary Press, 2002), 362.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 364.

<sup>109</sup> A person’s nature is “a channel, a medium which reflects” the presence of God, “never will it assume the role of the source.” Ibid., 371. Stăniloae frequently appeals to the Palamite distinction between the essence and energies of God, a distinction many Orthodox theologians consider crucial to any conversation regarding deification. It is the presence of the “energies” of God in the Incarnation, energies which truly are God though distinct from the unknowable “essence” of God, that makes possible participation and union with God. At stake is the preservation of the distinction between the uncreated God and created being, the unknowable and knowable, and freedom and necessity in God. This distinction dominates the thought of Orthodox theology ever since it proved such an effective tool in Gregory Palamas’s defense of Hesychasm.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 373.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

of one's own imperfection.”<sup>112</sup> In this constant state, repentance is not necessarily a response to a wrong act, but *metanoia*, a change of mind, a turning about which is a return to God.<sup>113</sup>

## Sin

This understanding of *metanoia* incorporates an understanding of sin and the “fall” seen in the light of the metaphors of the image of God and *theosis*. In keeping with the description of *theosis* as becoming more human through the acquisition of the virtues (acknowledging that *theosis* includes other aspects as well), sin is our failure to become fully human, evident (in part) in the failure to practice virtuous relationships toward one another and God. In Orthodox theology, humanity did not “fall” from perfection into imperfection. Rather, humanity began as immature, infants, at the beginning of our eternal growth into full, virtuous humanity. The knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2.17), the responsibility and maturity to discern and choose between good and evil, was never meant to be permanently denied humanity. Instead, this responsibility and choice was something into which humanity has always been meant to grow, from our very creation. Theophilus of Antioch (late 2<sup>nd</sup> c.) summarizes:

For there was nothing in the fruit but knowledge, and knowledge is good if one uses it properly. In his actual age, Adam was as old as an infant; therefore he was not yet able to acquire knowledge properly. For at the present time when a child is born it cannot eat bread at once, but first it is fed with milk and then, with increasing age, it comes to solid food. So it would have been with Adam.... At the same time [God] wanted the man to remain simple and sincere for a longer time, remaining in infancy.... Furthermore, it is shameful for infant children to have thoughts beyond their years; for as one grows in age in an orderly fashion, so one grows in ability to

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<sup>112</sup> Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 204-05.

<sup>113</sup> This has significant implications for how Orthodoxy understands “voluntary and involuntary” sin, a category which makes no sense in the categories of Catholic moral theology.

think (*Ad Autolycum* 2.25).<sup>114</sup>

John of Damascus (c. 676 – 4 December 749) makes a crucial observation for later discussions of deification: “The tree of knowledge of good and evil is the power of discernment by multiple vision, and this is *the complete knowing of one’s own nature*.”<sup>115</sup> Stăniloae picks up this theme when he speaks of the ‘primordial state’ of humanity: “The human person was a being whose spirit had not been wounded or weakened by the passions, but neither had it yet been strengthened through exercise,” specifically, the exercise of “acquired virtues and consolidated and purified thoughts” necessary to resist the possibility of sin.<sup>116</sup>

If, using the terminology of modern Orthodox theology, to know ourselves is to know ourselves as unique, irreducible and free, then an element of sin is the failure to recognize ourselves, and others, as such. We stymie our growth towards God through Christ when we fail to see ourselves and others as we truly are. This ability to see rightly is not instant, it occurs over time and through relationship.

Neither genuine existence, nor the good, are known or experienced fully, however, except in loving relationship with other subjects. You must listen respectfully to the other also if you seek to discover other points of view and come to know his never-ending newness. You must listen to him if you wish to see what he also expects of you and come to know more than just his existence as something different from that of the world, but also what is the good that he is looking for from you. Indeed, the good he looks for from you, and you from him, lies precisely in this: that each of you is for the other a source of newness, communion, and love.<sup>117</sup>

When we fail to recognize in ourselves and in the other a source of “newness, communion, and love” we fall short of our own humanity, and fail to see the humanity of the other. This shared existence as “source” both “verifies” and “reinforces” our very existence. The

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<sup>114</sup> Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolycum*, trans. Robert McQueen Grant, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 67.

<sup>115</sup> Saint John of Damascus, *Orthodox Faith* 2.11 (NPNF, v.10 p. 232), emphasis added.

<sup>116</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. The World: Creation and Deification*, 104.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 179.



dependence on the other for our existence underscores our dependence on, and our vulnerability to, communal relationships. When we refuse or fail to see in one another our unique, irreducible and free humanity, we fail to verify and reinforce that humanity. This makes it all the more important that our relationships within the ecclesial community verify and recognize the existence of each person as unique, irreducible and free, and that our community is a place which shows us how to do so.

Further, if it is in *Christ* that we *see* what it is to be fully human, then the question of *how* we see Christ is crucial. After all, Christ is not literally in our presence, by which I mean that the divine-human Jesus, the Palestinian Jew of the first century is not standing next to us in the liturgy, nor presiding at the altar, nor drinking the coffee with us during coffee hour. So how is it that we see Christ? Where do we see Christ? In whom do we see Christ? This is, of course, the underlying issue of this entire dissertation, but as an initial answer here, we taste and see Christ in every moment of loving relationship with the other, in every recognition of the unique newness of a person, in every way of relating that shines forth, even for a moment, the gleam of our full humanity in God. Full humanity is not a particular body, individual or person, but a way of relating to one another, a way of being in accord with our capacities. This will become evident as we look more closely at language regarding the priesthood, the visual presence of the saints among us in icons, and the shared celebration of the liturgy. Conversely, when we deny that a person can relate in a particular way, we simultaneously claim that they cannot share in a part of the humanity of God in Christ through the Spirit. We claim that there is some aspect of loving relationship which they are unable to embody, that we cannot see in them the image of God or Christ. In the end, this dissertation is not simply about a failure to recognize in women the fullness of their

unique, irreducible and free personhood, but also the failure (or unwillingness) to see God in women.

## 1.4: Hermeneutical Framework

Given the Orthodox Church's commitment to its historical tradition, it seems reasonable to assume that the most effective methodological arguments for female priests would be based in historical precedent. If at one point the church had women presbyters or bishops, surely she can do so again. Among non-Orthodox, this is a common way in which the debate proceeds. Karen Jo Torjesen, Mary Ann Rossi and others argue for the existence of female presbyters (and bishops) based on inscriptionary evidence.<sup>118</sup> Even among those who do not argue for the historical existence of female presbyters, historical interpretation and reconstruction are still paramount. Second-wave feminist theologians such as Letty Russell and Rosemary Radford Ruether challenged the hermeneutical framework of biblical interpretation, searching for a non-patriarchal core to Christianity and pointing out the ambiguity of the early Christian message regarding women. Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, applying a "hermeneutic of suspicion," insists on carefully interpreting our texts and history, identifying the ways that an egalitarian original message of mutual love and service is distorted to mean the service of women under the "servant-leadership" of men.<sup>119</sup>

Interpreting from the perspective of the *ekklesia gynaikeon* (women-church) provides Schüssler

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<sup>118</sup> Karen Jo Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests: A Theory of Women's Leadership in the Early Church and the Theory of Their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993); Mary Ann Rossi, "Priesthood, Precedent, and Prejudice: On Recovering the Women Priests of Early Christianity," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 7, no. 1 (1991): 73-93. A more cautious approach can be found in Kevin Madigan, and Carolyn Osiek, *Ordained Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

<sup>119</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984); *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekklesia-Logos of Liberation* (New York: Crossroad, 1993); *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's*

Fiorenza with a way of remaining within the Christian tradition without assenting to its failures regarding women. The only Orthodox scholar who applies Schüssler Fiorenza's "hermeneutic of suspicion" is the Australian historian Leonie Liveris. Rather than apply this method to the early history of the church, she focuses on recent Orthodox attempts to consider the subject. Among Orthodox hierarchy and lay members Liveris identifies a "resistance to the 'women's question' and the feminist movement, which are both perceived as the province of secular feminism that is destructive of tradition and family."<sup>120</sup> Liveris's work is an exemplary discussion of the contemporary debate on women's participation in the life and ministries of the Church, but it does not examine the theological or ethical underpinnings of the arguments for or against female ordination. She makes no argument based on a historical precedent, and for good reason: at this time, Orthodox will simply not be convinced by this method.

### 1.4.1: Lessing's Ditch

Even if one were to rely on historical precedents, for most if not virtually all Orthodox, it is simply impossible to convincingly prove that women participated in the priesthood in the earliest days of the church, but were then excluded due to patriarchy. Like Lessing's ditch, the unreliable facts of history are an inadequate basis for convincing theological arguments; they simply require too great a leap of faith. At best, we can point to possibilities, suggestions and reinterpretations. Appeals to Montanist prophets such as Priscilla hold no sway among most Orthodox since the Montanists were dubbed heretics.

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*Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (New York: Continuum, 1994); *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, 2nd. ed ed. (London: SCM Press, 1995).

<sup>120</sup> Leonie B. Liveris, *Ancient Taboos and Gender Prejudice*, xv, xiii. This book is an excellent historical review of the conversation during the twentieth-century regarding the place of women in the Orthodox church, a conversation which has almost exclusively taken place in the context of the larger ecumenical movement.

While it is acknowledged that their heresy was not a result of their female prophets, more than once in conversation I have heard the implication that their openness to heresy may very well have been due to their female leadership and the instability of overly emotional female ‘prophets’ (used as a derisive term rather than the respected and prevalent role in early Christian communities). This is a speculative (and denigrating) claim with no factual weight behind it, but is virtually impossible to convincingly debunk. At the very least, it indicates the level of difficulty in using history as a source. Orthodox scholars simply will not be convinced that there is any historical precedent for women presbyters and bishops. The evidence is too thin and subject to variable interpretation. The Orthodox patristic historian Valerie Karras, herself an advocate of the ordination of women to the priesthood *today*, has challenged the notion that the epigrammatic titles of *presbytera* and *episcopa* referred to female clergy. Rather, they bear the same meaning in the past as they do in the present: the terms are honorifics given to the wives of presbyters and bishops.<sup>121</sup> Karras is aware that her argument does not rule out the historical existence of women presbyters *tout court*, but she is rightfully skeptical that we can be sure based on the available historical evidence. The recent extensive study of epigrammatic evidence by Carolyn Osiek and Kevin Madigan is also much more cautious than Torjeson or Rossi.<sup>122</sup> The search for a historical precedent that is convincing to Orthodox appears to be an impossible leap.

### 1.4.2: Problem of "Precedent"

There are a number of problems with using historical precedent as a methodology. Arguing solely from historical precedent views tradition as static: it denies the development

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<sup>121</sup> Valerie A. Karras, “Priestesses Or Priests’ Wives: *Presbytera* in Early Christianity,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 51, no. 2-3 (2007): 321-45.

<sup>122</sup> Kevin Madigan, and Carolyn Osiek, *Ordained Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History*.

of theological argument, insight and practice abundantly evident in the early church.

Paradoxically, it claims that the changes which did occur in tradition ceased somewhere around the Second Council of Nicea at the very latest, seven hundred years after Christ.

Finally, it wrongly assumes that nothing which has not already been done can be done in the present or future. Any of these reasons denies the historicity of the Church, whose history attests to constant, dynamic change. Further, it limits the work of the Spirit to what was done in a very small window of time. Tradition, according to Vladimir Lossky, is “the life of the Church in the Holy Spirit.”<sup>123</sup> This “life” is hardly static, nor is the ongoing relationship between the people of God and the Spirit.

### 1.4.3: Dynamism of Tradition

Instead of historical precedent, I argue that traditional sources, specifically, text, image and liturgy, provide a hermeneutical framework within which we can identify and focus on the *dynamic* of the historical mediation of faith and practice as it engages with culture and the work of the Spirit. This dynamic directs us towards a path whose trajectory is the full inclusion of women into the ministries of the Church according to their capabilities and virtues. It is a path we Orthodox have barely contemplated as a possibility and thus far have clearly refused to travel. I am less interested in arguing why we never went down such a path (though I will certainly address some of those reasons) as I am in arguing that we have compelling reasons to do so now. This dissertation incorporates patristic metaphors and Byzantine iconodule theology in order to develop a *contemporary* theological ethic of liturgical practice. It freely borrows from the insights of contemporary feminism, linguistic theory, modern psychology and anthropology. In doing so, I am engaging in a

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<sup>123</sup> Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 188.

constructive rather than merely repetitive interpretation of church theologians. I also, as they did, seek to engage with the world in which I am doing theology, in my case, a twenty-first century world. The late ancient theologians with whom I converse were trained as rhetoricians by some of the best teachers of their day, many of whom were not themselves Christian. They were steeped in what we today refer to as the “classics” and were as familiar with Plato and Aristotle as they were with Jewish and Christian scriptures. They were not afraid to dialogue with the world, borrowing the insights of anyone who taught truth, even while challenging some of the social and philosophical elements antithetical to the gospel. They (and presumably I) did not do this completely or perfectly, illustrated in by their ambivalent attitude towards females.

I am not, however, arguing that these same theologians would agree with my conclusions. If we read them as they currently stand, the only way we *can* read them as they are no longer among us to argue, object, rethink or revise, then it is clear that they do not believe that women could be presbyters or bishops. I am not arguing that were they here today they would agree with my position and then attempt to use their supposed agreement to give greater weight and authority to my position. This is not only intellectually dishonest, but it concedes too much to dubious arguments privileging historical precedent. I, and many Orthodox (whether they acknowledge it or not), believe something different about men and women than did our theological predecessors, and we do so based on modern science, psychology and sociology that, among other things, repudiate Aristotelian notions of the body. Many of the late ancient theological assumptions about gender are based on

Aristotelian theories of the human body that are simply wrong.<sup>124</sup> However, I do believe that there is a trajectory within our early theologians that allows for an improbable consistency between their exclusion of women based on particular social, cultural and scientific beliefs and our inclusion of women based on a radically different social, cultural and scientific context. This trajectory begins in their struggle to reconcile the Gospel that calls all human persons to embody the same virtues with a culture that believes “true” virtue to be male, and thus beyond the ability of all but the most exceptional of women. Like them, we believe all are called to acquire virtue but we no longer assume that virtue is inherently male. Even those modern theologians who argue for gender-specific virtues do so in a manner almost completely at odds with that of our earliest theologians.

#### 1.4.4: Feminism

I do not write as a patristic theologian, a biblical scholar, or a Byzantine canonist. I write as a theological ethicist whose interest is in how we relate to one another today. I also write as a feminist. Few Orthodox women identify themselves as such, even those who believe in the full participation of women in the church. Élisabeth Behr-Sigel was quite critical about the phenomenon she frequently referred to as “militant western feminism.” Only in one of her last contributions does she retrospectively interpret the 1976 meeting in Agapia, Romania, as “the birthplace of a specifically Orthodox feminism.”<sup>125</sup> She does not define Orthodox feminism, but from her work, ‘Orthodox feminism’ affirms that women as well as men are fully human, and must be allowed to develop and express their full range of unique and irreducible humanness in both the theology and practice of the Church. It also

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<sup>124</sup> We know for instance, that a woman’s seed makes as much of a contribution to a fetus as does the male seed. Actually, we know that women *have* a seed. There is no simple reception or passivity on the part of *either* male or female reproductive systems.

affirms that the voices, experiences and theological insights of women may be different than men, and that this difference must be taken into account in our theology and practice. This declaration of myself as a feminist ethicist and theologian is not simply the requisite declaration of my social location in light of the post-modern insistence that all interpretation is contextual, though it also is that. I want to be very clear that I am all these things, as well as a life-long, “cradle” member of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

In this dissertation, I am making arguments that I suspect are only possible in a social context entirely different than either the classical or late-ancients worlds. As much as early Orthodox analysis strove to dismiss feminism,<sup>126</sup> we live in a society profoundly changed by the lived experience of women as publicly capable agents.<sup>127</sup> Women today are perceived in a manner unimagined in late antiquity (or in virtually any period until the modern era). I am not issuing a blanket endorsement of all feminisms. Feminism is complex, proceeding in waves, each of which incorporates and critiques the insights of previous waves, and that are themselves critiqued and enriched by the wisdom and insights of women from different cultures. Rather, I am underscoring that I do theology in a context

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<sup>125</sup> Élisabeth Behr-Sigel, “The Ordination of Women,” 32.

<sup>126</sup> See for instance, Deborah Belonick, *Feminism in Christianity: An Orthodox Christian Response* (1983). For a more recent and positive approach, see Nonna Verna Harrison, “Orthodoxy and Feminism,” *The St. Nina Quarterly*, <http://stnina.org/journal/art/2.2.6> (accessed 20-Feb, 2008). Ironically, the most sympathetic early response was that of Evdokimov. See his introduction in Paul Evdokimov, *Woman and the Salvation of the World*.

<sup>127</sup> Each of these terms is chosen intentionally. Under Christianity, women’s power increased in the home. Only privileged (wealthy aristocratic) women had influence outside the home, and even then, it was never in the same manner as male public figures. The capability of women was often questioned in antiquity, even as it was challenged. However, it is very rarely asserted today that women are not capable of higher learning, complex reasoning, leadership, etc. Finally, as agents, women are recognized as exercising choice. For some, this is autonomous choice, for others, choices are only possible in the midst of complex webs of dependencies. It does not matter which tack is taken here. What is important is that virtually no one disputes that women as human beings are agents, even if not always with the same freedom as men. For an excellent discussion of the complexities of women’s public and private roles, see the recent collection of essays in David L. Balch, and Carolyn Osiek, eds. *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).



where the concrete reality of women's lives is completely different than it was in late antiquity, and I do so as a woman with feminist commitments.

Therefore, I write not as someone "outside" the Orthodox Church looking in, but as someone inside the Church, seeking to reconcile the life-giving experience of faith within the Church with the equally life-giving affirmation of herself as a capable woman, an affirmation offered by the supposedly destructive forces of "Western feminism." The Orthodox initially confronted the question of the ordination of women in the context of the ecumenical dialogue where it was perceived as a 'demand' imposed from the outside. In Greece, Eleni Sotiriou argues, the debate over the exclusion of women is not a "battle between the sexes" but one between "Orthodoxy, Greekness and the West."<sup>128</sup> The reaction of Greek Orthodoxy (by which I mean Orthodoxy in Greece) to this demand is hardly exclusive to Greece. Replace "Greekness" with "traditional family values" and Sotiriou's assessment of the situation in Greece fits the rhetoric of those Liveris dubs "militant conservatives" within the Orthodox Church.<sup>129</sup> The earliest responses of Orthodox theologians assert the impossibility of someone from the "inside" challenging exclusion of women. Fr. Alexander Schmemmann declared the issue to be "totally extrinsic, a *casus irrealis*," and the ordination of women for Orthodox as "tantamount to a radical and irreparable mutilation of the entire faith..."<sup>130</sup> In his concluding article to the 1983 edition of *Women and the Priesthood*, editor Fr. Thomas Hopko observed that "until now no voice has arisen anywhere within the Orthodox Church claiming that women ought to be ordained as priests and bishops," the

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<sup>128</sup> Eleni Sotiriou, "Contested Masculine Spaces in Greek Orthodoxy," *Social Compass* 51, no. 4 (2004): 499-510.

<sup>129</sup> Leonie B. Liveris, *Ancient Taboos and Gender Prejudice*, ch. 7, "Militant Conservatism and a Movement of Orthodox Women," 171-204.

<sup>130</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, "The Ordination of Women: A Letter to an Episcopalian Friend," *Sourozh* 17 (1984), 239.

reason being that “the body of the faithful recognizes that the life and faith of the Church...precludes such a development...”<sup>131</sup>

Yet this claim is no longer tenable. Over the last two decades the question has been seriously considered by Orthodox theologians who have made it our own. This is true of theologians who both oppose and support a greater participation of women in liturgical and sacramental service. These theologians include Fr. John Erickson, Dr. Élisabeth Behr-Sigel, Metr. Kallistos Ware, the late Metr. Anthony Bloom, Dr. Kyriaki FitzGerald, Dr. Valerie Karras, Dr. Susan Ashbrook Harvey, Dr. Ioannis Petrou, as well as others. Even Fr. Thomas Hopko, whose conclusions remained the same in the 1999 revised edition of *Women and the Priesthood*, allows that the “subject must remain open in the Orthodox Church as long as there is even one committed communicant of the Church who wishes to argue from the Church’s scripture, liturgy, dogmas, canons and saints that some women may be qualified to be Orthodox bishops and priests.”<sup>132</sup> In the context of a Church that considers the Church fathers and mothers as final arbiters of theology, the difficulty, as Erickson points out, is that our earliest theologians never explicitly examined the question of the ordination of women to the priesthood. Generally, the fathers accepted the cultural assumptions regarding men and women extant in Greek and Roman society. Such assumptions are no longer shared, even by the most outspoken critics of the ordination of women. Erickson concludes his own examination by admitting, “quite simply: while the fathers have blessed us with a multifaceted yet coherent teaching on the priesthood, they have not given us a complete and altogether satisfactory answer to the question of the ordination of women.”<sup>133</sup> Nor will the

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<sup>131</sup> Thomas Hopko, and Kallistos Ware, *Women and the Priesthood* (1983), 179-80.

<sup>132</sup> Thomas Hopko, “The Debate Continues - 1998,” in *Women and the Priesthood*, ed. Thomas Hopko (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1999), 256.

<sup>133</sup> John H. Erickson, “The Priesthood in Patristic Tradition,” 63.

fathers ever give us a satisfactory answer. This answer is ours to give, developed in discerning conversation with our theological ancestors and our own social, cultural, philosophical and theological context.

In concert with other feminist theologians, I am offering an interpretation of Orthodox theologies of both priesthood and sex that I believe is consistent with our tradition (and most certainly our Tradition), which challenges certain practices as no longer acceptable (if they ever really were), and that I believe calls us into a greater appreciation, in word and deed, of the expansive mystery that is the human person created in the image of God.

## 1.5: Virtues and Capabilities

As is evident from its ubiquitous mention, this dissertation is concerned with virtue. It is not, however, a dissertation in virtue as a (or even ‘the’) way of approaching ethics, that is, it is not a study of virtue ethics, an ordering or categorizing of the most important of Christian virtues, or of virtue ethics as a method. Certainly an emphasis on virtue is the ethical mode of fourth-century patristic theologians, and recurs in the work of subsequent major figures. On this basis, I presume, perhaps in anticipation of future discussions of an Orthodox virtue ethic, that contemporary virtue ethics and Orthodox theological ethics have common interests and common questions.<sup>134</sup> The doxological cry of self-assertion, “who am

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<sup>134</sup> Given the prominence of virtue in the early church fathers, and the vibrant work in virtue theory by Christian ethicists, it seems a sign of the relatively recent ‘arrival’ of Orthodox ethicists that there is not more Orthodox contribution to the conversation. The only book-length study of virtue and Orthodox theology is Joseph Woodill, *The Fellowship of Life: Virtue Ethics and Orthodox Christianity*, Moral Traditions & Moral Arguments (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1998). Woodill’s study focuses on the central place of virtues in John Climacus’ *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. At each step of the spiritual journey, virtues are attained and expanded. In this argument, the ascetic effort of becoming a virtuous person is the central means and goal by which Climacus expresses the human life in God. Vigen Guroian has made inroads in this area, and his work will be discussed in more detail in the chapter on liturgy. See Vigen Guroian, *Tending the Heart of*

I?”, is also the first of three central questions with which virtue ethics is concerned, followed by “Who ought I to become?” and “How am I to get there?”<sup>135</sup> By bringing the answers to these questions from within virtue ethics into conversation with Orthodox anthropology and *theosis*, we can see existing parallels as well as a reorientation of virtue away from the individual towards persons-in-relation.

### 1.5.1: Ekstatic and dynamic

Virtue ethics considers as equivalent the question “Who am I?” and “How virtuous am I?”<sup>136</sup> This question cannot be answered by reducing “who” to a moral quality, as in, “I am good.”<sup>137</sup> This answer understands virtues as characteristics of persons considered in themselves, an overly individualistic view in which “I” is the starting point virtue. Rather, the answer must be placed in the context of the recent “turn to the subject” in which the human agent is a person-in-relation. Considered in this light, virtues do not “perfect what

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*Virtue: How Classic Stories Awaken a Child's Moral Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); “Liturgy and the Lost Eschatological Vision of Christian Ethics,” *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 20 (2000): 227-38; “Seeing Worship as Ethics,” in *Incarnate Love: Essays in Orthodox Ethics* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002). The most prolific contribution has actually been from the patristic scholar Nonna Harrison, whose work on gender and the patristic writers has produced an excellent body of literature on the importance of virtue in human life. That her investigation of virtue is the result of her interest in gender and not the virtues per se indicates that the discussion of virtue and gender is a fertile field. See especially though not exclusively: Nonna Verna Harrison, “Male and Female in Cappadocian Theology,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 41 (1990): 441-71; “Feminine Man in Late Antique Ascetic Piety,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 48, no. 3-4 (1994): 49-71; “The Maleness of Christ.” The patristic theologian who likely offers the most coherent integration of theology and virtue, and who warrants extensive study in this light, is Maximus the Confessor.

<sup>135</sup> The first phrase refers to Zizioulas, as previously discussed, and in John Zizioulas, “On Being a Person,” 100. The questions are offered by Alistair MacIntyre in *After Virtue*, and are echoed throughout the work of James Keenan. See Alasdair MacIntyre, C., *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (Univ of Notre Dame Press, 1984); James F. Keenan, “Proposing Cardinal Virtues,” *Theological Studies* 56, no. 4 (1995), 711; James F. Keenan, “Virtue Ethics,” in *Christian Ethics: An Introduction*, ed. Bernard. Hoose (London: Cassell, 1998), 84.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> If this were an acceptable answer, then virtue ethics would be, in the eyes of Zizioulas, no better than ethics in general. “Ethics,” says Zizioulas, “operates on the basis of the polarity of good and evil,” and while culture and time may affect what principles belong to the categories of good and evil, “there can be no ethics without a categorization of what ought and what ought not to be done.” John Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 81. Since the unique, irreducible and free human person cannot be identified by the qualities of good or evil, nor, slips in Zizioulas, can their actions, “the notion of ethics automatically collapses.” Ibid., 82.

we have or what we do; rather they perfect who we are in the mode of our being, which is as being in relationships.”<sup>138</sup> “Virtues,” summarizes James Keenan, “perfect us in our relations.”<sup>139</sup> Virtues are orientations and relationships of persons to other things or persons. Here is the first parallel between contemporary virtue theory and Orthodox anthropology. Virtues understood as those orientations that perfect us in our relationships, are *other*-oriented. They are dispositions to act in a certain way in relation to the other who is outside of myself, dispositions to relate *ekstatic-ly*. A second, related parallel is that virtue as *acting towards* emphasizes the dynamic quality of personhood. From the perspective of an Orthodox virtue ethic, a better question than “who am I” is “how am I in relation to others?” The resulting answer is not a moral absolute such as “I am good or bad, kind or cruel,” but a recognition regarding how I relate to others, “I am compassionate towards my neighbor,” or “I am impatient with my children.” The starting point places the focus not on “I” but on “we.”

### 1.5.2: Growth

Honest answers to the question “how am I in relation to others” acknowledge that I am not fully myself, that is, I am not yet who I am called to be as a unique and irreducible person called to *ekstatic* relationships of love. I am not yet fully human. Thus, the next question is “Who am I to become?” This concern with who we are becoming is the third parallel between virtue ethics and *theosis*. Like *theosis*, there is a vision, a *telos* to virtue, that is, a person who habitually relates in a virtuous manner, whose relationships habitually exemplify joy, peace, patience, kindness, compassion, and love. Relating in these ways does

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<sup>138</sup> James F. Keenan, “Proposing Cardinal Virtues,” 723.

<sup>139</sup> This phrase was offered by Keenan in a personal discussion. Its foundations, however, are discussed in the previously cited article.

not happen instantly. *Theosis* is a process, requiring effort (*askesis*) and time. Yet we become who we are by being who we are. We become virtuous by practicing and perfecting the virtues. “The key insight,” says Keenan, “is that we should always aim to grow. As a person oriented ethics, virtue ethics insists that without growth, we cannot become more moral.”<sup>140</sup>

### 1.5.3: Communal habituation

The last question of virtue ethics, “How am I to get there?” introduces an important fourth parallel to *theosis*, namely that growth in virtue requires discernment. Keenan, faithful to the Catholic and Thomistic tradition, highlights prudence as the integrating virtue that considers the claims of all other virtues.<sup>141</sup> I will not defend here the centrality of discernment for *theosis* as it will be evident as a key virtue in exercising pastoral care, one of the essential functions of the priesthood. Instead, at this point, I want to emphasize that becoming virtuous requires a discerning assessment of who one is in relation to others and how to grow in those relationships. Within the Orthodox spiritual tradition, discernment (*diakrisis*) is the first gift of a spiritual mother or father, a “companion and guide” who is uniquely able to both see the truth of another person, but to also speak to that persons need to grow in particular areas.<sup>142</sup>

Discernment leads to practice, an answer to “How am I to get there?” that sets up the crucial parallel for this dissertation. Virtue theorists emphasize that one becomes virtuous by being virtuous. It is only by practicing and perfecting virtuous relationships that

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<sup>140</sup> James F. Keenan, “Virtue Ethics,” 85-86.

<sup>141</sup> Keenan is both articulating and challenging the long-standing Aristotelian and Thomist tradition of positing “Cardinal Virtues.” His preferred list includes justice which orders our relations to the common good, fidelity which orders our relations to other persons, and self-care (his most daring modification to the more traditional list) which orders our relations to our self. There is no hierarchy of value or priority among these three cardinal virtues. Rather, prudence “helps each virtue to shape its end as more inclusive of the other two.” James F. Keenan, “Proposing Cardinal Virtues,” 728.

we become so disposed. Virtuous relations are not only the goal, but also the means towards that goal. An anthropology of persons-in-relation locates this becoming *in community*. There are many levels to this formative community. One level is the relationship formed with the communion of the saints. As chapter three argues, it is in the saints that we *see* virtuous relations. The acquisition of virtue often begins through imitation of holy men and women, but as it becomes a habitual way of relating, it is then mediated through a unique and irreducible person. Caroline Walker Bynum notes that while medieval hagiographers repeatedly asserted that saints were too dangerous to be imitated by mere mortals: “those holy women of whom we have records, especially those who were canonized or widely revered, were *chosen* by their contemporaries as heroines, mirrors, and lessons—as lenses through which God's power and human aspirations were focused toward each other.”<sup>143</sup> While we know what is virtuous, how we are to act in relation because of the saints, we do not simply clone saintly behavior. Owen Flanagan stresses the originality of the human experience and practice of virtue, emphasizing “the deep truth that persons find their good in many different ways.”<sup>144</sup> This is not a relativistic claim that there are different goods but, as James Keenan succinctly puts it, that “the saint has always been an original; never an imitation.”<sup>145</sup>

A second level of formative relationships are those that occur within the particular, historical community, the parish, the ideal locus of which is the liturgy, an idea developed in

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<sup>142</sup> Kallistos Ware, “The Spiritual Guide in Orthodox Christianity,” in *The Inner Kingdom* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000), 127. See pp. 135-38 for the discussion of discernment

<sup>143</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 7. Keenan offers a portion of this citation in James F. Keenan, “Proposing Cardinal Virtues,” 712.

<sup>144</sup> Owen J. Flanagan, *Varieties of Moral Personality: Ethics and Psychological Realism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), 158. Cited in James F. Keenan, “Virtue Ethics,” 84.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 91. See also Robert L. Wilken, “The Lives of the Saints and the Pursuit of Virtue,” in *New Visions* (New York: Crossroad, 1993).

the fourth chapter. Current theories of the social constitution of the human person highlight the ways in which communal practices form relational agents. Because virtue is fundamentally about relating to the other, and because it is learned in and through relationships with the other, becoming a virtuous person *is dependent on the virtuous relationships practiced by a given community*. Our community profoundly shapes what we understand to be the virtues, it prioritizes some virtues over others, and it communicates in a myriad of ways who may practice what virtues. I will return to this point again and again, as it is precisely the area in which Orthodoxy can make a strong contribution to contemporary debates regarding the social construction of persons, as well as the area of its greatest weakness. By presuming an over-realized eschatology rather than the community-based “eschatological development” suggested by Stăniloae, Orthodoxy neglects to critically examine its own communal practices, and risks distorting the virtuous relations of its sons and daughters.

### 1.6: Conclusion

This chapter has offered the foundational elements of Orthodox theology that will be utilized to develop my argument for the ordination of women to the Orthodox priesthood. I have summarized the human person as constituted by particularity, existing in and through dynamic, other-oriented relationships that seek to be characterized by virtue. As men and women in the image of God, we move into likeness, becoming more fully human as we participate in divine-human communion. Communal relations are particularly formative in this regard. Metaphorical language that embodies new insights is essential if our imaginations are to be captured. Metaphors offer new insights, often accessible only through a unique and surprising phrase. Metaphors are verbal icons that allow us to ‘see’ something new about ourselves and our relations to God and neighbor. By ‘reading’ text,



## Chapter 1: Foundations

image and liturgy, this dissertation highlights the irreducibility of both the human person and metaphors that describe human and divine-human relations. Late-ancient texts and Byzantine images are not read in order to establish a historical precedent, but rather to identify a trajectory within the Orthodox tradition, which when combined with contemporary concerns and theories regarding gender, personhood and virtue, offers a compelling reason to change our liturgical practice regarding women. Having laid this foundation, we can now move examine patristic metaphors to describe the priesthood, the long-standing tradition of ‘seeing’ virtue in the relationships and actions of the saints, and the importance of enacting similar virtuous relations in our liturgical practices.

## Chapter 2: Virtuous Priesthood

Who can mould, as clay-figures are modeled in a single day, the defender of the truth, who is to take his stand with Angels, and give glory with Archangels, and cause the sacrifice to ascend to the altar on high, and share the priesthood of Christ, and renew the creature, and set forth the image, and create inhabitants for the world above, aye and, greatest of all, be God, and make others to be God?

Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 2.73.<sup>1</sup>

### 2.1: Introduction

Summarizing the Orthodox theology of the priesthood (used here as a general term inclusive of bishop and presbyter) is a difficult task. With few exceptions, theologians who address the priesthood do so in an occasional manner.<sup>2</sup> Rather than write a treatise specifically on priesthood, they take particular occasions to discuss priesthood as a means to address a more primary concern. The twentieth-century theologians Nicholas Afanasiev and John Zizioulas both address the priesthood via ecclesial concerns. Afanasiev attempts to disentangle contemporary ecclesial order and structure from the models that existed in the

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all references and english translations to Gregory's orations are from NPNF, second series, vol. 7. The first page number given refers to the online version. The second number references the page in the original print edition. Gregory of Nazianzus, "Cyril of Jerusalem and Gregory Nazianzen," 341 (220).

<sup>2</sup> It can be argued that the deacon should also be included in the term 'priesthood,' though according to some the diaconate is not "priestly" because it does not involve presiding at the Eucharist. While I tend to agree with the former, the authors I consider primarily (though not exclusively) refer to bishops and presbyters with the term priesthood. In addition, there is a growing consensus among Eastern Orthodox that it is possible to restore the historical female diaconate and so I am less concerned with addressing the diaconal office in this dissertation. This work concerns the presbyterate, and by extension, the episcopate. For recent scholarship on the female diaconate, see Kyriaki K. FitzGerald, *Women Deacons in the Orthodox Church: Called to Holiness and Ministry* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998); J. N. M. Wijngaards, *No Women in Holy Orders?: The Women Deacons of the Early Church* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2002); Valerie A. Karras, "Female Deacons in the Byzantine Church," *Church History* 73, no. 2 (2004): 272-316; Kevin Madigan, and Carolyn Osiek, *Ordained Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History*.

developing church found in New Testament and apostolic texts.<sup>3</sup> Zizioulas addresses the orders of ministry in light of his arguments regarding relationality within Trinity and church. Other modern authors address the priesthood with an eye towards church governance in light of the role of the laity, concern for the lack of pastoral support of priests, the importance of the priestly role of ‘counselor,’ or the participation of women in ministry.<sup>4</sup> This occasional quality is equally true in late-ancient authors. Gregory of Nazianzus’ reflections on his own priesthood initially occur as a defense of his flight from ordination, and much later as a part of his protest and grief at the loss of his congregation by forced retirement. John Chrysostom’s classic tract is written to defend the abandonment of his friend Basil to an ordination neither feels worthy to bear, as well as defend a priesthood whose members appear unqualified and abusive of their role. Both of these texts are a more extended and systematic reflection on the priesthood than the abbreviated references in earlier apostolic material.

### 2.1.1: Overview

This chapter examines the use of metaphors to describe the functions, capabilities and virtues necessary for Christian priesthood in Gregory the Theologian, and to a lesser degree John Chrysostom. The reason for focusing on metaphors rather than the tasks and functions of the priesthood is that arguments against female priests in Orthodox circles rarely take the form of questioning the ability of women to teach doctrinal orthodoxy,

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<sup>3</sup> See Nikolai Afanasiev, *The Church of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Vitaly Permiakov (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007). At this point, I would like to thank those who have generously shared their work pre-publication: Michael Plekon, Susanna Elm and Christopher Beeley.

<sup>4</sup> See Thomas Hopko, “On the Male Character of Christian Priesthood.”; *Women and the Priesthood* (1983); *Women and the Priesthood*, 2nd (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1999). Stanley S. Harakas, “Orthodox Priest as Leader in the Divine Liturgy,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 21 (1976): 163-76; Joseph J. Allen, “The Orthodox Priestly Consciousness in the 70’s and 80’s,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 22, no. 03

preach, or exercise pastoral discernment and care. These are the primary *functions* of the priesthood. As we will see in the fourth chapter, these functions, and ordination into the exercise of these tasks, places the priest in a particular, formative, relationship with the community. Women are not excluded because they are perceived as unable to exercise these functions. Orthodox women throughout history have taught, preached, and exercised pastoral care, but not as the head of a community. Rather, women are excluded because they cannot embody roles that are presumed to be masculine based on their *metaphorical* description. Because of this, special focus will be given to metaphors that appeal to sexed and gendered roles.

The bulk of this discussion will center on Gregory the Theologian's *Oration 2*, the first 'systematic' reflection on the Christian priesthood that serves as a source for John Chrysostom's well-known six books *On the Priesthood*, Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Rule*, and very possibly Augustine's *On Christian Teaching*.<sup>5</sup> Contemporary Orthodox theologians regularly turn to these texts as source material for discussing the priesthood. Since Chrysostom is in agreement with the Nazianzen's theology, emphasis and method, *On the Priesthood* will be examined for its differences from Gregory's orations specifically as they relate to present-day concerns regarding the priesthood. Gregory's autobiographical poetry, written much later in life, elaborates on his self-understanding of his priesthood. In particular, it serves to highlight the fluidity of gendered metaphors in describing the role of a priest in relationship to the congregation. The argument of this chapter is simple: Both

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(1977): 285-98; John Chryssavgis, "The Royal Priesthood (Peter 2.9)," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 32, no. 4 (1987): 373-77.

<sup>5</sup> Susanna Elm, "The Diagnostic Gaze: Gregory of Nazianzus' Theory of Orthodox Priesthood in His Orations 6 *De Pace* and 2 *Apologia De Fuga Sua*," in *Orthodoxie, Christianisme, Histoire*, ed. Susanna Elm et al. (Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 2000), 99. Beeley notes the possible additional influence on Augustine's *On Christian Teaching*. See Christopher Alfred Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God: In Your Light We Shall See Light*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 237.

Nazianzen and Chrysostom use a wide variety of metaphors to adequately evoke the skills, functions and virtues required for priesthood. Their use of gendered metaphors indicates the simultaneous performance of behavior stereotypically characterized as masculine or feminine in the exercise of priestly functions. The priesthood, according to these two theologians, cannot be adequately described by a single metaphor. Any such reduction inadequately limits the ‘performance’ of the priest as an embodiment of a “new humanity” who is called to model and teach virtue.

### 2.1.2: Multiple Metaphors

Since theologies of the priesthood are contextual, so too are the models used to address specific concerns or occasions for writing. Choosing models and metaphors that are applicable to a particular context or driving issue is not inherently problematic. Metaphors, as evocative language, make associations between models and new practices that are essential to the persuasive and catechetical task of the theologian. Metaphors evoke priestly functions and relationships in imaginative and persuasive ways. However, Gregory and Chrysostom never rely on a single metaphor even if one may dominate. Instead, they use multiple metaphors, each of which uniquely evokes a particular set of associations, to verbally paint a more complete image of the priesthood. Frequently, the difficulties created by the limits or inadequacies of one model to account for all aspects of the comparison are resolved by another model or metaphor. Multiple models are *essential* to describing something as complex as the priesthood.

### 2.1.3: To What Do They Point?

For instance, both Gregory and Chrysostom acknowledge the failure of the shepherd as a model to account for the virtue and intelligence of human persons as compared to

sheep. This inadequacy on the part of the model does not eliminate its use, but serves as a segue for the development of a new model, presbyter as a “physician of souls.” The physician model comes to the fore not because of the scriptural association of Jesus as a physician who heals sin (Mt. 9.12), but because it allows Gregory and Chrysostom to address concerns with the current shape of Christian priesthood. The model allows them to fuse together three elements, the third- and fourth-century practice of granting ecclesial leadership to wealthy aristocrats (a practice common among most late-ancient associations), the therapeutic arguments prevalent in contemporary philosophical discourse, and a new set of criteria meant to enhance priestly qualifications according to genuine capability and doctrinal orthodoxy. This fusion results in a contextual development of theology regarding the priesthood that addresses contemporary concerns.

At no point are these models ever literal. They are always metaphorical. Neither Gregory nor Chrysostom were physicians, and despite their excellent educations at the best schools of the day, they did not pursue the typical path of philosophers leading those same schools.<sup>6</sup> Yet the model serves a crucial purpose. It calls to the minds of their audience, both congregants and fellow priests, a lifestyle of rigorous training to learn techniques that shape their minds, their ability to exercise the discernment essential to the task of diagnosing sickness, and the pastoral and persuasive ability to encourage healing in the sin-sick. Notice that these are capabilities which allow a priest to exercise his function within the community well. Orthodoxy often seems allergic to functional discussion of priesthood, but we will see that relationships and function are inextricably entwined.

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<sup>6</sup> Under the Emperor Julian (361-363), once a fellow student with Gregory, they were actually forbidden such a path.

Equally important as the cluster of associations to which metaphors and models point is that to which they fail to point. As we will see, the secular model that serves so well on the one hand fails precisely because the healing sought is not physical well-being but *theosis*. For Gregory, *theosis* is participation in God through the practice of the virtues, corresponding to the Cappadocian emphasis on the ethical/philosophical aspects of deification. Chrysostom, who with other Antiochenes prioritizes a realistic understanding of deification, emphasizes transformation through the sacraments administered by a priest, though not to the exclusion of virtue. In each case, the persuasive thrust is two-fold, to persuade congregants towards *theosis*, and to persuade priests to effectively model deification through their own lives, teaching and pastoral care. Especially for Gregory, priests are living *eikons* who point towards Christ, are becoming like Christ, and leading others towards the Christ-likeness.

### 2.1.4: Failure of Reduction

Just as all that is included in deification cannot be reduced to a single metaphor, practice, capability or virtue, neither can the priesthood. When one metaphor is emphasized to the exclusion of others essential components of the relationships between and among the people of God are lost, and the effectiveness of a given role within the community is reduced. This reduction is a trend starkly illustrated when the topic of conversation is the participation of women in the church. Suddenly, the image of the priest as father and husband, the only legitimate head of the family and, therefore, head of a congregation, overrides all other metaphors.<sup>7</sup> Yet it is striking that fatherhood is simply *not* a significant

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<sup>7</sup> Not alone in this tendency, Thomas Hopko is a well-known proponent of this view. While many of his reasons changed, he did not substantially change his views on this element in the second edition of the volume. See Thomas Hopko, *Women and the Priesthood* (1999).

metaphor in either of the theologians examined below. Even more ironic given its exclusive emphasis in modern discussions is that its infrequent use by Gregory and Chrysostom is often accompanied by maternal metaphors. Reduction to any single metaphor misses the point of metaphors in ancient texts: evocative and imaginative language that describes the essential virtues, capabilities and functions necessary for the relationship in which ordination places the ordinand.<sup>8</sup> This relationship is, among many others, that of a physician to patient, teacher to student, captain to sailor, ruler to ruled, and parent to child. Just as there is no single relationship that encompasses the priesthood, there are no isolated metaphors. One metaphor is often enhanced or held in paradoxical balance by another metaphor. Thus, every priestly office can only be adequately described by holding together a wide range of mutually enhancing metaphors.

### **2.2: A Priesthood of Virtue: Gregory of Nazianzus**

As the first theologian to reflect extensively on the priesthood, Gregory provides a foundation on which an Orthodox theology of the priesthood is built. These pastoral reflections on ecclesial leadership, however are given by an immensely well-educated man who interpreted theology within certain hermeneutical limits. This section discusses his innovative theology of the priesthood within the framework of his theory of language, a theory that proved itself to be essential to the most divisive issue of his day, language for the Trinity.

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<sup>8</sup> Following Afanasiev and Zizioulas, I agree that baptism is the first ‘ordination,’ followed by the further ordination of some laity into specific ministries which changes their *relationship to* other orders, not their ontological status. See John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 216ff; Nikolai Afanasiev, *The Church of the Holy Spirit*, 31. This is discussed more extensively in Chapter 4.



### 2.2.1: The Theological Rules of Grammar

Before proceeding to his actual edited sermons on the priesthood, it is vital to understand Gregory of Nazianzus' philosophy of metaphorical language. His most explicit discussion of the limits of language occurs in the famous Five Theological Orations, *Orations* 27-31. Gregory discusses the many names for God, each of which indicates partial truths about God. Three names come closest to the essence of God, "He who is" (ὁ ὢν), "God" (Θεός) and "Lord" (κύριος),<sup>9</sup> while others fall into two distinct groups of names shared by the deity: names that belong to the power of God or to God's providential ordering of the world. Among the first are "retribution," "peace" and "righteousness" (*Or.* 30.19).<sup>10</sup> Of these, Gregory says

For since we are controlled by three conditions—fear of punishment, hope for salvation and glory too, and the practice of the virtues which results in these last—the name which mentions retribution deals with fear, the one which mentions salvation with hope, and that which refers to virtues disciplines us to practice them. The intention is that by, as it were, carrying God inside him, a man may have some success here and press on all the harder to perfection, towards that affinity with God which comes from the virtues (*Or.* 30.19).<sup>11</sup>

These names of God spring out of the context of human relationship with God and say as much about the way we are to relate to God in the context of deification as they say about the deity. A name, then, indicates a way of relating between two subjects.<sup>12</sup>

This relational basis for naming God undergirds Gregory's objections to Eunomius, and provides the basis for the development in trinitarian theology for which Gregory is so famous. Eunomius and his followers regard language as univocal and monosemic.

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<sup>9</sup> *Or.* 30.18. Frederick W. Norris, *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning*, 274.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> In the next chapter, we will see a similar understanding of the relationship between an icon and its prototype through a shared name.

Language is “*univocal* in its denotive force: the words and phrases of faith have a positive, straightforward, and verifiable meaning that is accessible to all minds,” an approach similar to modern evangelical insistence on verbal inspiration.<sup>13</sup> Univocality has a corollary in “*monosemic hypothesis*,” that words have a single, basic, unifying and “abstract consistency of meaning.”<sup>14</sup> Meaning is not found in experience or cleverness, but “proceeds from the very nature of things—*kata physin*.”<sup>15</sup>

According to Gregory, Eunomius’s insistent literalism necessarily subordinates the Son to the Father. Frederick Norris notes that while Eunomius and his followers view language much like Plato does, Gregory of Nazianzus follows Epicurus and Aristotle in understanding that names are contrived and given by human beings.<sup>16</sup> Language is contextual, conventional and polysemous, developed by common agreement, not by the nature of the thing named.<sup>17</sup> The “real truth is contained in facts [πράγματα], not in names” (*Or.* 29.13).<sup>18</sup> Key is that “no connection is to be made between the names of things and God’s revelation because language is not a revelational gift of God.”<sup>19</sup> Language is not, therefore, illogical as identical predicates and substantives used similarly have a similar “locutionary force.”<sup>20</sup> Context and shared convention shape and determine meaning.

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<sup>13</sup> Mark Brian Sietsema, “On the Name of the Father: A Comparison of Neo-Arian and Cappadocian Metalinguistics,” (Unpublished Paper), 3.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>16</sup> Frederick W. Norris, “Theology as Grammar: Nazianzen and Wittgenstein,” in *Arianism After Arius* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 238. For further discussion, see Norris’ introduction and commentary on the Orations 27-31 (the “Five Theological Orations”) in Frederick W. Norris, *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning*. In addition, see the essays by Børtnes, McGuckin, and Norris in Jostein Børtnes, and Tomas Hägg, *Gregory of Nazianzus: Images and Reflections* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> Mark Brian Sietsema, “On the Name of the Father,” 2.

<sup>18</sup> Frederick W. Norris, *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning*, 253.. See Epicurus, *Letter to Herodotus* 37 and 75 and Aristotle, *On Interpretation* 16A-B

<sup>19</sup> Frederick W. Norris, “Theology as Grammar,” 239.

<sup>20</sup> Mark Brian Sietsema, “On the Name of the Father,” 14.

Gregory is committed to polysemy and metaphor in which the same word has different meanings in different contexts.<sup>21</sup>

### Conventional Names

Names, then, do not correspond to essences, but are conventionally agreed upon words that indicate things and often its qualities or relationships. The names of God make sense in a shared context not because the words themselves have a ‘natural’ meaning, but because they point to ‘facts’ about God in the context of a salvific relationship with God. Language about God is “sketchy at best” and is seldom “capable of telling us anything definite, particularly about deity. It can represent faintly so that we can understand each other, but never fully.”<sup>22</sup> The “mental images” and “pictures” presented in scripture rely on conventional understandings of meaning and are always incomplete. For Gregory these images provide “a reliable guide unto God, but they cannot lead us the whole way.”<sup>23</sup>

This is true even of the unshared “personal names” of God. The Triune formula in *Oration* 30.19, which also appears in *Oration* 42.15, “states the differences between the three without destroying the unity.”<sup>24</sup> The Father is “unoriginate,” (ἀνάρχος), the Son is “eternally begotten”<sup>25</sup> or “unoriginately begotten”<sup>26</sup> (ἀνάρχος γεννηθέντος), and the Holy Spirit, “issued, or proceeds, without generation,”<sup>27</sup> or “unbegottenly proceeding” (ἀγεννήτως προελθόντος).<sup>28</sup> These are “part of an attempt to form links as well as to

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Frederick W. Norris, “Theology as Grammar,” 240. Commenting on *Or.* 28.4.

<sup>23</sup> Mark Brian Sietsema, “On the Name of the Father,” 11.

<sup>24</sup> Frederick W. Norris, *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning*, 179.

<sup>25</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *On God and Christ*, 109.

<sup>26</sup> Frederick W. Norris, *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning*, 179.

<sup>27</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *On God and Christ*.

<sup>28</sup> Frederick W. Norris, *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning*, 179.

specify individual characteristics.”<sup>29</sup> Even the names of “Father,” “Son” and “Holy Spirit” do not reveal essences, but ways of relating in unity and distinction, which are unique to each person of the Trinity. The words used are conventional, indicating familial relations and affinity (*Or.* 20.15). These three names are not interchangeable with either themselves or other names for God because they say something distinct that no other word appears able to say. ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ highlight essential aspects of the relations between trinitarian persons, specifically, that of generation or source.<sup>30</sup> These words are symbols or icons that point to something ontologically true, but whose ontological content is not inherent in the word itself. It is simply the best word possible given the scriptural and contemporary options.<sup>31</sup>

### **The Theologian as Poet**

The ideal theologian, according to Gregory, is the “poet-philosopher” trained in the appropriate rules of rhetoric.<sup>32</sup> “Our noblest theologian is not one who has discovered the whole—our earthly shackles do not permit us the whole—but one whose mental image is by comparison fuller, who has gathered in his mind a richer picture, outline, or whatever we call it, of the truth” (*Or.* 30.17). Since Gregory’s fundamental belief is that God is ultimately incomprehensible, no single name, image or picture can adequately describe God (*Or.* 28.4-5). “The basic problem,” says Norris, “is a simple but persistent one. Employing the human intellect to search out ultimate reality involves too small a tool for too great a task... In this

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Nonna Verna Harrison, “The Fatherhood of God in Orthodox Theology,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 37, no. 2-3 (1993), 202.

<sup>31</sup> For a more recent discussion of verbal icons and their relation to participation in God, see Jostein Børtnes, “Rhetorical and Mental Images in Gregory,” in *Gregory of Nazianzus: Images and Reflections*, ed. Jostein Børtnes, and Tomas Hägg (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2006). Børtnes’s emphasis is on how Gregory’s verbal icons create “remembrances of God”, a kind of verbal/visual *mimesis*.

<sup>32</sup> Frederick W. Norris, *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning*, 177.

existence humans are always at the mercy of their impressions of reality, which they know to be perplexing and faulty.”<sup>33</sup>

The ability to gather a richer picture, to develop a fuller mental image, required extensive meditation.<sup>34</sup> This meditation helped provide bridges between God and God’s images, human persons. As Norris notes, Gregory saw himself as a pastoral theologian preaching to a marred but struggling image of God, teasing out the best from his congregation as they moved, with his verbal encouragement, towards *theosis*.<sup>35</sup> As a theologian who contemplated the inconceivable “what one meditated on were images that provided a glimpse of the unknowable divine nature in much the same way that one spoke of the more easily knowable but still ambiguous human nature.”<sup>36</sup> Images were intended to be persuasive, not dogmatic or absolute.<sup>37</sup> Norris argues that as a philosophical rhetorician familiar with and in agreement with Aristotle’s views on rhetoric, Gregory utilized the enthymeme, an argument in which one premise is not explicitly stated, as a way of both drawing his audience into the conversation by allowing them to supply the missing middle term, and as a way to account for theology as a “probability discipline,” a discipline whose statements were rarely final, but certainly likely.<sup>38</sup> Gregory wove together both scriptural and non-scriptural narrative bits with the skill of a trained rhetorician, never allowing a single

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 122, commenting on *Or.* 28.17.

<sup>34</sup> Frederick W. Norris, “Gregory Contemplating the Beautiful: Knowing Human Misery and Divine Mystery Through and Being Persuaded By Images,” in *Gregory of Nazianzus: Images and Reflections*, ed. Jostein Børtnes, and Tomas Hägg (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2006), 20, commenting on *Or.* 27.3-4.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 23-24.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 23.

image to dominate since his subject, both God and humanity, could never be reduced to a single image.<sup>39</sup>

The limits of human intellect are amply illustrated by a flood of obvious questions about human nature (the natural world, heavenly bodies, incorporeal angels) for which neither Gregory nor his opponents have an answer (Or. 28.22-31). It is not that God's nature is unknown because human nature is incomprehensible, as if somehow if we understand ourselves we will understand God. Rather, it is simply the case that we do not know our more familiar and immediately available human nature, and so can hardly presume to claim complete knowledge of the more complex nature of God.<sup>40</sup>

### Summary

In light of the importance of contextual, conventional and polysemous language for theological discourse, we must keep in mind the following points as we move into a discussion of Gregory's view of the priesthood: models, metaphors and verbal icons point to something beyond themselves, a set of skills, practices, virtues or ways of relating. They only make sense only in a shared context of meaning. The power of a metaphor to persuade often depends on its "imaginative jolt" that unlike analogies "expands our lexicon," compelling "new possibilities of vision."<sup>41</sup> Each metaphor is unique and often the only verbal image that can adequately evoke the desired associations in a given context. However, in regard to God-talk, no single metaphor is adequate. What remains to be seen is whether this understanding of metaphor applies equally to the priesthood and the humans who embody it.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>40</sup> Frederick W. Norris, *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning*, 123.

<sup>41</sup> Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 65, 48, 58.

### 2.2.2: The Virtuous Priest

Gregory of Nazianzus, between 362 and 364, explicitly addresses the priesthood in which he includes bishops and their associates, the presbyters.<sup>42</sup> Up until this time, related literature includes biographies of priests such as Pontus' Latin *Life of Cyprian*, but no intentional reflection on the nature and character of the priesthood. Scholars agree that these early orations, likely edited later in Gregory's career, "represent the earliest attempt at a systematic theory of 'orthodox' priesthood."<sup>43</sup> In these reflections Gregory brings together a number of preceding scriptural and apostolic metaphors. He rhetorically elaborates on these metaphors, expanding their associations, and adds new metaphors. Further, he reflects an awareness of the limits of metaphors and analogies, and uses metaphors to balance one another, each pointing to a essential elements of priesthood. Gregory sprinkles in the rare gendered metaphor, though as we will see they are never primary, and they are quite malleable in their application to embodied persons.

Early on in his career Gregory was required to defend the orthodoxy of his father. Bishops were often local aristocrats, appointed as a result of their position in society, not necessarily their priestly qualities. However, they subsequently could not be found lacking in those qualities, especially orthodoxy. Yet Gregory's father, an aristocrat presumably qualified for the position fails precisely on these grounds. By signing the Homoian creed of Constantinople and Rimini in 360, Gregory the elder opened himself and his orthodoxy to attack by members of his own congregation. The timing of the younger Gregory's

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<sup>42</sup> For the inclusive use of "priesthood" see John Chrysostom, *Six Books on the Priesthood*, trans. Graham Neville, Popular Patristics Series (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1977; reprint 2002), 8; Brian E. Daley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, vol. New York (Routledge, 2006), 193 n.52; Christopher Alfred Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God*, 241.

ordination was, in part, to help his father out of a difficult situation. With his appointment, Gregory finds himself in the awkward position of defending his father whom he cannot publicly shame, but who is viewed as an ‘unorthodox’ bishop. This event, according to Elm, is the “catalyst for Gregory of Nazianzus’ fundamental reassessment of the meaning of the priesthood.”<sup>44</sup> Gregory must re-think the priesthood as much more than an aristocratic privilege. As texts likely edited later in life during a forced retirement due to controversy over trinitarian orthodoxy, these sermons bear the imprint of an ongoing struggle to consider the relationship between pastoral care and orthodox doctrine.

### Orations 1 and 2

Gregory’s innovation begins with his first sermon, delivered close to Easter of 362 and occasioned by his return to presbyteral duties after running away from his sudden ordination the previous December. He explains (and apologizes) for his decision to flee from the “noble tyranny” of his ordination at the hands of his father (*Or.* 1.1).<sup>45</sup> In his first rather brief *Oration*, Gregory likens his hesitancy to accept ordination to the reluctance of Moses and Jeremiah in accepting their own calls, claiming that he needed time to examine himself before the “Mystery” of his anointing (*Or.* 1.2).<sup>46</sup> He requests the renewal of the Spirit so that he may be given to the “New Creation” of the Church “as a good modeler and teacher for Christ” (*Or.* 1.2).<sup>47</sup> From the start, the function of a priest as a *model* of the good life and *teacher* of orthodoxy is paramount, the core of the priestly call. Gregory understands himself to be a “Shepherd” after the “Good Shepherd,” a “poor and small” living temple

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<sup>43</sup> Susanna Elm, “The Diagnostic Gaze,” 84. See also Andrew Louth, “St. Gregory Nazianzen on Bishops and the Episcopate,” in *Vescovi E Pastori in Epoca Teodosiana*, Studia Ephemeridis “Augustinianum” 58 (Roma: Institutum patristicum Augustinianum, 1997), 281; Brian E. Daley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 51.

<sup>44</sup> Susanna Elm, “The Diagnostic Gaze,” 84.

<sup>45</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, “Cyril of Jerusalem and Gregory Nazianzen,” 315(203).



added to the “the inanimate temple...that exceedingly beautiful and heavenly shrine” in which the “new creation” worships (*Or.* 1.4).<sup>48</sup>

The core of Gregory’s reflection occurs in *Oration 2*, a defense of his flight from and return to presbyteral ministry.<sup>49</sup> Merely hinted at in the first oration, in *Oration 2* Gregory clarifies his reasons for flight: he claims surprise at his sudden ordination (*Or.* 2.6), presbyteral ministry conflicts with his desire to live the quiet life of the scholar (*Or.* 2.7), he is ashamed of the unworthiness of many presbyters (*Or.* 2.8), and finally, Gregory believes himself unqualified to rule (*Or.* 2.9). As we shall see, given the magnitude of the priestly task, it is no wonder that Gregory flees ordination. Gregory’s claim of unworthiness begins in *Oration 1*, where he is merely a “poor and small” living temple, and threads itself through each of models and associated metaphors discussed below: the shepherd, the philosopher-physician, and the ruler. Each of these models serve to underscore the importance of the priest himself as a an exemplar for the people, an *eikon* of virtue.

### The Inadequate Shepherd

Gregory, faithful to biblical language, uses the term shepherd to describe the presbyter, but not without an early qualification. In a rather humorous passage, he describes the idyllic duties of a real shepherd:

...most of his time will be devoted to the oak and the shade and his pipes,  
while he reclines on the beautiful grass, and beside the cool water, and shakes  
down his couch in a breezy spot, and ever and anon sings a love ditty, with

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 316(203).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 317(204).

<sup>49</sup> This long and likely undelivered sermon may have been substantially rewritten almost twenty years later, upon his ‘retirement’ as Bishop of Constantinople in 381. John McGuckin indicates that “the severe castigations of venal monks and clergy” found in the letter are more characteristic of Gregory’s later, more “jaundiced” view of church hierarchy than they are of the views Gregory held when he originally wrote *Oration 2*. John A. McGuckin, *St. Gregory of Nazianzus: An Intellectual Biography* (Crestwood, N.Y: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001), 10.

his cup by his side, and talks to his bullocks or his flock, the fattest of which supply his banquets or his pay (*Or.* 2.9).<sup>50</sup>

Unlike the lazing shepherd who consumes his own flock for literal or monetary sustenance, the priest is obviously concerned with more: “no one ever has thought of the virtue of flocks or herds: for indeed of what virtue are they capable?” (*Or.* 2.9).<sup>51</sup> Virtue is precisely the preoccupation of the priest and its importance in the Christian life diminishes the usefulness of the shepherd metaphor.

The “common body of the church...composed of many different characters and minds, like a single animal compounded of discordant parts” bears closer resemblance to a mythological beast “compounded of many animals of various sizes and degrees of tameness and wildness” than it does to placid sheep (*Or.* 2.44).<sup>52</sup> The sheer variety of tame and wild “animals” must be tamed through the practice of virtue. Virtue is achieved through a will free to choose good or evil (*Or.* 2.17). Unfortunately, Gregory observes, it is far easier to do evil than good (*Or.* 2.12). Virtue must be sought through constant effort, encouraged and sustained by the priest. Such a complicated and delicate task is this pastoral role that to Gregory, “the guiding of man, the most variable and manifold of creatures, seems to me in very deed to be the art of arts and science of sciences” (*Or.* 2.15).<sup>53</sup> Sheep require food and protection from danger, and as a shepherd the priest provides spiritual food and protection through both the Eucharist and orthodox teaching, yet the adequacy of the model founders on the simple reality that people are not sheep. So difficult is it to stretch this model to adequately capture the reality that Gregory dismisses it relatively early in his sermon, rethinking the priesthood in light of a more flexible image.

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<sup>50</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, “Cyril of Jerusalem and Gregory Nazianzen,” 321(207).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 331-32(214).

## Improved Mimesis

This rethinking results in what Elm considers an innovative presentation of orthodoxy “defined as improved *mimesis*. It is a continuous, dynamic movement towards the ideal prototype, the *eikon* as embodied in and elaborated by Scripture.”<sup>54</sup> This dynamic movement of persons must be supported by a fittingly dynamic priesthood. Gregory then, turns to a new model for the ideal Christian priest, the philosopher-physician. For Gregory, this model brings together a number of threads, scriptural, historical, and contemporary. Christ is the physician who heals the sin-sick (Mt. 9.12). Ignatius of Antioch hints at the healing role of the Eucharist, the “medicine of immortality” (*Eph.* 20.2).<sup>55</sup> By the third century, episcopal ministry explicitly included efforts to heal the sick, mentioned for the first time in the ordination prayer from the *Canons of Hippolytus*.<sup>56</sup> Equally important is the way this model integrates Gregory’s preference for the philosophical life of perpetual *paideia*, training through rigorous asceticism, and the aristocratic elitism that Gregory never sheds, with a developing interpretation of orthodoxy as living embodiments of virtue that is participation in God.

## The Philosopher-Physician

During the third and fourth centuries, like the rhetoricians and philosophers under whom they trained, Christians developed their own “schools” where Christian “philosophy” was the focus. Robert Wilken underscores that a “school of...” is “a way of speaking of the

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 323(208).

<sup>54</sup> Susanna Elm, “The Diagnostic Gaze,” 87.

<sup>55</sup> Michael William Holmes, ed. *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations of Their Writings*, 2nd (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 151.

<sup>56</sup> See *Can. Hipp.* 3. According to Bradshaw, “this suggests a somewhat different concept of the episcopate [from that which preceded it]...in which the ministry of healing played a more prominent part.” Paul F. Bradshaw, *Ordination Rites of the Ancient Churches of East and West* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1990), 48.

intellectual and spiritual activity of the early teachers.”<sup>57</sup> To focus on schools as a locus of cognitive learning is to neglect the most important task of a philosopher: “to persuade people to take up a new and more rewarding way of life.”<sup>58</sup> As a way of life rather than a cognitive system, virtue was central. Philosophers “trained their students in the art of living, to seek justice and philanthropy, to cope with anger, lust, desire, fear of death, worldly goods, and ambition and showed them the way to a life of virtue and piety.”<sup>59</sup> Philosophical education included the typical “intellectual” tasks of analysis, debate and rhetorical skills, but emphasized “moral training, self-analysis, and spiritual direction.”<sup>60</sup> The goal was the transformation of students into virtuous persons.

### *Relational Modeling*

The means of this transformation is crucial to understanding the power of the philosopher as an adequate model for the priesthood. Wilken notes that schools were distinguished from one another primarily by a particular teacher and his method. The master-disciple relationship was not a simple relationship of teacher to student, expert to novice. Justice and prudence were practices taught through intimate and personal relationships of friendship and love. Only if the master knew and loved the disciple was it possible to truly cultivate a fruitful life.<sup>61</sup> By its nature, instruction was one-on-one.

Friendship, however, was not simply a means to gain the knowledge necessary to discern how best to teach a student. Instead, it allowed for modeling through shared actions and behavior. Aristotle underscored that virtue and deeds were inseparable, serving both as

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<sup>57</sup> Robert L. Wilken, “Alexandria: A School for Training in Virtue,” in *Schools of Thought in the Christian Tradition*, ed. Patrick Henry (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 18.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 19.

the end as well as its means. Subsequent classical thought held that moral good was attractive, inspiring like action in an effort to attain the virtues exemplified in the lives of holy men and women. As a friend, the teacher invited the student to share a life of virtue through behavior that was attractive. Deeds and character were inextricably intertwined.<sup>62</sup>

Imitation as a form of discipleship is present from the earliest days of Christian literature, but the exhortation to imitate figures other than Christ or Paul did not develop in any significant way until the third century. Up until then, scriptural figures and the popular genre of acts of martyrs, which tended to focus on the final days of a martyr's life, prevailed. With Pontus' *Life of Cyprian*, however the emphasis shifts to the whole life of the saint as a means to preserve a memory of his deeds, not merely his death.<sup>63</sup> The third through fifth centuries see an explosion of hagiographical literature. By the fourth century the earlier practice of personal instruction through respect, admiration, and friendship is expanded to include the stories of holy men and women as a means of inspiring virtue in a much wider range of followers.

A primary characteristic of these lives is that imitation is held up as the path to virtue.<sup>64</sup> Wilken notes that by setting the deeds of virtuous men and women within the story of an entire life, "the possibilities for moral instruction became more subtle and varied."<sup>65</sup> We will return to a fuller discussion of the saints as exemplars of virtuous and holy lives as diverse as its subjects in the next chapter. Here, the relevant point is that by the time Gregory the Theologian develops his theology of the priesthood, the philosophical practice of modeling virtue as a means of persuading towards the good is firmly embedded in

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>62</sup> Robert L. Wilken, "The Lives of the Saints and the Pursuit of Virtue," 46.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 62.

Christian practice and rhetoric. The individualized student-teacher focus is complicated when the philosophical model is applied to the priesthood, where a one-to-one relationship is inhibited by responsibility to an entire congregation. As we will see below, gendered familial metaphors help bridge this gap of intimacy, forging a connection between the priest and congregation that would otherwise be difficult if not impossible.

### *Therapy*

The prevalent understanding of the philosopher as a teacher was accompanied by the philosopher as a healer. Martha Nussbaum established an intrinsic link between medicine and philosophy in the second century. Therapeutic models in philosophical discourse, particularly among Epicureans and Stoics, served to describe the practical goal of bettering persons by making them healthier, happier and more virtuous. Therapeutic models had the benefit of moving away from abstract principles and towards the exercise of practical reason by the philosopher/doctor in the life of the student/patient. The student's particular circumstances and present abilities were acknowledged, and a specific path towards "healing" the soul was recommended. Hellenistic schools closely attended to the needs and motivations of its students. Philosophical "procedures" were designed, as Nussbaum summarizes, "so as to engage those deepest motivations and speak to those needs."<sup>66</sup> Particularly valued among these "procedures" was the careful attention to rhetorical speech and arguments constructed so as to truly engage the thoughts and troubles of the student.<sup>67</sup> As we will see, Gregory and Chrysostom rely heavily on this model, familiar to their contemporaries, in developing their vision of the priesthood.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>66</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1994), 486.

### Physician of Souls

The philosopher-physician in particular evokes “the only aristocratic model of a ‘professional’ man available to Gregory, namely that of the ‘philosopher as the physician of the soul.’”<sup>68</sup> As professionals, physicians were required to undergo significant training in order to develop the expertise necessary to diagnose illness. Gregory is not evoking a village healer, but the highly educated, upper-class court physician well-known to Gregory in the person of his own brother Caesarius who served as the Emperor Julian’s court physician. This elite group fuses noble birth with rigorous training that

...permitted them to master a technique capable of sharpening, first, their own internal, mental capacities and, second, a ‘diagnostic gaze’ able to discern maladies in others. Only through a continuous process of perfecting their own mental acumen and its external manifestation were philosopher-physicians able to accomplish their goal: to cure others, that is to guide them towards their own good through persuasion rather than force.<sup>69</sup>

The social context of Gregory’s world made the philosopher-physician the perfect model of the priesthood. It assumes an appropriate level of aristocratic status, proper training and education, and techniques that directly address the sickness which is sin. In Gregory’s evaluation, pastoral discernment and persuasion are skills and techniques gained through continuous ascetic reflection on scripture in which we see the ideal Christian leader Paul, and through him, Christ. This training allowed the priest to be an effective healer to the people. This innovative emphasis on the priest not as a ranked aristocrat but as an educated and virtuous ascetic, rooted in his early career, is maintained throughout Gregory’s writing. This emphasis also allows Gregory to elevate the priesthood well above its secular counterparts.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 487.

<sup>68</sup> Susanna Elm, “The Diagnostic Gaze,” 85.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

Like a physician of the body, a “physician of souls” seeks healing, but the labor is more difficult due to “the nature of its subject matter, the power of its science, and the object of its exercise” (*Or.* 2.15).<sup>70</sup> Human bodies grow old and die and physicians merely stave off the inevitable. A physician of souls deals with willful human beings whose souls transcend death. Like a physician, the presbyter diagnoses ‘patients,’ but the diagnosis of habits and passions is far more difficult. Our inclination to avoid learning and resist submitting to another amounts “almost to an armed resistance to those who are wishful to help us” (*Or.* 2.15).<sup>71</sup> Both physician and presbyter vary treatments according to each person, and the wrong treatment at the wrong time can be dangerous:

Some are benefited by praise, others by blame, both being applied in season; while if out of season, or unreasonable, they are injurious; some are set right by encouragement, others by rebuke; some, when taken to task in public, others, when privately corrected. For some are wont to despise private admonitions, but are recalled to their senses by the condemnation of a number of people, while others, who would grow reckless under reproof openly given, accept rebuke because it is in secret, and yield obedience in return for sympathy (*Or.* 2.31).<sup>72</sup>

Delivery of treatment is crucial. Persuasion is the sole means by which human person can choose the good: “For what is involuntary apart from its being the result of oppression, is neither meritorious nor durable. For what is forced, like a plant violently drawn aside by our hands, when set free, returns to what it was before, but that which is the result of choice is both most legitimate and enduring, for it is preserved by the bond of good will” (*Or.* 2.15).<sup>73</sup> Gregory is pastorally astute: too much reproof can drive people to despair and the loss of self-respect makes persuasion impossible (*Or.* 2.32). The primary tool for persuasion is preaching, a vocation whose loss Gregory mourned until his death.

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<sup>70</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, “Cyril of Jerusalem and Gregory Nazianzen,” 323(208).

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 324(209).

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 328(211).



### *The Role of Paideia*

Persuasion through preaching is a learned skill. Gregory is, by preference, a scholar, a student of “divine things” (*Or.* 2.5).<sup>74</sup> He craves the philosophical life of contemplative study and transformation of the self through the work of the intellect, and considers elements of this life crucial to the priesthood. Gregory is extremely critical of the belief that one can learn a few verses of scripture and declare oneself ordained (*Or.* 2.49). To train others before receiving sufficient training is to jeopardize their lives, a dangerous foolishness (*Or.* 2.47). This is central to Gregory’s innovation: priesthood is not the ‘right’ of aristocrats, but requires training that enables a priest to be an effective practitioner:

A true physician, Gregory emphasized, required many years of training to develop an exact scientific canon (*technē*) enabling him to recognize the external signs of the maladies of the body, and to prescribe appropriate remedies. Furthermore, to be effective, that is persuasive, the physician himself must present a worthy image (*eikōn*), which in its turn required a *technē* permitting both physician and patient to distinguish the good from the bad practitioner. Now, if such rigorous training was expected of the physician of the body, how much more then must be demanded of the physician of the soul? He, after all, must develop a science (*epistēmē*) enabling the diagnostic gaze to penetrate the souls of his patients, and to guide them towards the unity of Truth.<sup>75</sup>

Good leadership requires character and wisdom. Gregory mocks the idea that attaining wisdom takes less time, effort and training than learning to dance, or play a musical instrument (*Or.* 2.50). Wisdom is the “chief of all things, and holds in her embrace everything which is good, so that even God himself prefers this title to all the names which He is called” (*Or.* 2.50).<sup>76</sup> A teacher must herself first learn. Character is the result of study that informs the mind as well as habituates virtues. The true philosopher has both right

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 323(208).

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 320(206).

<sup>75</sup> Susanna Elm, “The Diagnostic Gaze,” 95.

<sup>76</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, “Cyril of Jerusalem and Gregory Nazianzen,” 334(215).

knowledge and virtuous practice.<sup>77</sup>

Right knowledge and virtuous practice are ‘shared’ through preaching, painting the “charms of virtue” (*Or.* 2.13).<sup>78</sup> By itself, preaching is insufficient. Men and women do not learn simply by hearing, nor is virtue merely conceptual. In humans, virtue only exists as it is enacted in our embodied relationships. For Gregory, to be fully human is to relate in a virtuous manner. The priest “should be of such virtue, so simple and modest, and in a word, so heavenly, that the gospel should make its way, no less by their character than by their preaching” (*Or.* 2.69).<sup>79</sup> This priestly *eikon* of virtue must not only “be free from evil...but also eminent in the good.... He should know no limits in goodness or spiritual progress, ... and not think it a great gain to excel ordinary people, but a loss to fall short of what we ought to be” (*Or.* 2.14).<sup>80</sup> In other words, the priest is not satisfied with avoiding sin, but is always seeking to grow further in virtue according to a vision of who it is possible to become in God, a full human person.

In summary, the philosopher-physician model allows orthodoxy, right belief about relationship to God in the Trinity, to be portrayed as a means of diagnosis and healing towards a new humanity.<sup>81</sup> It highlights the enormous task of the physician of souls, requiring rigorous training in scripture in order to learn and then embody the ideal *eikon* that is Paul, who himself points to Christ. As a physician, the priest exercises techniques and

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<sup>77</sup> Susanna Elm argues that Gregory is calling for a “philosophy of action” in contrast to the Emperor Julian’s preference for philosophy as *theoria*. See Susanna Elm, “Hellenism and Historiography: Gregory of Nazianzus and Julian in Dialogue,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33, no. 3 (2003): 493-515.

<sup>78</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, “Cyril of Jerusalem and Gregory Nazianzen,” 322(207).

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 340(219).

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 322-323(208).

<sup>81</sup> Christopher Beeley argues that Gregory’s pastoral reflections are focused on the ministry of the word as “administering the Trinity,” a concern for Christian orthodoxy. Christopher Alfred Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God*, 236.

skills that enables him to discern maladies. As a philosopher, the priest engages in moral education through modeling and preaching the virtuous life.

### **Persuasion and Authority**

Gregory's innovations do not necessarily 'flatten' hierarchies. Gregory, despite the fact that his innovations are in part a response to the aristocratic appointment of bishops, does not challenge the assumption that leadership was best held by members of elite classes. Gregory is the proud, eldest son of an aristocratic family. As Andrew Louth points out, Gregory's "aristocratic disdain" towards the lower classes who were free to enter the priesthood is "evident, and unpleasant." After all he opines, "the (male) members of such families were accustomed to rule...through their education, which made them members of the charmed circle of a rhetorically trained élite, who regarded participation in government as very nearly a right."<sup>82</sup> Gregory repeatedly expresses a desire to live the quiet and studious life of a ascetic philosopher. The genuineness of his frequent lament at the impossibility of this life given the constant pressure to serve as a presbyter and bishop is debated by many scholars. In the context of Gregory's aristocratic 'right' to rule, his repeated 'flights' from leadership are a perfect example of the *agathos aner*, whose refusal of political offices serves to underscore his fitness for it.<sup>83</sup> Gregory's aristocratic assumptions are important to keep in view even as he theologically undermines them. Louth notes that it is not his aristocratic

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<sup>82</sup> Andrew Louth, "St. Gregory Nazianzen on Bishops and the Episcopate," 283, 282. Louth cites an extended section from *Carm.* II.1.12.155-60, 64-72, which is indeed unpleasant. The assumption that philosophers and teachers are necessarily male is challenged by the figure of Macrina, the older sister of Gregory's close friend Basil, and Gregory's own mother, Nonna. Both of these women are portrayed by these men as teachers, models of the ideal Christian ascetic and philosophical life, and the individuals responsible for their own decision to adopt Christianity.

<sup>83</sup> See Susanna Elm, "Hellenism and Historiography," and "The Diagnostic Gaze," 92ff. Suzanne Abrams Rebillard, "Speaking for Salvation: Gregory of Nazianzus and Poet and Priest in His Autobiographical Poems" (PhD Diss, Brown University, 2003).

bias that wins out in this *Oration 2*, but a priesthood “which can lead towards true philosophy those who are seeking it....”<sup>84</sup>

Further, it is important to note that the use of therapeutic images does not necessarily imply persuasion as the only means of healing. Nussbaum argues that such images assume that truth as ‘expertise’ already exists and the job of the practitioner is to diagnose the illness (to accurately assess the truth of the situation) and indicate to the patient the path of healing.<sup>85</sup> All that is necessary on the part of the patient is obedience. Understanding is not required. J. Rebecca Lyman demonstrates that Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis (c. 315-403) uses therapeutic images precisely to reject of asceticism and *paideia* as sufficient means to orthodoxy.<sup>86</sup> They are far too open to heresy through misunderstanding and argumentation. Epiphanius instead advocates unquestioning obedience to orthodox teachers such as himself who are able to properly diagnose and prescribe healing from sin. As we have seen in Gregory, the philosopher-physician blends the same elements Epiphanius rejects. In the hands of Gregory (and Chrysostom as well), the physician diagnoses and prescribes, but cannot dictate. Thus, persuasion, a key element of *paideia* as taught in philosophical schools, remains important. This modifies though hardly eradicates the paternalistic emphasis embedded in the image.

It is interesting then, to notice that Gregory’s use of models and metaphors that portray the priest as a ruler also emphasizes skills and techniques that encourage persuasion rather than obedience. As an aristocrat, Gregory regards hierarchy as essential to a well-functioning church. People need to be ruled for the sake of their salvation. It is just as

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<sup>84</sup> Andrew Louth, “St. Gregory Nazianzen on Bishops and the Episcopate,” 285.

<sup>85</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*. CITE

<sup>86</sup> J. Rebecca Lyman, “Ascetics and Bishops: Epiphanius on Orthodoxy,” in *Orthodoxie, Christianisme, Histoire*, ed. Susanna Elm et al. (Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 2000).

wrong for all to desire to rule (anarchy) as it is for a qualified person to refuse to lead (*Or.* 2.4).<sup>87</sup> It is no more strange that “the majority of those devoted to the study of divine things” rule over the flock than it is for a good sailor to be promoted to steer the ship, or a worthy soldier to become captain and then general (*Or.* 2.5).<sup>88</sup> Promotion is based on appropriate knowledge, the learned skill of navigation, and the good performance of relevant duties. Gregory allows that God may order the church by either providence or merit, but he clearly prefers the latter, emphasizing the necessity of real skills and capabilities on the part of the priest (*Or.* 2.3). Gregory’s priestly language elevates the priesthood, placing the presbyter above the laity. The priest is to his flock as a soul is to the body or the intellect to the soul (*Or.* 2.3). Each of these metaphors emphasizes the asymmetrical relationship of the ruler to the ruled: a sailor who sails a ship, a general of soldiers, rationality to will and will to body.

Yet the task of the priest is to elevate the flock, just as the soul elevates the body and the intellect the soul. This task requires an ‘elevated’ leader. Gregory is acutely aware of the seeming impossibility of the task and the great burden it bestows:

Who can mould, as clay-figures are modeled in a single day, the defender of the truth, who is to take his stand with Angels, and give glory with Archangels, and cause the sacrifice to ascend to the altar on high, and share the priesthood of Christ, and renew the creature, and set forth the image, and create inhabitants for the world above, aye and, greatest of all, be God, and make others to be God? (*Or.* 2.73).<sup>89</sup>

The presbyter stands with the angels, makes possible the Eucharist and models the image of God, all claims that elevate the presbyter and demand that the person in this position possess the highest virtue, education and skills. The priest must make every effort to *be*

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<sup>87</sup> This view underscores Elm’s argument that Gregory’s refusal to lead may be less than genuine since Gregory is clearly qualified to do so.

<sup>88</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, “Cyril of Jerusalem and Gregory Nazianzen,” 320(206).

precisely what *all Christians are becoming*. Gregory is justifiably nervous about the task and not so naive as to think that either he or any other presbyter has succeeded. In the quotation above, Gregory is asserting the *impossibility* of the presbyter to do what has been asked, not a statement of what the presbyter is or has already achieved. His emphasis on the importance of the priest's self-knowledge, recognition of his own sickness and the necessary confession of sin is cast in rhetorical language, which is intended to highlight the burden of responsibility that comes with ordination and the danger of taking it lightly.

For some moderns, Gregory's view of the laity is potentially patronizing: they are sheep, soldiers, ships, patients, students. Gregory is hardly free of the aristocratic assumptions of his era. He is no egalitarian, and his 'merit' assumes access to the philosophical life of leisure, or in this case, a disciplined time of retreat and study of scripture, that is more readily available to the wealthy than the lower classes of late-ancient Mediterranean society. These models do not present a clear view of a competent and educated laity that might partner in its own healing, a particularly modern concern that complicates any simple appropriation of his metaphors today. Gregory is not subverting the status quo. He is concerned with the genuine need for institutional organization, and articulates this need in the hierarchical categories of his day.

### **Eikon of Virtue**

However unflattering Gregory's metaphors are towards those who are not priests, Gregory recognizes that remaining in relationships of subordination is not the goal of participation in God. The asymmetry between priests and laity is of a temporary (even temporal) nature. In terms of modern discussions of the priesthood, the 'ontological'

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 341(220).

change ‘within’ the presbyter is, from Gregory’s perspective, a change in relationship to the community, not a change in quality or value of the person.<sup>90</sup> The priest is no longer ruled but a ruler whose primary task is, by being the *eikon* of virtuous humanity, to persuade the ruled to be like the one truly human person towards whom the virtuous humanity of the priest points, Christ. There is no special grace, no mystical change in the person of the presbyter. Oddly enough, by doing his or her job well, to “be God, and make others to be God” (*Or.* 2.73), the ideal presbyter works him or herself right out of a job. In a beautiful mix of images alluding to the *Phaedrus*, Gregory summarizes the ‘art’ of the priesthood:

... the scope of our art is to provide the soul with wings, to rescue it from the world and give it to God, and to watch over that which is in His image, if it abides, to take it by the hand, if it is in danger, to restore it, if ruined, to make Christ to dwell in the heart by the Spirit: and, in short, to deify, and bestow heavenly bliss upon, one who belongs to the heavenly host (*Or.* 2.22).<sup>91</sup>

Just as the presbyter stands among the heavenly host, so too will the people of God. To read these passages and verbal images out of context misses Gregory’s intent in utilizing such elevated language. Gregory is not asserting the superiority of the priest over the people, but assuming that leadership is necessary to model virtue. Again, modern readers may rightly argue that hierarchy to the degree that Gregory and his peers assert is not the only means to this end. However, for Gregory, these metaphors are warnings *to priests* of responsibility, burden and accountability. The continued call towards perfection is no less dynamic for priests than for laity. The acquisition of virtue is a continual process for *all*

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<sup>90</sup> This understanding of ordination as a change in relationship is emphasized by John Zizioulas. Zizioulas argues that inasmuch as relationship influences our being, a change in one’s relationship within a community is an ontological change: “Thus it becomes impossible in this state to say that one simply ‘functions’ without implying that his being is deeply and decisively affected by what he does. In the same way, it becomes impossible to imply in this state that one ‘possesses’ anything as an individual.... Ordination and ministry as communion are precisely and only describable in terms of love.” John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 226-27. This understanding of ontology as springing out of relationship is quite consistent with my emphasis on virtue as enacted in and through relationships.

*Christians*, priest no less than parishioner. Metaphors that elevate the priest as a leader of the people are reminders that all are called to the same status, that of standing with the heavenly host before God, and all are called to the same virtuous life.

It is important not to mistake Gregory's innovative language for the priest as *eikon* as innovative language for the people of God. The call to all people to become the image of Christ who is the image of God is *prior* to the priest as *eikon*, and, in actuality, necessitates it. To receive and pursue *theosis* is what it means to be a baptized member of the community. In baptism, all the members, young and old, male and female, rich and poor, learned and laborers, have "put on Christ" (Gal. 3.2). It is precisely because each person is already called to deification through their common baptism that the priest precedes (perhaps only by a step or two) the people by becoming and calling all to become an *eikon* of this new humanity. The *eikon* of the priest as a virtuous participant in the life of the Trinity journeys before and encourages all Christians to become that same *eikon*.<sup>92</sup>

### 2.2.3: Gender and Priesthood

Gregory the Theologian takes an unquestionably multi-dimensional approach in elucidating the Christian priesthood, piling metaphor upon metaphor. He does not primarily utilize gendered metaphors, but instead, emphasizes the model of the philosopher-physician and the metaphors that it inspires. His sparing use of gendered metaphors, however demonstrates two crucial points. First, Gregory makes no explicit reference to priestly ministry as inherently sexed or gender. Masculinity bears no special place in the priesthood,

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<sup>91</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, "Cyril of Jerusalem and Gregory Nazianzen," 325(209).

<sup>92</sup> For a discussion of Gregory's view of pastoral ministry as an 'administration of the Trinity,' see Christopher Alfred Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God*. Received too recently to fully incorporate into this section, it is a very interesting integration of Gregory's obvious concern with trinitarian orthodoxy and ecclesial ministry.



beyond the fact that the priesthood in his period is exclusively male. This exclusive maleness might well have led him to assume or even argue, had he addressed the question directly, that only men could be priests. But the fact remains that he never made such an argument (unlike his successor Chrysostom) and that his models and metaphors are not exclusively or even necessarily male. Second, Gregory's "new humanity" incorporates into one body ideals associated with *both* genders. Not only, then, is it impossible to draw from Gregory any notion that a theoretically gendered attribute can only be embodied by its corresponding sex, but in order to be an *eikon* of virtuous humanity, a given person must exhibit behaviors and relationships that can be metaphorically evoked by *both* masculine and feminine metaphors. The priesthood is not a masculine ministry, but a ministry that embodies the full range of this "new humanity." Gender remains relevant, though the ability of a given gendered attribute to be expressed by either sex defies any simple reduction of sex to gender or vice versa. What remains important, as with all metaphorical language, is that to which the model or metaphor points.

### Gendered Imagery

Given that gender plays no explicit part in Gregory's early orations on the priesthood, his use of gendered imagery to describe his teaching ministry once it has been taken away from him is striking. In his early texts, the priest is neither parent (father or mother) nor spouse (bride or bridegroom). In his post-Constantinopolitan autobiographical poems, however Gregory speaks of the bishop as responsible for the 'birth' of the faithful, describing his former congregation as "pure offspring of my labor pains."<sup>93</sup> Gregory makes

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<sup>93</sup> 2.1.15.17. In Suzanne Abrams Rebillard, "Speaking for Salvation," 263.

frequent references to his congregants as ‘children.’<sup>94</sup> The loss of his congregation leaves him, a celibate man, childless: “Now as a stranger, solitary I wander in alien lands/trailing along a lamentable life and feeble old age/without a throne, without a city, childless, concerned for my children/living out day upon day with ever-wandering feet” (2.1.43.9-12).<sup>95</sup>

### **Dream of Anastasia**

The exiled Gregory dreams of his former congregation, the Church of the Anastasia. Seated on his episcopal throne, surrounded by the elders, “leaders of the flock, a select generation” (2.1.16.10), deacons in “resplendent clothing/the very images of angelic splendor” (2.1.16.11-12), Gregory watches the people enter, learned and ignorant alike (2.1.16.37-38), buzzing like bees (2.1.16.13), ebbing and flowing like waves as they jockey for position, “longing to hear my homilies” (2.1.16.22).

Then the Trinity, singularly holy, was flowing from my mouth  
shining with its triple beauty unstopped,  
In strong voice, in the swell of the burning Spirit,  
and in the leaps of competing homilies.  
Some, then, were moved and were praising, but others wondered  
In silence, some still mumbling in speech, other in their *nous*,  
as the unspeakable birth pangs died, still others fought  
as a wave stirred by the winds.  
But eloquence charmed them all.... (2.1.16.29-37)

### **Birth Pangs of Preaching**

The difficult labor of teaching orthodox doctrine is likened to the birth pangs of a mother. Again, Gregory grieves:

Often in the great evils of my miseries, I have called the name of

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<sup>94</sup> See poem 2.1.5.9; 2.1.6.9; 2.1.10.8; 2.1.15.52; 2.1.16.52; 2.1.30.103; 2.1.32.50; 2.1.37.2; 2.1.43.11; and 2.1.92.10, available in *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 363.

Christ the Lord, for a lord bears even the servitude  
spoken by the mouth of his servant as a quiet whisper,  
and as a good father often accepts gently the rashness  
of the public words of his own foolish son;  
for this reason may you also, God, be gentle towards my speech,  
which my tormented heart, Most Wonderful One, will offer you.  
A small cure for my suffering is the bellowed birth pangs of my *phren*.<sup>96</sup>

Abrams Rebillard points out the familial and gendered imagery in the poem:

The two models ...that Gregory wishes for Christ to emulate – a lord toward a servant, a father towards a son – are both relationships between a speaker and an audience, both couched in a form of parental imagery. Gregory thus likens Christ to a father and himself as he speaks, or at least his *φρήν*, to a mother. In a general sense, Christ and priest are father and mother whose offspring are the laity faithful to the doctrines of Nicene orthodoxy. Although he does not explicitly describe the Nicene laity, himself, and Christ as an individual family unit, he does hint at such a familial metaphor. By characterizing his speech as a birth process inspired by the Trinity, he implies that speech is a reproductive process in which the priest as mother and the Trinity (especially Christ or the Holy Spirit) as father join to produce an orthodox community.<sup>97</sup>

Abrams Rebillard does not translate *phren*, for which there is no English equivalent. It is “the midriff, a more physical reference. As such, it acquires the functions of the organs in that large part of the body (where the heart lies), including emotions and appetites, as well as the cognitive functions covered by the English term ‘mind.’”<sup>98</sup> Abrams Rebillard is careful to point out that the *phren* “is clearly distinct from the *nous* because it relates specifically to mortal reason and the intellectual processes that result from earthly experience.”<sup>99</sup> In the Platonic hierarchy to which Gregory still ascribes, this is a female element. Here, Gregory incorporates the feminine into his male body.

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<sup>96</sup> 2.1.19.1-8. Ibid., 19. The full poem is found on pp. 282-289.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

### Nursing Laity

Speaking trinitarian orthodoxy is not only an act of a woman in labor, but of a nursing mother:

I groan for having dropped the reins of a devout people,  
not having rejected them, but in no way having them in hand:  
a people that earlier exulted in my homilies  
because from my tongue the triple light shone forth.  
But now, as a weaning infant in the arms of his mother  
pulls on a dry nipple  
with his thirsting lips, but his desire is disappointed by his mother,  
so also from my tongue the people are suspended,  
yearning for more of the previously flowing spring,  
from which now their ears have not even a little juice.  
Others gush forth a sweet stream, but those listening  
grieve, for they do not have the speech of their father.<sup>100</sup>

Here, Gregory's tongue is a breast for his nursing laity. Gregory jolts his audience by intentionally mixing metaphors. We do not hear of the tongue of a child and its desire to taste milk, but instead of the nourishment provided by the nipple that is Gregory's tongue. "This thwarting of expectations points us toward the multiplicity of functions of the tongue: it is an organ of both speech and taste. Because it also represents the priest himself and his responsibilities toward the laity, this reminder of the functional flexibility of the organ may be transferred to the priest."<sup>101</sup> Rebillard focuses on the flexibility required by the priest to meet the varied needs of congregants at different stages of spiritual development, a flexibility indicated by the earlier model of a physician who must treat each patient uniquely. The fact that a single object, the tongue, draws on so many associations underscores the fluidity of both the metaphor and that to which it points. The multiple functions of the tongue in Gregory's poetry serves as a vivid indication that the metaphors that describe priestly tasks and relationships are fluid.

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 23.

## New Humanity

Recently, Elm has developed her thesis regarding Gregory's innovation of ascetics as priests in the context of contemporary debates regarding the late-ancient construction of masculinity. Gregory, in a complex effort to firmly establish the legitimacy of a Christian as opposed to pagan *paideia*, engages the concern that celibate males lack the most obvious evidence of maleness, children. In order to do this he, in a manner both like and unlike his contemporary and nemesis the emperor Julian, constructs for himself an ideal Christian philosopher's family.<sup>102</sup> He is, of course, the pinnacle of his family's progeny. The authority derived from his construction does not assume paternity as its sole source. Gregory develops, says Elm,

... a new form of authority that derived its potency from a new form of humanity. This 'new humanity' encompassed both paternity and maternity. Rather than being 'subversive' because it assumed feminine aspects declared by definition 'inferior', Gregory's form of authority and hence masculinity was on the contrary doubly powerful: it claimed both the social and cultural potential of the role of the elite father and mother, the male and the female head of household, and thus claimed a dual fecundity and a dual potency.<sup>103</sup>

By constructing himself as mother, Elm continues, Gregory creates a "a divine sonship and philosophical fatherhood that drew its potency from the amalgamation (and hence obliteration) of gendered difference into one universal human that was mother in order to be more father, generating children, *logoi*, that were nothing other than the visible and intelligent representation of the Logos that was 'the blessedness above.'"<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>102</sup> This theory is developed in Susanna Elm, "Gregory's Women: Creating a Philosopher's Family," in *Gregory of Nazianzus: Images and Reflections*, ed. Jostein Børtnes, and Tomas Hägg (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2006).

<sup>103</sup> Susanna Elm, "Family Men. Masculinity and Philosophy in Late Antiquity," in *Transformations of Late Antiquity: Essays for Peter Brown*, ed. Philip Rousseau (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009).

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

If Gregory only constructed his own male body as doubly fecund, then it would appear that Gregory is enhancing his own masculinity by claiming femininity as his own, leaving nothing for female bodies. Gender difference is indeed obliterated, resulting in a “universal human” that is, unsurprisingly given the period, primarily male.<sup>105</sup> This is hardly a solution that appropriately addresses the full range of unique and irreducible human persons. However, Gregory does not merely construct *himself* as a male and female. In his eulogies to his sister, Gregory characterizes both Gorgonia and their mother Nonna as true philosophers, a traditionally male role, and himself as the recipient of now positively valued “womanly influence.” “Gregory leaves no doubt,” says Elm, “that he himself is far more Nonna’s spiritual child than her physical one: ‘God brought me to my radiant mother in return for her prayers;’ ‘through her prayers I came to the light.’”<sup>106</sup> Elm notes that through Gregory’s speech, “as true philosophers his mother and sister are also both mother and father, doubly fecund themselves, since they too created spiritual children through philosophy....”<sup>107</sup>

### Sex and Gender fluidity

Gregory beautifully demonstrates a sexed bodily experience as one of *fluid* ‘gendered’ behavior. His male body nurses his children with the life-giving trinitarian milk, without which his children cry out in hunger. The female body of his mother is the locus of the woman who is his spiritual father. Notice that Gregory, in his male body, engages in the symbolic, simultaneous performance of both genders. Gregory does not simply take on the

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<sup>105</sup> See Virginia Burrus’s provocative but very interesting study on the construction of masculinity and its interplay with Trinitarian doctrine Virginia Burrus, *Begotten, Not Made: Conceiving Manhood in Late Antiquity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

<sup>106</sup> Susanna Elm, “Family Men.” citing Gr. Naz. *Carm.* 2.1.92.4 ; 2.1.94.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

attributes we label as masculine or feminine, but he images himself as engaging in the sexed functions that point towards supposedly gendered attributes. Sexed male and female bodies symbolically perform the ‘other’ sexed activity, and in so doing, become more effectively what they are in relation to their offspring, a mother or father.

Elm argues that Gregory’s intentional construction of a new humanity that incorporates male and female is not subversive in the sense of much modern scholarship. Gregory clearly secures his power as a Christian philosopher through the reiterative performance of gender norms. But by performing both genders, he subverts neither one of them, nor does he value one (typically the masculine) over the other (typically the feminine). He also does not dismiss gender and its powerful metaphorical associations. Rather, he expands the definition of humanity to incorporate the socially accepted gender (and class-based) norms of his society. His efforts underscore that full humanity requires both paternity and maternity.<sup>108</sup> For Gregory, this creation of a “new humanity” encompassing both maternity and paternity is in all likelihood an element of his larger anthropology emphasizing an eschatological, non-sexed and gendered humanity. In the non-eschatological present, however his theology of the human person does not support a rigid or reductive binarism of gendered behavior (though his theology says nothing that undermines a continued binarism of sexed bodies). Gregory does not obliterate body and sexed or gendered difference, but instead, appeals to them as a means of becoming more powerful as both mother and father.

As a priest then, his effectiveness requires the ability to teach like a woman whose words are life-giving milk to his children. This metaphorical description of the power of Gregory’s teaching says nothing about the function of teaching itself. Instead, it highlights

the intimacy and network of relations created by teaching something so important as trinitarian orthodoxy. Gender metaphors serve to create powerful emotional connections between priest and congregants. As Gregory constructs himself as a philosopher on a par with the emperor Julian, his family not only legitimizes his full humanity, but also bridges the gap created by a ministry situation in which relationships are not one-on-one, but one-to-many. In the context of priesthood, gendered metaphors do not limit *who* can teach, but highlight that teaching is as crucial to the Christian life as a mother's milk is to an infant.

The priest as *eikon* of a new humanity must be able to move between the types of relations indicated by the many metaphors Gregory utilizes according to the need, the task or person at hand. A priest does not have a primarily masculine or feminine role. Rather, among the many roles and relationships required by his or her duties (counselor, teacher, ruler), the priest takes on masculine *and* feminine roles as needed. The qualities that we describe as gendered (whether they truly are or not) must be embodied by each and every person as well as by the priest who models our full humanity. Difference co-exists and intermingles, dynamically embodied without eradication.

### 2.3: John Chrysostom

John Chrysostom's famous treatise *On the Priesthood* was penned two decades after its source and model, Gregory's *Second Oration*. Chrysostom adds very little to Gregory's content, so my treatment here will be brief. The differences are a matter of style and Chrysostom's gift as a persuasive moralist rather than a philosophical theologian. Chrysostom, who like Gregory includes the ministry of bishops and their associates the

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.



presbyters, wrote the treatise between 381 and 386 while a deacon at Antioch.<sup>109</sup> *On the Priesthood* serves two purposes: first, to present the great dignity and burden of the priesthood, and second, by doing so, to justify Chrysostom's own avoidance of the ministry.<sup>110</sup> It is difficult to discern whether Chrysostom's extremely high view of the priesthood is persuasive rhetoric aimed at elevating an office that has been defamed by unacceptable candidates, an exaggeration that emphasizes his own unworthiness for the office from which he fled, or both. According to Chrysostom, the priest "must be as pure as if he were standing in heaven itself" (III.4),<sup>111</sup> bears the sole responsibility "for our birth from God, that blessed second birth," baptism (III.5),<sup>112</sup> and holds a "great office without which we cannot attain to salvation or God's good promises" (III.5).<sup>113</sup>

### 2.3.1: Shepherd

The call of the priest to be a shepherd is, for Chrysostom, an indication of the great love Christ bears for his flock. Christ could have commanded Peter to "practise fasting, sleeping on the bare ground, and prolonged vigils; champion to the wronged; be 'as a father to the fatherless and instead of a husband to their mother'" (II.2).<sup>114</sup> Yet according to Chrysostom, the ascetic helps only himself, and the one who distributes alms or "defends the wronged" does good to some, "but less than the priest, as the body is less than the soul,"

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<sup>109</sup> For dates see John Chrysostom, *On Priesthood*, 23ff; Brian E. Daley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 193 n.52.

<sup>110</sup> The veracity of Chrysostom's claim to have allowed his more deserving friend Basil to be ordained, while he himself escaped in order to avoid the same fate is questioned. For the case against it, see Johannes Quasten, and Angelo Di Berardino, *Patrology* (Westminster, Md: Christian Classics, Inc, 1986). Both Kelly and Neville support the veracity of the story. See John Chrysostom, *On Priesthood*, 20-24; J. N. D. Kelly, *Golden Mouth: The Story of John Chrysostom--Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 25-26.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 70. Page numbers refer to the English translation. Parenthetical references refer to traditional numbering of the six books and their subsections. Neville, the translator of the edition used, renumbers the sections according to the logic of the books as a single unit with far more than six 'chapters.'

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 72.

since the “shepherd’s skill extends to the whole people” (II.4).<sup>115</sup> Christ’s final command to Peter to care for his sheep is given “to teach us how much he cares for the supervision of these flocks” (II.1).<sup>116</sup> Chrysostom reads John 21:17 and Matthew 24:47 together, commenting that Christ was no more ignorant of the love Peter bore him than he was of who was faithful and wise. Rather, Christ “wanted to show how few there are and how important is this office” (II.1).<sup>117</sup>

The shepherd, as the guide and defender of the flock, must be “as much above the rest in spiritual stature as Saul was above the whole nation of the Hebrews in bodily stature—or rather, far more. Let us not look for a difference only ‘from the shoulder and upward’ but let the difference between shepherd and sheep be as great as the distinction between rational and irrational creatures...”(II.2).<sup>118</sup> That Chrysostom is, for the purposes of these treatises, exaggerating the value of the priestly role is evident when one remembers that in another sermon whose persuasive goal is not the importance of priesthood but of almsgiving, he claims that nothing, not even virginity, is more important for the Christian than giving generously to those in need.<sup>119</sup> Chrysostom is writing as a defense of his own choice to escape ordination. He not only engages in rhetorical exaggeration but bases his defense on his own inadequacy, reflected in his desire for the ‘easier’ life of the ascetic.

Further, Chrysostom recognizes his own rhetorical exaggeration. The parallel drawn between the laity and “irrational creatures” is a problem Chrysostom realizes and that he

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 54. The NPNF renders the final phrase, somewhat more sensibly, “be as a father to orphans, and supply the place of a husband to their mother.” NPNF I.09, 40.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 58-59.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 53. It is debatable that Matthew 24 is a reference to priesthood.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 54. Chrysostom is referencing 1 Sam. 9.2.

<sup>119</sup> See “Concerning Almsgiving and the Ten Virgins,” 3.13 in John Chrysostom, *On Repentance and Almsgiving*, trans. Gus George Christo, vol. 96, The Fathers of the Church (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 36-37.

does not strictly maintain. The shepherd who loses sheep through accident, the attacks of wild animals or thieves is accountable to an owner who at best will offer pardon, and at worst, demand monetary compensation. The penalty for the loss of any member of the “rational flock of Christ” is loss “not of money but of his own soul” (II.2).<sup>120</sup> Congregants are not irrational sheep, but rational persons. As a result, like Gregory before him, Chrysostom limits his metaphor. A genuine shepherd who leads a real flock easily sees the suffering of sheep and has “full power to compel the sheep to accept the treatment if they do not submit of their own accord”(II.2).<sup>121</sup> A shepherd can enforce a particular diet or perform a necessary surgery regardless of the will of the sheep. This is not the case with human beings. It is possible to forbid particular behaviors and recommend ‘surgery,’ but the priest is neither a real shepherd who can physically drive straying members of the flock back to safety nor a secular judge who can compel criminals.<sup>122</sup> The model of a shepherd does not allow for the necessary personal freedom to choose among particular actions and behaviors.

### 2.3.2: Physician

To solve this, Chrysostom enhances the metaphor of the shepherd with the metaphor of the physician who recognizes that “the decision to receive treatment does not lie with the man who administers the medicine but actually with the patient” (II.2).<sup>123</sup> The physician must offer a balanced treatment:

If you behave too leniently to one who needs deep surgery, and do not make a deep enough incision in one who requires it, you mutilate yet miss the cancer. But if you make the needed incision without mercy, often the

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<sup>120</sup> John Chrysostom, *On Priesthood*, 54.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>122</sup> Chrysostom refers to a judge in Ibid., 56.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

patient, in despair at his sufferings, throws all aside at once, medicine and bandage alike, and promptly throws himself over a cliff (II.3).<sup>124</sup>

Chrysostom moves from the apparent guardianship of the shepherd to Paul's focus on a shared work, "we are workers with you for your joy" (2 Cor 1.24). The shepherd-physician encourages change by "persuasion" that requires discernment and tact rather than fear, compulsion or force. The shepherd-physician requires "great wisdom and a thousand eyes, to examine the soul's condition from every angle" (II.4).<sup>125</sup> The absence of wisdom, the inability or unwillingness to examine a situation from every angle, or the tendency to enforce moral rules with too much strictness creates a stubborn backlash that may "make the tear worse"(II.3).<sup>126</sup> The physician not only understands the importance of the willing participation of people in their own healing, but recognizes the uniqueness of each person. Wisdom, a primary virtue of the physician, is necessary in order to discern the particular needs of each unique and irreducible patient. It is this process that Louis Patsavos refers to as "individualization, according to which the doctor of souls must understand well that maladies of the soul are varied, as are the spiritual condition and character of each individual."<sup>127</sup>

### 2.3.3: Preacher

For Chrysostom, the priest as physician serves to highlight healing through persuasion into the virtuous life. Chrysostom, known for a pragmatic rather than theological approach to controversy, does not stress the importance of ascetic withdrawal in order to understand truth and identify heresy, as does Gregory. Like Gregory, however, Chrysostom

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 57.

prioritizes the learned quality of discernment in order to heal the sin-sick. Persuasion in the form of preaching is the most important skill for Chrysostom, a reflection perhaps, of his own well-known gifts. Given the importance of preaching as the product of rhetoric, training is certainly assumed. Further, Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of the teaching function of presbyters, specifically, the ability to speak the truth. While the presbyter is physician and shepherd, “when all is said and done, there is only one means and only one method of treatment available, and that is teaching by word of mouth.”<sup>128</sup> Note here a difference from Gregory. Chrysostom does not emphasize the priest as a model of virtue. Virtue is important for the character of the priest as a leader who stands before God. Persuasion, the tool of the priest, is done via words and presumes the presence of wisdom that comes from the practice of virtue. However, in this text, Chrysostom rarely uses metaphor or imagery to describe this essential skill.

### 2.3.4: Mother-Father

Chrysostom is frequently cited to demonstrate the elevated nature of the priesthood. Chrysostom urges Basil to dwell on “the excellence of this sacred office,” associating the priest who stands before the “sacrificial fire” of the Holy Spirit called down from above just as Elijah called down fire from heaven. Priests are those who are persuaded “while still remaining in the flesh to represent the ministry of angels” (III.4).<sup>129</sup> While all humanity has received authority over earth as stewards, it is only actions of the priest that are “ratified by God” (III.5).<sup>130</sup> Without priests, salvation and the promises of God are unreachable since

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<sup>127</sup> Lewis J. Patsavos, “Image of the Priest According to the Three Hierarchs,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 21 (1976), 68-69.

<sup>128</sup> John Chrysostom, *On Priesthood*, 115.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>130</sup> On Matt. 18.18. *Ibid.*, 72.

baptism and Eucharist “can happen through no other agency except their sacred hands”(III.5).<sup>131</sup> What is rarely noted in the frequent citations of Chrysostom’s elevation of the priesthood is that he accomplishes this using a birth metaphor. The baptismal work of the priest is a great effort that Chrysostom likens to the birth process:

They are the ones—they and no others—who are in charge of spiritual travail and responsible for the birth that comes through baptism. Through them we put on Christ and are united with the Son of God and become limbs obedient to that blessed Head. So they should properly be not only more feared than rulers and kings, but more honoured even than fathers. For our fathers begot us “of blood and the will of the flesh”; but they are responsible for our birth from God, that blessed second birth, our true emancipation, the adoption according to grace (III.5).<sup>132</sup>

The association of baptism with death and birth into new life is a common Pauline metaphor.<sup>133</sup> It is easy to overlook the gendered associations of birth, especially since the passage explicitly mentions begetting by fathers. The point of the passage, however, is that the begetting by earthly fathers is trivial compared to the midwifery of the priest. The male reproductive function of insemination is superseded by the female reproductive function of God who is giving birth in the presence of the priest-midwife. The priest, serving in a traditional woman’s role, supervises and is responsible for “that blessed second birth, our true emancipation....”<sup>134</sup>

The assumption of presbyter as only a ‘father’ is pervasive in contemporary Orthodox discussions of the priesthood. Louis Patsavos, in an address given in celebration of the Feast of the Three Hierarchs, says of Chrysostom’s theology that the “priest appears as an intermediary to whom the entire community is entrusted, and he occupies the place of a father to the faithful. As their spiritual father, he entreats God on behalf of the

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> See Gal. 4:14-5:1, Titus 3:5, Romans 6:1-14.

community. For this reason he must surpass everyone in all things.”<sup>135</sup> Patsavos is correct in stating that the presbyter “must surpass everyone in all things” as this is the emphasis of Chrysostom in both of the passages he cites supporting his statement. What makes Patsavos’s citation slightly problematic is that only one of these passages mentions the presbyter as father. The first reference, given above, rhetorically connects the “awe-inspiring” earthly liturgical rite with the “ministry of angels” (III.4).<sup>136</sup> The priest, therefore, must be as pure as if he were standing in heaven itself, “in the midst of those powers” (III.4).<sup>137</sup> There is no mention of the presbyter as father in this passage. The second passage emphasizes the responsibility of the presbyter as an “ambassador” who “begs God to be merciful to the sins of all men,” an intercessor who exceeds even Moses and Elijah, one who

...approaches God as if he were responsible for the whole world, and himself the father of all men, praying that wars everywhere may end and tumults cease, supplicating for peace and prosperity, and a speedy release from all ills, private or public, that threaten any man. He must so far surpass all those for whom he intercedes in all qualities as one in authority ought to properly surpass those under his charge (VI.4).<sup>138</sup>

‘Fatherhood’ is hyperbolic in this passage, extending not merely to a particular congregation but to “the whole world.” Note also that what the priest does as father is hardly unique to men, since surely women pray and supplicate. The passage establishes the love and responsibility the intercessor bears towards those for whom he, or she, intercedes.

Finally, Chrysostom’s parental images serve to elevate the priesthood over parenthood, not assert a spiritual equivalency between the parents and priests:

God has given greater power to priests than to natural parents [φυσικῶν γονέων], not only for punishment, but also for help. The difference

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Lewis J. Patsavos, “Image of the Priest According to the Three Hierarchs,” 66. See his note 84 for citation references.

<sup>136</sup> John Chrysostom, *On Priesthood*, 70.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 140.

between the two is as great as between the present and the future life. Parents bring us into this life; priests into the life to come. Parents cannot avert bodily death nor drive away the onset of disease; priests have often saved the soul that is sick and at the point of death, by making the punishment milder for some, and preventing others from ever incurring it, not only through instruction and warning, but also through helping them by prayer. They have the authority to remit sins, not only when they make us regenerate, but afterwards too.... Again, natural parents [φυσικοὶ γονεῖς] cannot help their sons if they fall foul of the prominent and powerful, but priests have often appeased the anger of God himself, to say nothing of rulers and kings (III.6).<sup>139</sup>

Chrysostom's repeated use of the phrase φυσικοὶ γονεῖς, literally translated 'physical parents,' provides a contrast to the priest's role as a *spiritual* parent. Further, by using the term 'parents,' he affirms that it is not merely fathers who "bring us into this life," seek to "avert bodily death" and "the onset of disease," or seek mercy for their children, but mothers who do the same.

### 2.3.5: The weakness of women

Chrysostom, unlike Gregory, mentions the possibility of female priests, summarily rejecting them due to their "weakness":

The other things I have mentioned could easily be carried out by many of those under authority, women as well as men. But when someone has to preside over the Church and be entrusted with the care of so many souls, then let all womankind give way before the magnitude of the task—and indeed most men. Bring before us those who far excel all others and are as much above the rest in spiritual stature as Saul was above the nation of Hebrews in bodily stature—or rather, far more. Let us not look for a difference only "from the shoulder and upward" but let the difference between shepherd and sheep be as great as the distinction between rational and irrational creatures (II.2).<sup>140</sup>

Chrysostom here is alluding the socially accepted assumption of women as less able to attain virtue or practice wisdom, and the assumption that men have a certain level of preeminence

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 54.



in the presence of women. Since most men, who are presumably more able to attain virtue than women, cannot sufficiently excel in the virtue necessary for such a holy and elevated role, surely all women will fail. Later, Chrysostom complains that though “divine law excludes women from this ministry,” women “forcibly push themselves in, and since they can do nothing personally, they do everything by proxy” (III.9).<sup>141</sup> Chrysostom’s further comments about women in these books, directed towards meddling widows, corrupted virgins and gossiping women, leave little reason to wonder at the modern characterization of Chrysostom as a misogynist.<sup>142</sup> The debate will not be settled here. Whether or not this type of rhetoric characterizes the whole of his rhetoric (and it does not) regarding women is not the point. Rather, the pressing question is this: do we, today, believe that women are less able to attain virtue than men? Less able to exercise wisdom? It is important to remember that Chrysostom uses rhetoric in a manner we might consider irresponsible today. Harrison has written extensively on this subject, arguing that despite moments of androcentrism and even misogyny, theologians of the patristic era inexorably moved away from the culturally assumed weakness and inability of women in light of the extraordinary lives of faith witnessed to by the growing number of female saints and holy women.<sup>143</sup> This was not a smooth or consistent movement and the struggle to escape the social assumption of their era continues to reverberate in our theology and practice. But Chrysostom’s reason in this text

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>142</sup> Elizabeth A. Clark, “Sexual Politics in the Writings of John Chrysostom,” *Anglican Theological Review* 59, no. 1 (1977): 3-20; Elizabeth A. Clark, “Theory and Practice in Late Ancient Asceticism: Jerome, Chrysostom, and Augustine,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 5 (1989): 25-46.

<sup>143</sup> Nonna Verna Harrison, “Women and the Image of God According to St. John Chrysostom,” in *In Dominico Eloquentia* (2002). Among Orthodox, David Ford attempted to correct Clark (and others) on Chrysostom, but his conclusions are highly unsatisfying to feminists. Nonna Harrison replied with a typically gracious and insightful critique. See David C. Ford, *Women and Men in the Early Church: The Full Views of St. John Chrysostom* (South Canaan, Pa: St. Tikhon’s Seminary Press, 1996); Nonna Verna Harrison, “The Inevitability of Hermeneutics: David C. Ford on St John Chrysostom,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (2000): 195-205. Additional treatments include Valerie A. Karras, “Male Domination of Woman in the Writings of Saint John

does not require uncritical agreement. Instead, it exemplifies the ambiguity of understanding the new humanity that is the *eikon* of Christ through the practice of virtue in light of the socio-cultural assumptions regarding the ability of men and women to be virtuous.

### 2.4: Conclusion

At no point thus far have I provided a summary of the skills and virtues necessary to the priesthood. My purpose is not to establish a single theology of the priesthood, to prioritize capabilities or virtues. Rather, it is to address the question of female participation in the priesthood in light of the modern emphasis on particular metaphors. By examining the metaphors utilized by Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom, we have the opportunity to read a theology occasioned by an issue other than female participation. Each metaphor highlights a variety of capabilities and practices, including learning, discernment, tact, and persuasion through preaching and exhortation. The virtues range widely, and include humility, patience, perseverance, wisdom, hope and love. The highest of these is of course, love, “the chief of virtues, the talisman of Christ’s disciples, the highest of all spiritual gifts....”<sup>144</sup> Neither of these theologians systematizes or prioritizes these virtues. Their assumption is that virtues are unified in the practice of love. The virtuous life is to be pursued by both males and females as the means, the ends, and the goal of participation in God.

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Chrysostom,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 36, (1991): 131-39; Maria-Fotini Polidoulis Kapsalis, “Image as Authority in the Writings of John Chrysostom” (PhD Diss., University of St. Michael’s College, 2001).

<sup>144</sup> John Chrysostom, *On Priesthood*, 63.

### 2.4.1: A Masculine Ministry?

The contemporary Eastern Orthodox debate on women in the priesthood has centered on the priest as ‘father’ and the assumed headship this metaphor gives to male clergy based on Ephesians 5.<sup>145</sup> It seems reasonable to expect that these foundational texts would provide descriptions of the priesthood as clearly masculine. There is no question that both Chrysostom and Gregory see the presbyter and bishop as a father. But we appear to neglect three important points if we limit ourselves to these metaphors alone. First, the metaphor of ‘father’ is not the primary metaphor used. In reality, it has a very minimal role. The models of shepherd and philosopher-physician predominate and are accompanied by many other models and metaphors. While each metaphor describes something unique about the priest, the range of unique priestly functions cannot be limited to even a few (much less one) of these metaphors. Second, the few appearances of the masculine metaphor of ‘father’ are also accompanied by the feminine metaphor of ‘mother’ depending on the emotion or relation being evoked, relations that are based on ancient understandings of parental roles and gendered virtue. Both are parental metaphors, and their use is based on whichever image will best evoke the desired response and capture the imagination of the audience. Neither Chrysostom, nor especially Gregory, hesitates to apply feminine images to themselves or their priestly role. Finally, there is a distinction between Gregory and Chrysostom, who are males and thus ‘fathers’, and the assertion that the priesthood itself is inherently male. The male priest is not literally a father to his congregation any more than he literally midwifes a new Christian born of God at baptism. Just as the priest is supposed to ‘be’ a father in leadership, the priest must also ‘be’ a midwife to a birth-giving God. These

are metaphorical, not literal, usages, and to claim otherwise has no basis in the texts of either Gregory or Chrysostom.

Relying on masculine metaphors, reducing the metaphorical richness of our theology to a single image, falsely reifies that metaphor. ‘Father’ incorrectly becomes the only way to describe the priesthood, and appears to require male embodiment. The power of these metaphors, the surprise they generate, is in part due to the fact that they are not literally embodied. Gregory’s image of his tongue as a nipple dripping with milk is surprising because his mouth is not a breast, his tongue is not a nipple, and his body does not produce birth milk. And yet he yearns to sustain his children by nursing them at his breast. The new birth of baptism at which Chrysostom presides highlights the intensity and effort entailed in the process of participating in others’ journey into Christ. Gregory’s use of the same metaphor illustrates the urgent and irresistible pressure he feels to speak the truth of God, and reminds his audience that his teaching is the birthplace of their orthodoxy. Chrysostom, the only one of these two theologians to even hint at a woman in the role of priest, rejects the possibility because she is simply not strong enough to handle the magnitude of the task. Yet he does so based on an understanding of women to which most Orthodox would no longer ascribe. If the male priest is both masculine and feminine in his relationship to the people of God, cannot a woman do the same? The priesthood is simply not a masculine ministry.

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<sup>145</sup> Thomas Hopko, “On the Male Character of Christian Priesthood.”; Thomas Hopko, “Presbyter/Bishop: A Masculine Ministry.”

### 2.4.2: An Incomplete Anthropology

As discussed above, the use of gendered metaphors, even when both genders are included, is problematic. On the one hand, it appears that a male usurps a uniquely female function, giving birth. Clearly, the second birth of baptism into life is superior to our first birth that inevitably leads to death. On the other hand, it is crucial to note that in order to adequately describe the import of what happens in baptism, male priests engage in a *female* function. Gregory's construction of himself and his family requires the incorporation of two genders into a single sexed body. Gregory points us towards a way through what I think is an impasse in our two dominant models of theological anthropology, both of which assume rigid divisions of gender. But Gregory does not himself go down this path. In reality, Gorgonia and Nonna were *not* public, therefore masculine, figures, though Macrina as the leader of a community of women had a more public role. It was only in Gregory's rhetorical reconstruction of their lives that they became fathers as well as mothers. Gregory made the private public, the feminine masculine. He plays with gender distinctions, using rhetorical language to construct persons whose gender and roles are fluid. Gregory uses his rhetoric not to elevate Gorgonia or Nonna, though he certainly does that, but to elevate himself, to raise himself as the ideal teacher of Greek *paideia* in the form of trinitarian truth.

The problem is this: if this gendered fluidity of roles and relationships remains a mere rhetorical construction we fail to allow men and women to live their full humanity, in all its diversity, in any real way. We forget with disturbing regularity that as an *eikon* of a new humanity, the priest does not point, *and never has pointed* toward a male body. If we continue to insist that the priest can only be male, we affirm, unintentionally or intentionally, the pointed critique of Virginia Burrhus: this new humanity relegates the female to oblivion,

and reifies the masculine precisely by hiding it in trinitarian transcendence.<sup>146</sup> True wholeness in our liturgical and sacramental life is absent, obliterated by and for the male. Twentieth-century Orthodox theologies that reify the feminine as the source of holiness only do the same thing in reverse. Viewing Gregory's male body as performing both male and female roles as it enacts priesthood does not force us to settle the speculative questions of nature versus *hypostasis*. It allows us a certain amount of mysterious ignorance regarding what humanity is, an ignorance that for Gregory provides a basis for venturing very carefully into the greater mystery that is the Trinitarian God. This ignorance of our full humanity, however, is not an excuse to do nothing and maintain a status quo that, as I will continue to argue, actually denies men and women their full humanity and cheapens the priesthood. We do not know all that makes up our humanness, but we do know that our humanness is only fully evident when we are able to freely practice the full range of virtues and relationships available to us. The priest, whether female or male, enacts "the other" without obliteration, and in doing so, points us towards virtue enacted in and through both female and male bodies.

### 2.4.3: Verbal Icons

More fundamental to Orthodox theology as it currently stands than developing a 'third option' that reifies gender as ontologically fixed is the status of the priest as *eikon*. It is important, in light of the initial rejections of female priests by Orthodox based on the idea of the priest as an icon of Christ, to reiterate that the priest, as an icon, has never pointed to a male body. Iconic arguments are at a basic level correct, the priest *is* an icon of Christ, the theanthropic embodiment of virtue (*in persona Christi*), as well as to virtuous human beings

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<sup>146</sup> Virginia Burrus, *Begotten, Not Made*, 185.

who are distinctly male and female (*in persona ecclesiae*).<sup>147</sup> Further, the priest is not a static icon, but a person who through active, virtuous relationship and particular functions (teaching, engaging in pastoral care and discipline), exemplifies the qualities and characteristics that visually enact a model that all Christians are to implement in their own lives to the best of their ability. The fault of an iconic argument that excludes women from being priestly icons of Christ, a fault which has led to its rejection by Elisabeth Behr-Sigel and others, is that it displays an utterly inadequate iconodule theology. An icon is not simply an image-in-likeness to a person, but the dynamic and participatory presence of its prototype. A male-centered theology of icons bears little resemblance to either the initial theological triumph of icons, or their continued use in the intervening millennia. If, following the suggestion of Harrison that we read metaphors as verbal icons, and Elm's that the priest himself is an *eikon* of virtue, then understanding the role of icons in theology and worship, especially as they relates to virtue and gender, is paramount.

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<sup>147</sup> A common argument in Catholic theology is that the priest acts *in persona Christi*. While Orthodox do not use this language, the idea that the priest is an icon of Christ has permeated the contemporary discussion of women as priests. Kallistos Ware rightly offers two important checks to this trend. First, the priest as icon is a *new* argument "developed in the second half of the twentieth century but not explicit in earlier Tradition." Note that my argument regarding Gregory disagrees with this as a new development, though my position is quite different than other twentieth-century theologians. Second, while Orthodox share with the West the idea of the priest as "*alter Christus*, the image, sign or representative of Christ," in the Byzantine rite, the priest does not speak "*in persona Christi* but *in persona Ecclesiae*." See Kallistos Ware, "Man, Woman and the Priesthood of Christ," in *Women and the Priesthood*, ed. Thomas Hopko (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1983a), 40 and 47. This will be discussed further in chapter four on liturgy and ethics.

# Chapter 3: The Glory of Embodied Diversity:

## Icon, Virtue and Gender

The seal shows its desire for honor when it makes itself available for impression in many different materials. In the same way, although we believe that Christ's own image is in Him as He has human form, nevertheless when we see His image materially depicted in different ways, we praise His greatness more magnificently. For the failure to go forth into a material imprint eliminates His existence in human form.

- Theodore the Studite, *On the Holy Icons*<sup>1</sup>

### 3.1: Introduction

The previous chapter concluded with two sets of questions, the first of which is the focus of this chapter: is the virtuous new humanity embodied by the person who presides at the liturgy necessarily gendered? Before turning to the interplay between icons and gender, much less icons and priesthood, we must carefully step back and examine the relevant aspects of icons themselves. By focusing on iconodule theology, iconographic representation and the practice of icon veneration and contemplation, I will place the question of the iconic nature of the priesthood in its appropriate context.<sup>2</sup> This chapter builds on the preceding argument that the priest is an icon of a new, virtuous humanity. By agreeing with critics of female priests that the priesthood is iconic, I cede a potentially dangerous point. It is the iconic argument that has proven a stumbling block to many thoughtful critics of female ordination, including the early work of both Élisabeth Behr-Sigel

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<sup>1</sup> Theodore the Studite, *On the Holy Icons*, trans. Catherine Roth (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 112.

<sup>2</sup> For a similar approach, see Andrew J. Sopko, "Second Nicaea (787-1987): Eucharist, Image, and Priesthood," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 32 (1987): 379-86.



and Kallistos Ware. It is incorrect, however, to interpret their rejection of iconic arguments against women priests as also rejecting all iconic aspects of the priesthood. In the next chapter, I will discuss the liturgical symbolism of the relationships between presider, congregants, and God. In this chapter, I will develop the shift evident in Behr-Sigel's later work specifically as it relates to the theology of the icon that underlies arguments for or against female priests. Only by understanding the theology and practice underlying icons are we able to correctly decide who (or what) can be an icon of what (or whom). The problem, I believe, is not simply in what or who is being symbolized. Equally important are the ways in which iconic arguments against female priests misuse iconodule theology in regard to the medium that directs the gaze of the beholder, mistakenly assuming a clear and fixed correspondence between a sexed body and supposedly gendered virtues and capabilities. Below, I delineate a theology of icons that allows us to affirm the iconic nature of the priesthood without reducing it to a single symbol or material, a practice foreign to both liturgical theology and the iconodule theology that underlies all liturgical symbolism.

My argument will proceed in the following sections: First, I will draw on early iconodule arguments, primarily those of Theodore the Studite, to establish the importance of the material body as essential to being human. I will argue that Theodore, who speaks specifically of the maleness of Jesus, affirms *particularity* as an indication of human uniqueness, and in so doing, both exacerbates and points towards the beginning of a solution to the problem of "ontological gender."<sup>3</sup> Second, I will proceed to discuss the practice of icon veneration, in light of particularity and virtue. By exploring elements of the iconography of Orthodoxy's most popular Saint, Nicholas the Wonderworker, I argue that icons invite the beholder to participate in a life of virtue as *theosis*. In icons of the saints, we

see the virtues in action, as the way in which Christians are called to relate to others. Third, I will address virtue in context by reflecting on the diverse iconographic and poetic representations of the Theotokos. Here we will see the complex interplay between icons and gender, and note that the virtues idealized by a society are contextual and bear little correspondence to our modern notions of virtue and gender. The diverse portrayals of the Theotokos undercut any single interpretation of gendered virtue or male/female complementarity. Finally, I will conclude by discussing “conceptual icons,” icons and images that reflect ideas, in light of the priesthood and the work of Paul Evdokimov, Nonna Harrison and Élisabeth Behr-Sigel. I will argue that in icons we see a trajectory of virtue that expands both personally and communally, and that is unrestricted by sex or gender. This will bring us back to the iconic symbolism of the priest (and the people) in the liturgy, the topic of the next chapter.

My core contention is that the material symbolism of icons (painted or enfleshed) is fluid. Its purpose is not to draw attention itself as a particular type of material, but to allow its medium to gesture towards divine presence in and through it. The material through which we sense the divine is never static, in part because the symbol and its intended effectiveness shifts with cultural interpretation, in part because the needs of cultures change and so they interpret the symbol differently, and in part (perhaps the most significant part) because the divine reality indicated by the symbol can never be encompassed or completely revealed by any material element or human quality. Orthodoxy speaks of icons as ‘written,’ an acknowledgement that theology is taught in both words and images. ‘Written’ icons reveal the divine in persons by indicating the capacities and virtues of a particular, unique, free human person who participated in the work of God in a way that we (as the church)

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<sup>3</sup> See Introduction, “‘Neo-Theological’ Complementarity”

want to remember. Icons of saints indicate the particular way *this* saint in *this* time related in love to God and neighbor. What we ‘see’ is deification, virtues in relationship.

Icons have consistently illustrated (intentionally or not) that the practices and virtues integral to *theosis* are common to all believers regardless of biological sex or cultural assumptions regarding gender. Icons evidence the complexity and particularity of virtue in practice. In icons, we see our “new humanity” uniquely embodied in each and every person who pursues holiness through virtue. The icon, or the person within the icon, invites us to love God and our neighbor according to our unique capacities and virtues, not in direct imitation, but as we are called, gifted and able to participate in God in our particular lives. The diversity of saints and the diversity of narratives surrounding the saints allow for an infinite range of virtuous practice, limited only by the actual, not assumed or stereotyped, capabilities and situation of each unique person. In short, a properly iconodule theology of *theosis* expresses an Orthodox ethic of full humanity uniquely embodied in each irreducible person. This affirms Behr-Sigel’s personalist commitment to difference without reduction to any particular quality, including biological or culturally performed sex and gender.

The consequence of my contention that the person within the icon invites the beholder to practice virtuous relationships is that iconic arguments that restrict virtues, capacities or roles based on the material of the icon (again, painted or enfleshed) fail to look beyond the material. Singular interpretations of an image allow the eye to halt ‘before’ (temporally and, possibly, spatially) its intended destination that is God. This place, person or thing on which our gaze rests is no trivial matter, since that which fills our gaze is, presumably, where we sense the aspect(s) of divinity the icon reveals to us. If we halt too soon, our visual journey arrested by one bit or another, we risk mistaking the medium for divinity itself. Iconodule theology historically affirms difference without reduction, and so in

its contemporary appropriation, simultaneously rejects as inconsistent and unfaithful to itself any “neo-theological” move that reduces virtues, roles and capabilities to gender and sex. Such a reduction is idolatry, a *fixed gaze* filled by flesh rather than an *iconic gaze* that looks towards the one in whose image we are all created. Instead of seeing in each embodied individual a unique person who points to and participates in the image of God, which is Christ, our vision is filled by flesh and bones in a manner no less idolatrous than if it were filled by paint and wood. This idolatry results in a failure to love the neighbor by refusing to acknowledge his or her uniqueness, and a failure to love the God who is uniquely embodied in and through human persons. The rejection of female priests based on the specially weighted maleness of Jesus, who has *always* been more than just or even primarily male in Orthodox theology, reflects not only the erroneous notion that the priesthood is a solely masculine ministry, but also a misunderstanding of Orthodox iconodule theology and its affirmation of human particularity as a means by which we *sense* God.

### 3.2: Iconodule Theology: Particularity

The seemingly modern concern with bodily particularity was shared by the defenders of icons over a millennia and a half ago, though for very different reasons. Like modern ‘materialists’ of every stripe, late-ancient theologians could not imagine human beings without bodies. Less concerned with how bodies shape our identity and relationships and more concerned with the reality of Christ’s body and its ability to be seen, touched, and ‘written,’ late-ancient theologians of icons laid a foundation for the crucial value of bodily difference as a constituent element of human uniqueness. Perhaps even more surprising is the insight that difference and variety increases the glory and honor offered to God.

The controversy over the use of icons spanned much of the eighth and ninth centuries. Iconoclasm coincided with the dramatic shrinking of the Byzantine empire, beginning in the seventh century with the loss of eastern and southern provinces, the emergence of Islam, and the constant threat of invasion by Arabs, Slavs and Bulgars to its remaining provinces. On a political level, iconoclasm served, among other things, to centralize power in a rapidly dissolving empire.<sup>4</sup> On a theological level, the first wave of iconoclasm was sparked by the religious reforms of Leo III (c. 685-741) whose edicts against the worship of images were affirmed by the Council of Hieria in 754. Initially at issue was the question of idolatry, whether icons violated the Second Commandment. Subsequently, iconoclasts were concerned “that the unlawful art of painting living creatures blasphemed the fundamental doctrine of our salvation—namely, the Incarnation of Christ.”<sup>5</sup> This first concern is reflected in the works of John of Damascus (c. 675-c. 750), and is the primary topic in the work of a prominent second-wave defender of icons, Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople (758-828).<sup>6</sup>

The second concern is the theological heart of the controversy, the Christological doctrine of the two natures of Christ. It remained at the center of attention from 754 on. John of Damascus had already made a Christological case for icons: Christ can be depicted by virtue of his Incarnation. While the Damascene repeatedly affirms the idea of deification as the participation of matter in divinity, his iconographical emphasis tends towards

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<sup>4</sup> For discussion of the historical and political dynamics at work throughout the iconoclastic controversy, see: John A. McGuckin, “The Theology of Images and the Legitimation of Power in Eighth Century Byzantium,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (1993): 39-58; Bissera V. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power: The Mother of God in Byzantium* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Phillip Schaff, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, Electronic ed., vol. II.14, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (Grand Rapids, MI; Edinburgh: Christian Classics Ethereal Library; T & T Clark, 2005), 543/726.

<sup>6</sup> John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, trans. Andrew Louth, Popular Patristics Series (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003). The works of Nicephorus are *Apologeticus Minor Pro Sacris Imaginibus*, *Apologeticus Maior Pro Sacris Imaginibus*, and *Antirrhetici III Adversus Constantinum* and can be

portraying deification as *imitation* inspired by images that remind us of the past faithfulness of God and the virtuous lives of the saints. Icons here are pedagogical in function, “books for the illiterate” whose visual stories invite us to participate by memory and imitation as friends of God.<sup>7</sup> The Council of 754, anathematizing the Damascene, rejected entirely the making of images because icons either confuse the two natures of Christ (Monophysitism) or separate them entirely (Nestorianism). The Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787, in support of the Damascene, overturned the Council of 754, ending the first wave. Within a generation, the iconoclasts retaliated, meeting in 815 to overturn the council of 787 in favor of the previous iconoclast council of 754. No longer at issue was the question of idolatry. Second-wave iconoclasts admitted the possibility of creating icons (unlike the first wave), but regarded their veneration the result of a confusion between divine and human nature. In 815, icons were permitted if they were out of reach, hung high enough on the walls of churches that they could not be touched. Icons could be made but not “used.”<sup>8</sup> The concern was no longer with the possibility of depicting divinity, but with acts of worship, how individuals ‘interact’ with depictions of the divine.

### 3.2.1: Theodore of Studios

Theodore of Studios (759-826), writing in response to the iconoclast Council of 815, addresses the changed priorities of the debate by tying together impiety and heresy, rejecting an over-intellectualized “worship consisting entirely of pure mental contemplation” of a

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found in the *Patrologia Graeca* 100.

<sup>7</sup> Rutherford, Pelikan and Hybrew note this as an early element in iconodule theology, one which is progressively less emphasized. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Imago Dei: The Byzantine Apologia for Icons*, A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts (New Haven: Princeton University Press, 1990); Hugh Wybrew, *The Orthodox Liturgy: The Development of the Eucharistic Liturgy in the Byzantine Rite* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003); Janet Rutherford, “Pythagoras, Byzantium and the Holiness of Beauty,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 71 (2006): 302-19.

God who is revealed “as an intellectually apprehensible abstraction.”<sup>9</sup> Such a revelation, were it truly adequate, might have resulted in Mary writing a book rather than bearing a child.<sup>10</sup> His response, according to Patrick Henry, is in part the result of a danger Theodore detects in the arguments of John of Damascus. For Theodore, the Damascene’s emphasis on the pedagogical content of icons effectively legislates distinctions among the people of God based on intelligence, and implies that icons are provisional, unnecessary for the literate.<sup>11</sup> Theodore is less concerned with what icons teach as with their necessity for salvation, and the paradox of circumscribing the uncircumscribable.

Rather than summarize the entirety of Theodore’s defense of icons I will focus on the crucial role of embodied particularity in his argument. Particularity at first appears to problematize the status of sex and gender in the human person. However, if examined closely, it provides a potential way out of the impasse over whether sex and gender are “natural” (simply shared biology, which according to Zizioulas and others, should have no effect on our unique persons), or *hypostatic* (an element of our radically unique personhood) without resorting to the admittedly strange ‘third’ option of ontological gender (which raises gender to something eternally shared among some but not all, *and* which affects our *hypostasis* in non-unique ways).<sup>12</sup> In making embodied particularity central to his defense of icons, Theodore develops not only the Damascene’s work, but the typically Cappadocian theologies of the incarnation and the human person.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Patrick Henry, “The Formulators of Icon Doctrine,” *Schools of thought in the Christian Tradition* (1984), 78-79.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>10</sup> This comment is the quip of a student in Henry’s class, Margaret Coulling. See Ibid., 80, note 9.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>12</sup> See Behr for labeling of ‘natural’ vs. ‘hypostatic’ and Karras for the ‘third option.’ Valerie A. Karras, “Patristic Views on the Ontology of Gender.”; John Behr, “A Note on the ‘Ontology of Gender.’”

<sup>13</sup> In an unpublished paper, C. Paul Schroeder posits two streams of Christian thought on the body, the first, a “Christian spiritualism” best represented by Origen and his theological successors, Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor, for whom sexual distinction is identified with division, mortality and the fallen state,

Patrick Henry points out that Theodore's terminology is Aristotelian even as he retains the Neoplatonic commitments of both Psuedo-Dionysius the Areopagite and John of Damascus.<sup>14</sup> It is one thing to establish the ability to 'write' Christ and the saints. It is another to say that we *must* do so. An image must be active, dynamic, and it must exist. For Theodore, a seal or substrate that is not impressed is ineffective, idle, a failure:

The seal shows its desire for honor when it makes itself available for impression in many different materials. In the same way, although we believe that Christ's own image is in Him as He has a human form, nevertheless when we see His image materially depicted in different ways, we praise His greatness more magnificently. For the failure to go forth into a material imprint eliminates His existence in human form (*Ref.* III.D.10).<sup>15</sup>

Christ without an image *fails* as a prototype (*Ref.* III.D.9).<sup>16</sup> Here, Theodore is arguing for the *necessary* use of icons in worship. Christ must be sensed through the sensible, and the diversity of materials used *enhances* the glory of the one portrayed.

### 3.2.2: Incarnation: Resemblance and Homonymy

Theodore is not concerned to establish the precise nature of either the image or its prototype. Rather, he emphasizes their self-evident distinction from one another, even as they are connected by a name through which the 'lesser' shares in the grace and honor of the 'greater'. This distinction between natures sharing the same name and likeness allows Theodore to achieve his goal, to establish the circumscribability of Christ and the saints in

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and is redeemed in creation by its essential disappearance in the resurrected body. The second stream, that of "Christian corporealism," is exemplified in the work of Methodius of Olympus and John Chrysostom. Here, "the physical body and sexual distinction are integral to God's original creative intent." Schroeder argues, I think rightly, that Iconodule theology, especially as developed by Theodore the Studite, develops this second strand of thought. C. Paul Schroeder, "Corpus Et Spiritus: Patristic Perspectives on the Human Body and Human Sexuality," (Unpublished Paper).

<sup>14</sup> Patrick Henry, "What Was the Iconoclastic Controversy About," *Church History* 45, no. 1 (1976), 27.

<sup>15</sup> Theodore the Studite, *On the Holy Icons*, 112. Theodore's work is a series of *Refutations*, thus the abbreviated use of "*Ref.*" followed by the number, section and paragraph. Page numbers will always be given in the footnotes.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.



order to defend the long-standing practice of venerating icons. The ability to portray a saint depends on their being particular. This emphasis on particularity as essential to circumscribability initiates a creative trajectory for human anthropological thought. This trajectory, despite its potential problems, is helpful in establishing the relationship between historical and eschatological bodies, as well as between human nature and our embodied particularity.

The ability to sense the divine starts with the Incarnation. In accord with Gregory of Nazianzus' principle that "what is not assumed is not saved," Theodore argues that Christ assumes the entirety of our human nature (*Ref.* III.A.4). A human being is recognized "with the mind and thought" as that which is "animate, rational, mortal, and capable of thought and understanding" (*Ref.* III.A.16, 4).<sup>17</sup> Yet no human being is recognized in the mind without being seen by the eye as he or she exists as a particular, embodied individual (*Ref.* III.I.A.16). Without particular human beings that can be sensed, there is no such thing as a general human nature (*Ref.* III.A.15).<sup>18</sup> Christ, therefore, "assumed human nature in general, yet He assumed it as contemplated in an individual manner; for this reason the possibility of circumscription exists" (*Ref.* III.A.17).<sup>19</sup>

The second wave of Iconoclasts, however did not object to the circumscription of human beings, or even the ability to 'write' Christ. Instead, they asserted that in the Incarnation, human flesh was "made wholly divine" and, therefore, took on the divine

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 83, 78.

<sup>18</sup> Theodore consistently refers to the ability to "see." However, I suspect that had he been asked, he would have agreed that the blind are able to recognize a human person utilizing other senses. See the recent work of Susan Ashbrook Harvey and Bissera Pentcheva on the incorporation of the senses into Orthodox worship. Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006); Bissera V. Pentcheva, "The Performative Icon," *The Art Bulletin* 88, no. 4 (2006): 631–55; Bissera V. Pentcheva, *The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual, and the Senses in Byzantium* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010). While Pentcheva notes a hierarchy of sense with sight reigning, I will refer to the "senses" rather than sight only.

property of uncircumscribability.<sup>20</sup> To the iconoclast, icons risked confusing the sensible with the insensible. As a result, the laity through an ignorant act of veneration might worship the wood and paint of icons as itself divine, thereby worshipping the creation rather than the Creator. The issue here is twofold, the proper order of worship, and the implied conflation between image and prototype, which for iconoclasts are *homoousios*, of the same substance or essence (*ousia*) with one another.<sup>21</sup> The problem, declares Theodore's literary opponent, is that "Christ's flesh is always venerated together with His divinity, because they are united inseparably; but the icon is not united inseparably with Him" (*Ref.* I.12).<sup>22</sup>

In response, Theodore carefully maintains the distinction between the two natures of Christ. While the Logos's human nature is only seen in the particular person of Jesus, the divine nature of Christ is not affected by the human limitations of circumscription such as "inclusion, quantity, quality, position, places, times, shapes, bodies..." (*Ref.* III.A.15).

Instead:

Christ incarnate is revealed within these limitations. For He who is uncontainable was contained in the Virgin's womb; He who is measureless became three cubits tall; He who has not quality was formed in a certain quality; He who has no position stood, sat, and lay down; He who is timeless became twelve years old by increasing in age; He who is formless appeared in the form of a man; He who is bodiless, when He has assumed a body, said to His disciples, "Take, eat, this is my body" (*Ref.* III.A.15).<sup>23</sup>

Thus, the human nature of Jesus can be portrayed via his body, which contains but does not limit Christ's divine nature.

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<sup>19</sup> Theodore the Studite, *On the Holy Icons*, 84.

<sup>20</sup> This aspect is in line with the *Definition* of the Council of 754: "For it should be considered that that flesh was also the flesh of God the Word, without any separation, perfectly assumed by the divine nature and made wholly divine." Phillip Schaff, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, 702(544).

<sup>21</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600-1700)*, vol. 2, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 109; Patrick Henry, "The Formulators of Icon Doctrine," 82.

<sup>22</sup> Theodore the Studite, *On the Holy Icons*, 32.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

Further, Theodore relies on Aristotelian categories of relation to connect the material depiction of Christ's human nature with its divine prototype. "Thus if one says that the divinity is in the icon," says Theodore, one "would not be wrong ... but divinity is not present in them by a union of natures (φυσικῇ), for they are not the deified flesh, but by a relative participation, because they share in the grace and the honor" (*Ref.* I.12).<sup>24</sup> The nature of sacred objects remains distinct from the nature of that which they represent, just as within Christ his human and divine natures remain distinct. What connects the nature of the image with the nature of its prototype are shared resemblance and name:

Insofar as the image resembles the prototype, it shares its whole veneration on the basis of resemblance, not bringing into veneration the material in which it appears; for this is the nature (*physis*) of the image, to be identified according to likeness with the prototype, but to differ according to the principle of its essence (*ousia*). For this reason the image has homonymy with the prototype. But if it were wholly similar, what we have said has collapsed, and the image is simply the prototype. However, it resembles the prototype in its whole likeness, but not in its nature. (*Ref.* III.D.6)<sup>25</sup>

### 3.2.3: Particularity

Members of the same species, according to Theodore, share an essence (οὐσία), a common nature, but are "hypostatically differentiated from one another" (*Ref.* III.A.21).<sup>26</sup> The general exists and is sensible only in the particular. We move from the particular to the general, *not* the other way around.<sup>27</sup> We do not see, nor portray, humanity in general, but only in the particular:

For example, Peter is not portrayed insofar as he is animate, rational, mortal, and capable of thought and understanding; for this does not define Peter

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>26</sup> "ὑποστατικῶς δὲ διακεκριμένα πρὸς ἀλλήλα." Ibid., 85.

<sup>27</sup> According to Theodore, "Generalities have their existence in particular individuals: for example, humanity in Peter and Paul and the others of the same species. If the particular individuals did not exist, man in general would be eliminated" (*Ref.* III.A.15). Ibid., 83.

only, but also Paul and John, and all those of the same species. But insofar as he adds along with the common definition certain properties, such as a long or short nose, curly hair, a good complexion, bright eyes, he is distinguished from the other individuals of the same species (καὶ πάντας τοὺς ὑπὸ τὸ αὐτὸ εἶδος). Moreover, although he consists of body and soul, he does not show the property of soul in the appearance of his form: how could he, since the soul is invisible? The same applies to the case of Christ. It is not because He is a man simply (along with being God) that He is able to be portrayed; but He is differentiated from all the others of the same species by His hypostatic properties (ἀλλὰ χαθότι τοῖς ὑποστατικοῖς ιδιώμασιν ἀπὸ πάντων ὁμοειδῶν ἀφοριζόμενος) (*Ref.* III.A.34).<sup>28</sup>

Hair, eyes, complexion, the length of the nose, all are bodily characteristics that distinguish Peter from Paul. Each of these characteristics is shared among some but not all individuals. Yet in a single person, these hypostatic properties converge to indicate unique, discrete human persons.

Among these differences, some of which are held in common among groups of individuals, is biological sex. Theodore is one of the few early church theologians to refer to the maleness of Christ.<sup>29</sup>

Maleness and femaleness are sought only in the forms of bodies, since none of the differences which characterize the sexes can be recognized in bodiless beings. Therefore, if Christ were uncircumscribable, as being without a body, He would also be without the difference of sex. But He was born male...therefore He is circumscribed" (*Ref.* III.A.4).<sup>30</sup>

Theodore's reference to biological sex is in keeping with his overarching goal: circumscribability. Christ had a sexed male body, sexed bodies can be circumscribed, therefore, Christ can be circumscribed. Biological sex is an essential hypostatic property, one of many, which enables us to recognize one another as distinct in our bodies.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 90-91.

<sup>29</sup> Theodore is not the only theologian to do so. Nonna Harrison discusses other examples, among them Gregory the Theologian in *Or.* 45, 13. Harrison's article is a careful and thorough discussion of the nuanced use of gendered language, imagery and allegory in patristic sources. See Nonna Verna Harrison, "The Maleness of Christ."

<sup>30</sup> Theodore the Studite, *On the Holy Icons*, 94.

## Biological Male

Before I argue for the possibilities Theodore creates by his positive emphasis on particularity, I want to further problematize the question of biological sex. The incarnation of God as a male individual typically leads to two questions: 1) Is God male? 2) Is maleness necessary for God to be ‘seen’? The answer to the first is a virtually unanimous “no” among Orthodox theologians. Valerie Karras effectively debunks any attempt to utilize Theodore’s mention of the maleness of Christ to read maleness into God. Maleness is simply one property among others that Christ possesses proving that God truly became human and that Christ is circumscribable according to his human nature. According to Karras, Theodore’s faithfulness to Chalcedonian Christology as well as Cappadocian trinitarian theology allows him to argue that just as in the Trinity there is one divine nature and three persons, in Jesus there is one person and two natures: divine and human.<sup>31</sup> They are united without confusion in the person of Jesus, who is circumscribable not as God, but as human:

Theodore's own reasoning categorically excludes any attempt to extrapolate back from Christ's male humanity to some sort of maleness in the Son of God. Therefore, it would be wrong to ascribe to Theodore any notion that it is important or necessary for Jesus Christ to be male per se. Christ's maleness has incarnational and hypostatic significance for Theodore since it supports the fullness of the Son's assumption of human nature, in particular the physical aspect. However, given his beliefs that the Son of God took on human nature generally (though in an individualized manner) and that gender has no existence beyond the physical level, Theodore gives Christ's maleness no more ontological significance than the color of His eyes.<sup>32</sup>

Karras is correct that Theodore considers biological sex, which is how I understand her use of the term “gender” here, on the same plane as eye color, which for Theodore, is important only because it identifies and distinguishes unique human persons. Any argument that

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<sup>31</sup> Valerie A. Karras, “The Incarnational and Hypostatic Significance of the Maleness of Jesus Christ According to Theodore of Stoudios.” (Paper presented at the Studia patristica, Ithaca, NY, 1997), 321.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 324.

essentializes sex beyond its hypostatic qualities falls into the same trap of the iconoclasts: it confuses natures, which should remain radically distinct. Karras's argument regarding Theodore corresponds to her larger argument that biological sex (and gender) are a part of human nature, which will be insignificant in the eschaton. What matters in eternity is our likeness to a non-sexed and genderless God. As she recently argues, it is on the basis that sex and gender have no import in the eschaton that women can be priests in the present because the liturgy is the presence of the eschaton.<sup>33</sup> Our guide for practice today is our eschatological future.

### Resurrected Male

What Karras does not address is the second question, is maleness necessary for the divine to be 'seen'? Can we only see God 'through' a materially male body? Theodore himself problematizes Karras's reasoning regarding eschatological sex and gender. At one point in Theodore's "dialogue" his iconoclastic foil concedes the possibility of circumscribing Jesus up to and through his Passion, but rejects circumscription *after* Christ's resurrection (*Ref.* II.41), asserting that Christ condescended to appear to the apostles in a bodily form that lacked "solidity" (*Ref.* II.44).<sup>34</sup> Theodore dismisses this on the basis of Jesus' resurrectional appearance to Thomas. According to Theodore, if we can see it, we can circumscribe it regardless of whether or not it is solid in the way we understand solid (*Ref.* II.44). Further, the risen Christ does not lose the qualities of his human nature:

If then He said that He whom they saw after the resurrection was that same one who was with them before the passion, after the resurrection also He was contained by circumscription, because He had not lost the properties of His human nature. What kind of hands and feet did He show them, sir? How did He bid them to touch Him, as a man with flesh and bones? What

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<sup>33</sup> Valerie A. Karras, "Orthodox Theologies of Women and Ordained Ministry."

<sup>34</sup> Theodore the Studite, *On the Holy Icons*, 71.

kind of food did he taste? (*Ref.* II.43)<sup>35</sup>

The human person is corporeal. To be human is to be embodied, even when that body fully participates in the divine nature. Further, the resurrected body is just that, a *body* (spiritual though it is according to Paul, 1 Cor. 15.44) that still bears its particular, bodily marks, including maleness. In Christ, we do see the divine through the material of a male (e.g., Palestinian, Jewish) body. It seems fair to conclude that in Theodore's mind, biological sex is a part of our personal bodily identity that apparently continues to exist in the eschaton.

Yet the maleness of Christ is a problem for more than the eighth-century iconoclast or the twenty-first-century feminist. As Nonna Harrison indicates, church fathers do not deny the maleness of the resurrected Christ.<sup>36</sup> Yet she also presents an impressive list of theologians who believe that sex distinctions lie in the body, not the soul, and will no longer exist in the resurrected body: Clement of Alexandria, Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom and Maximus the Confessor.<sup>37</sup> Harrison proposes that these two views are reconciled in acknowledging that the resurrected body includes particularity, but is not limited by it; "human nature has added possibilities in the

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 70. Theodore is referring to both John 20:26 and 21:9-15.

<sup>36</sup> Nonna Verna Harrison, "The Maleness of Christ," 123.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 122-23. In note 11, Harrison cites the following texts: Clement, *Paed.* 1,4,10-11, Otto Stählin, ed. *Clemens Alexandrinus: Protrepticus und Paedagogus*, 3rd ed., GCS (Berlin, 1972), pp. 95-96; Basil, *Hom. in Ps.* 114; Gregory the Theologian, *Or.* 7, 23; Gregory of Nyssa, *De mort.*, GNO 9:63; John Chrysostom, *Hom. 6 in Col.* 4, *Hom. 70 in Matt.* 3; Maximus, *Ambig.* 41. John Behr argues that the "synthetic" view represented by Harrison and others is an incorrect reading of Gregory of Nyssa. His reading of *De Hominis Opificio*, if correct, challenges my statement that Theodore is developing Cappadocian thought, though his argument supports my overall thesis regarding the centrality of particularity. Behr argues that for Gregory, sexual particularity is fundamental to humankind as it is created by God. Sexual differentiation may be created in light of the Fall, but there still exists no non-differentiated humanity, nor any other means of procreation other than sexual. What is at issue for Gregory is the use of the body as ascending towards virtue and full humanity, or descending towards vice and inhumanity. See John Behr, "The Rational Animal: A Rereading of Gregory of Nyssa's *De Hominis Opificio*," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7, no. 2 (1999): 219-47.

resurrection.”<sup>38</sup> In rejecting bodily sex as division, each of these theologians is attempting to affirm a particular eschatological hope:

They perceive the distinction between male and female as involving human nature in division and incompleteness. The eschatological hope is for wholeness, fullness of life and unity in Christ. As simply and exclusively male or female, a person lacks some virtues or perfections that belong to the other gender. This incompleteness is evident in the fact that neither can procreate, neither can bring forth a new life, without the other.<sup>39</sup>

Harrison’s mention of procreation is key: these theologians believe that biological sex—and even material bodies—were post-fall realities required for procreation.

Theodore, however says nothing regarding the *purpose* of biological sex outside of its role in indicating particularity. He does not comment on whether sex has a role beyond the physical (that is, as “gender”).<sup>40</sup> Theodore’s primary concern is this: particularity is the very ground of human distinction and thus circumscribability. The biological sex of Christ ‘proves’ that he is fully human and can be written. Iconodule theology and practice develops considerably in the centuries following Theodore. However, he offers two crucial principles that are the warp on which I will weave my arguments. First, difference is required for uniqueness. Hypostatic qualities, human particularities, are required to distinguish between persons. Second, Theodore offers a crucial psychological insight regarding veneration: diverse mediums *increase* the glory accrued to the prototype. “We praise His greatness more magnificently” with every *different* material depiction of Christ presented for veneration.<sup>41</sup> It follows that the reduction of diversity reduces glory. It is a dishonor to God, not an honor.

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<sup>38</sup> Nonna Verna Harrison, “The Maleness of Christ,” 124.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>40</sup> Which means that Karras’s comment that “gender has no role beyond the physical” may stretch Theodore beyond his actual concerns.

<sup>41</sup> Theodore the Studite, *On the Holy Icons*, 112.



How then does iconodule theology develop, in practice? Theodore is primarily concerned with diverse images of Christ, but subsequent iconodule theology coordinates with a theology of the saints, resulting in a diversity of holy men and women and their images. If there is a connection between icon and prototype that exists in all images, not simply those of Christ, how do we understand the plethora of images? What or whom do saints “resemble”? With whom do they share a name? To whom or what do their icons point? And do icons of female saints point to the same thing or person as do icons of male saints?

### **3.3: Iconodule Practice: Presence, Participation Particularity**

This section focuses on the development of iconodule theology through iconic representation and the practice of veneration and contemplation. As we will see, iconic practice incorporates the theologies of *theosis* and the communion of the saints.<sup>42</sup> While Theodore was concerned to establish the legitimacy of diverse images of Christ, this section links the saints to Christ through their ‘resemblance’ to Christ in holiness and virtue, a resemblance borne out through active, virtuous relationships. Sainly ‘resemblance’ to Christ is not bodily, but relational. Sainly images then, operate on many levels, all of which point to the fullness of humanity as a bodily “bearing” of Christ through virtuous relationships. The many images of the saints, in their particularity and uniqueness, embody an astonishing diversity of “little christs,” each of which offers greater honor to the creator.

Further, icons bring into the presence of the beholder the person depicted, and invite the beholder to participate in a particular kind of life. The presider, as an icon of our

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<sup>42</sup> Maria Gwyn McDowell, “Communion of the Saints,” in *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Orthodox Theology*, ed. John McGuckin (Blackwell, 2011).

new humanity, is called to image (to a greater or lesser degree) in embodied form what the saints already embody. This section will first describe, on a conceptual level, how iconodule practice emphasizes presence, particularity, and an ongoing invitation to participate in life of virtue as *theosis*. Turning then to the icons and narratives of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, I will offer this most popular of all saints as an example of virtues in action, ‘narrated’ through both image and text. Finally, I will turn to diverse images and narratives of the Theotokos in order to see how virtues and their idealization are shaped by context. After examining actual icons, I will address the formation of ‘conceptual’ icons in light of contextual interpretations of gender, bringing the discussion back to the practice of exclusion based on gender.

### 3.3.1: The Participatory Gaze

The encounter with an icon is always an encounter with a face. The often disproportionately large head and eyes are written in such a way that, says Jean-Luc Marion, “there appears in them the intention of a transpiercing gaze emanating from them,” rendering the invisible person visible.<sup>43</sup> The term “gaze” among contemporary art theorists and philosophers is a “double-sided term,” implying both one who gazes and one who returns the gaze.<sup>44</sup> Historically, the term “gaze” in art and philosophy, more like a “stare,” assumes that “that all human relations are power relations.”<sup>45</sup> Margaret Olin notes various efforts to incorporate a more positive view of human relations resulting in theories that “espouse some form of dialogism, in which a totalistic, hegemonic gaze is replaced by the

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<sup>43</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being: Hors-Texte*, Religion and Postmodernism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 19.

<sup>44</sup> Margaret Olin, “The Gaze,” in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson, and Richard Shiff (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 319.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 319, 327.

mutual gaze of equality.”<sup>46</sup> The “shared gaze” of Mikhail Bakhtin and Emmanuel Levinas rightly “suggests responsibility toward the person looking back at one.”<sup>47</sup> For Levinas, the face imparts the command, “Thou shalt not kill.” This negative command is indicative of the unbridgable gulf between persons in Levinas’ philosophy, the violence of the encounter between the self and other.<sup>48</sup> I would like to argue that the encounter with the person in an icon, situated in the narrative and liturgical life of a worshipping church, imparts the positive command to enact the highest virtue, “Thou shalt love.” The term ‘gaze’ used in reference to icons indicates an encounter that suggests responsibility to embody and enact virtues to which the mutual gaze invites us.

The heart of iconodule theology, in the oft cited (and decontextualized) words of Basil, is “that the honor offered to the image passes to the archetype.”<sup>49</sup> The image of paint and wood signifies the other. It is the other before whom the beholder stands, whose intercessions or assistance the beholder requests, who is offered gratitude or simply reflected upon. Yet it is not merely a signification but a presence. The relationship between the beholder and the person represented through the icon often begins in prayer. Contemporary theologians of the image emphasize prayerful requests *to* another as only a beginning. “Prayerful contemplation passes through the icon, so to speak, and does not stop until it reaches the living content, that is, the person represented. The icon makes this living

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 327.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> See Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991; reprint 3rd), 195. Zizioulas offers an interesting critique in *Communion and Otherness*, 48ff.

<sup>49</sup> *On the Holy Spirit*, 18.45. Basil is here making a parallel between veneration of the emperor via his images, and veneration of the Father through his image the Son. It is this principle of veneration passing from image to prototype that becomes the refrain of the iconodule defense of icons. For further discussion, see Andrew Louth, “The Appeal to the Cappadocian Fathers and Dionysios the Areopagite in the Iconoclast Controversy,” in *Gregory of Nazianzus: Images and Reflections*, ed. Jostein Børtnes, and Tomas Hägg (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2006).

personal content present.”<sup>50</sup> Paul Evdokimov calls the icon a sacrament, a “vehicle for personal presence” and “witness” to the saint’s “ministry of intercession and communion.”<sup>51</sup> The icon provides the possibility of a relationship between the beholder and the person portrayed.

### "Spiritual Stillness"

Orthodox discussion of icons often emphasizes the gaze, the eyes, as the most arresting aspect of many iconographic images.<sup>52</sup> Through the gaze, the person portrayed is face-to-face with the beholder, person-to-person. Evgeniĭ Nikolaevich Trubetskoĭ (1863-1920), a Russian nobleman and philosopher, highlights the apparent immobility of iconic figures in which movement is restricted to the eyes, which convey “the immense power of the spirit over the flesh.”<sup>53</sup> The interplay of light and vision as spiritual illumination threads throughout Orthodox thought, icons of the Transfiguration portraying Christ on the mountain surrounded by a blue *mandala* of light, his eyes directly focused on the beholder.<sup>54</sup> Open eyes “not only open on another world, they open that world to others....”<sup>55</sup> Trubetskoĭ repeatedly highlights immobility and stillness, contrasting an active, motion-filled human nature with “the motionless calm of divine life.”<sup>56</sup>

This emphasis on stillness and prayer reflects a monastic and neo-platonic view of the Christian life, emphasizing contemplation as the means of participating in divine simplicity and stillness. As a result, particular virtues are elevated. Constantine Cavarnos, in

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<sup>50</sup> Paul Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon: A Theology of Beauty*, trans. Steven Bigham (Torrance, CA: Oakwood Publications, 1990), 175.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 178, 179.

<sup>52</sup> See for example, *ibid.*, 226-27.

<sup>53</sup> E. N. (Evgeniĭ Nikolaevich) Trubetskoĭ, *Icons: Theology in Color*, trans. Gertrude Vakar, (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973), 23.

<sup>54</sup> See for example, Evdokimov on the light of Tabor. Paul Evdokimov, *Art of the Icon*, 183-188, 233-34.

<sup>55</sup> E. N. (Evgeniĭ Nikolaevich) Trubetskoĭ, *Icons: Theology in Color*, 23.

a short text on icons, highlights icons as expressions of spiritual beauty, by which he means “the beauty of holiness. God is holy; and man becomes holy by attaining likeness to God through the acquisition of all the virtues.”<sup>57</sup> He delineates a list of five primary virtues, each of which has a corresponding iconic symbol. Faith is seen in the halo, “symbolic of the state of illumination, of higher knowledge, as well as of victory over death and of sanctity in general.”<sup>58</sup> Meekness is depicted in figures that are “free from all agitation, calm,” without anger and serene.<sup>59</sup> Humility is seen in frequently bowed heads and bodies.<sup>60</sup> Dispassion (*apatheia*) is emphasized through the solemnity and “spiritual grandeur” of icons, through serene faces and “wide open eyes.”<sup>61</sup> Finally, love is likewise seen in solemnity and awe, appropriate expressions when the object of love is Christ.<sup>62</sup>

It is important to recognize at the outset that it is no coincidence that iconic symbols are interpreted as pointers to virtues. The theologian of the image reflects on icons with an eye towards how they transform the beholder. As Cavarinos rightly notes, “the efficacy of the authentic icon in this regard has as its basis the principle that ‘we become like that which we habitually contemplate.’”<sup>63</sup> Iconic practice only begins thru contemplation. Contemplation is then meant to assist the beholder, through habitual practices, to ‘incarnate’ a life of virtuous relationships. By becoming more like the saint imaged, by practicing the virtue exemplified, the beholder also becomes more like Christ. The saints make visible not simply their own virtue, but aspects of Christ’s way of relating. This transformation is the

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>57</sup> Constantine Cavarinos, *Orthodox Iconography* (Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1977), 41.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 44. Cavarinos gives an interesting and worthwhile definition of humility: “A man is humble if he sees himself as he actually is and in relation to what he can and ought to become.” Ibid., 43.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 47.

process of *theosis*. The connection between the saint and Christ is made visible via symbolic depictions of light. The blue *mandorla* that frequently appears around Christ is an image of divine light. Evdokimov writes that the icons show the “Light of the world” made visible in the light of the saints, that is, Christ made visible in the saints. The censuring of icons in the liturgy acknowledges the presence of the image and light of God in the saints. The censuring of the gathered worshipers by the priest likewise acknowledges the presence of this light in the gathered community.<sup>64</sup> *Theosis* is often expressed as the contemplation of the uncreated light of God. “The icon reveals that light to us all. The icon is prayer; it purifies and transfigures in its image those who contemplate it.”<sup>65</sup> Yet too frequently neglected in Orthodox discussions, which implicitly prioritize contemplative monasticism and its associated virtues, is the much longer list of virtues to which icons witness. Following the work of Henry Maguire, I argue that the formal qualities of icons present for the beholder a wide range of emotions and virtues that are as often indicated by embodied *action* as by stillness.

#### Eye of Justice

Historically, emphasis on the eye may not be as spiritual as nineteenth- and twentieth-century Orthodox (especially of the Russian school) might like. Maguire demonstrates a transition from the ancient concept of the “evil eye” to the “Eye of Justice.” The ancient world held Envy (*phthonos*) responsible for the miscarriage of justice, characterizing it as an “active and causative force.”<sup>66</sup> The many ancient laments over the power of envy “represent real fears of instability and uncertainty in the administration of

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<sup>64</sup> Paul Evdokimov, *Art of the Icon*, 184.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>66</sup> Henry Maguire, *From the Evil Eye to the Eye of Justice: The Saints, Art, and Justice in Byzantium* (1994), 209.

justice.”<sup>67</sup> Envy, however was centered in the gaze. The gaze of an envious person was believed able to cause misfortune and sickness. The evil eye, woven into tapestries and worn as amulets, repelled this gaze, protecting the wearer from the jealous gaze of others. Christians, shying away from superstition, characterized envy as proceeding from the Devil who created misfortune either directly, or worse, indirectly through human cooperation.<sup>68</sup> Yet, as is so often the case, Christians found ways of incorporating traditional symbols into its art. Instead of sewing the evil eye into fabric or painting it on the frame of an image, eyes became a focal point in iconography, emphasizing the “Eye of Justice” in which God is the judge and those closest to God, the saints, intercede with both earthly and heavenly courts to ensure justice. Perhaps the most dramatic image is that of Christ *Pantocrator* (see Figure 1)<sup>69</sup> usually placed in the central dome of a church, whose enlarged eyes gaze down in perceived mercy or judgement, depending on the conscience of the beholder.<sup>70</sup>

This connection between the gaze, envy and justice (rather broadly conceived), though not typically emphasized in Orthodox theology, serves as a foundation to argue for a wider range of virtues than the five listed by Cavernos, faith, meekness, humility, dispassion and love. To this list can be added, among others, justice, mercy, compassion, generosity—a still incomplete list that more genuinely reflects the diverse embodiment of virtuous practices. The person gazing outward from ‘within’ the icon is a unique and irreducible person, whose transfigured holiness is narrated in part by the icon itself, and in part by associated hymns and stories. It is the presence of the person depicted in the icon that invites the beholder into active participation in the embodied virtues of the saintly person.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 209-10. Maguire refers here to Basil, *De invidia*, 4.

<sup>69</sup> All referenced images may be found under Illustrations, p. ???)EDIT

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 233.

## Participation

Before considering icons of individual saints, it is important to draw further attention to the theology of participation that underlies all icons. This is most evident in icons of biblical events and feast days. As already noted, it is a given that icons serve a pedagogical function, allowing the illiterate to read on walls what they cannot read in books. Icons that visually narrate biblical events obviously serve an educational function, as do icons of major feast days. Typically such icons adorn the side walls of the church, and the twelve major feasts often grace the second tier of the iconostasis.<sup>71</sup> The focus, however especially in the context of the liturgy, is not simply pedagogical, but on the participation of the beholder in the event depicted.

Maguire notes a range of detail in types of icons from dramatic and lively to spare and austere. Greater narrative detail emphasizes the dynamic, emotional, temporal, earthly qualities of humanity, while a progressive reduction of detail and movement highlights divinity, mystery and heavenly glory. The intent in each case is to draw the viewer into different kinds of participation. Icons of biblical scenes and feast days are often full of detail, placing the viewer *at* the event, drawing him or her into the action. Within these types of images, there is a variety of action and detail. Scenes of the Virgin's life are often more dynamic than those of Christ's life.<sup>72</sup> Paradoxically, Maguire notes that the greater the theological significance and doctrinal content of an image, the less detail, dynamism and interpretive license on the part of the iconographer. Thus, icons of the nativity of the Virgin

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<sup>71</sup> The Twelve Major feasts, according to the "new" calendar, are The Nativity of the Theotokos (Sep 8), The Exaltation of the Cross (Sep 14), the Presentation of the Theotokos (Nov 21), the Nativity of Christ (Dec 25), Theophany (Jan 6), the Presentation of Jesus at the Temple (Feb 2), the Annunciation (March 25), Palm Sunday (the Sunday before Pascha), the Ascension (forty days after Pascha), Pentecost (fifty days after Pascha), the Transfiguration (Aug 6), and the Dormition (Aug 15).



depict her mother Ann in human pain, holding her chin in a gesture Byzantines understood as indicating grief or pain, and being supported by midwives. In contrast, the nativity of Jesus sees Mary holding her child after birth without the assistance of midwives, and no indication of pain, preserving a more elevated view of the Virgin.<sup>73</sup> Icons of Christ have even less detail than those of the Virgin, and are placed in architecturally more significant locations. Christ is the perfect combination of humanity and divinity, while Mary, and even more so her mother Anne, are more human images. Icons of saints, which Maguire argues emphasize their successful transcendence of earthly humanity, have correspondingly less detail. The progression from stories and events surrounding the life of the family and friends of Jesus, to the stories of Jesus' life, to the stories of those who then follow Jesus is paralleled by a progression from imperfect humanity to a divinely infused humanity, earth to heaven, solid bodies to ethereal bodies, with Christ the perfect combination at the center.

Maguire is interested in the psychological functions of icons, whose sometimes theatrical portrayals conveyed the dynamism of human action and behavior, making the purpose of a particular icon more accessible to viewers. Dramatic, detailed icons intentionally engaged the emotion of the viewers, eliciting empathy, especially when accompanied by emotional texts. Biblical events celebrated on feast days paired icons with texts in such way as to make the event more accessible to viewers. By the fourteenth century, this pairing of image with texts emphasized the liturgy as a place not of reenactment, but participation in the event itself. Patriarch Athanasios I compares fourteenth-century worshippers to the myrrh-bearing women. The worshippers

...will witness with compassionate soul what was done by the men of that

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<sup>72</sup> Henry Maguire, *The Icons of Their Bodies: Saints and Their Images in Byzantium* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 159.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 166-68.

time through an inhuman and murderous impulse, and share the sorrow of the ever-Virgin mother of God...and they should not simply depart, just as a spectator interested in watching divine spectacles, but should rather remain and “bring precious ointments,” in the hope that they may [themselves] see the stone rolled away.<sup>74</sup>

It is motion, expressive figures, and dynamic colors accompanied by liturgical texts that invite worshippers to participate in the event as if they were present. Time is telescoped, a single feast day icon often portraying a number of consecutive events as if happening together, inviting worshippers to be contemporaries. Icons serve as a means of engaging the viewer in the event portrayed, removing temporal and emotional distance. Here, detailed icons ‘create’ not spectators but participants in the formative narratives of the church.

### **The particularity of a Saint**

Just as the icons of biblical events or feast days visually narrate aspects of the Christian story, icons of saints tell stories about particular holy persons. They also invite participation, but in a different manner. Rather than participation in an event, icons of saints invite participation in a life of virtue that is shaped by accompanying narratives. The iconographic interpretation of well-known narrative events in the life of a saint is spare and limited precisely in order to allow a wider range of interpretation and participation on the part of the beholder by focusing on the most salient and orienting aspects of the saint’s behavior. Rather than invite the beholder into a specific event that calls forth specific emotions appropriate to a wedding feast, a triumphal entrance into Jerusalem, or mourning at a tomb, icons of saints invite the beholder to seek the intercession of the saint, express gratitude, make requests, and to practice saintly virtues in potentially very different situations.

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<sup>74</sup> *Epistula LXXI; The Correspondence of Athanasius I*, 178; cited in *Ibid.*, 184.

#### *Recognition and Portraiture*

Recognition of the saint portrayed is crucial. Rather than “lifelike” portraits, Byzantines expected “that the image should be sufficiently well defined to enable them to identify the holy figure represented, from a range of signs that included clothing, the attributes, the portrait type, and the inscription.”<sup>75</sup> Soldiers wear military tunics and carry weapons, the evangelists hold a book, bishops are often portrayed as older and wearing vestments. Visual cues regarding a saint’s life abound. Monastics and ascetics possess *apatheia*, a freedom from passion exemplified by their immaterial being and immobility, and depicted by stillness, pale features, flattened drapery, stick limbs and unkempt hair.<sup>76</sup> In contrast, soldier-saints are “restless and vigorous,” “healthy,” full of movement, watchful and bold.<sup>77</sup> Icons, and the saints to whom they point, communicate different aspects of the Christian experience to the viewer. Soldier saints must “look strong, solid, and physically active if they are to inspire confidence in the beholder.”<sup>78</sup> The ascetic pallor of bishops who are close to God contrasts with the transitory, earthly, vital and emotional figures of the apostles who, as participants in the earthly life of Christ, bear “witness to Christ in human nature.”<sup>79</sup>

#### *Classes and Individuals*

Distinction between “classes” of saints do not exclude distinctions between persons within a class. Particularly prominent saints, such as Chrysostom, Basil, Gregory the

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 16. On Byzantine portraiture in general, see Maguire’s first chapter, “Likeness and Definition,” as well as the sources listed in this chapter’s first footnote. Ibid., 5ff. and 202. On the modern perception that Byzantine portraiture is hardly “life-like,” see footnote twenty-one in *ibid.*, 202. See also Gilbert Dagron, “Holy Images and Likeness,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 45 (1991): 23-33.

<sup>76</sup> Henry Maguire, *The Icons of Their Bodies*, 66-74.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 85.

Theologian and Nicholas all had fully developed unique portraits by the early eleventh century.<sup>80</sup> Chrysostom has a narrow chin, small pointed beard, a bald head and ascetic appearance. Basil, who died at only fifty, is young (atypical of images of bishops), with dark hair and a long pointed beard. The Theologian is balding with white hair and broad beard, and Nicholas has a receding hair-line, sunken cheeks and a short beard.<sup>81</sup> The consistent use of hair as a way of distinguishing among male saints was impossible for most females. The lack of a beard, and clothing designed specifically to cover the hair, rendered useless the typical tools of portraiture, as did the tradition of portraying all women as young. Female saints known for their hair, such as Saint Barbara and Mary of Egypt were easily distinguishable.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, Mary of Egypt's emaciated and virtually unclothed body is immediately recognizable. For other famous women saints, Byzantine artists resorted instead to distinguishing among them by assigning them easily recognized individual attributes, such as the great age of Saint Anne the mother of the Theotokos, the True Cross of Saint Helena or Saint Thekla's book.<sup>83</sup>

#### *Inscriptions*

Since the pressing concern of both iconoclasts and iconodules was worship, distinguishing between classes of saints through simple visual associations insufficiently guarded against idolatry. Pre-iconoclasm, icons depicting episodes in the lives of saints often depicted a given saint in an identical manner in each scene of his or her life. Iconoclasts were concerned, perhaps rightly, that rather than identifying a unique person, identical

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. See also: Konrad Onasch, and Annemarie Schnieper, *Icons: Fascination and Reality*, trans. Daniel G Conklin (New York: Riverside Book Company, 1995), 192-93, 205.

<sup>82</sup> Henry Maguire, *The Icons of Their Bodies*, 28. Maguire also comments that in a male dominated church, prominent male saints outnumbered their female counterparts.

figures might be misunderstood as a magical sign or symbol, an object or shape invested with power, that had no relation to the person depicted and his or her relationship with God. It was too easy for the uneducated (and implicitly superstitious) faithful to mistake the iconic object or its symbolism itself as sources of power. In response to the concern that an image might fail to direct the gaze to the prototype, but rather fix the gaze on the symbol or material, steps were taken to ensure identification with the prototype. After iconoclasm, the omission of names from holy images ceased and a complete image included an inscription identifying its subject.<sup>84</sup> In addition, icons that portrayed events in the life of the saint ensured that in each scene the saint was uniquely depicted, engaging in an action appropriate to the given event.

The ability to distinguish one saint from another (recognition) and depictions of the saint in distinct situations and engaging in particular actions (unique portrayal) are crucial to understanding how a particular saint uniquely contributes to the transformation of the viewer. Notice that ‘resemblance’ to the prototype is not based on identical material or what we today would consider photographic likeness. Rather, the iconic ‘markers’ that draw the beholder into the life of the person portrayed all indicate something about the way the saint lived his or her life. Mary of Egypt’s hair is an indication of her particular form of asceticism, and Thekla’s book indicates her preaching mission. Saint Nicholas, a popular saint in both east and west, exemplifies the iconic dynamic of particularity, presence and participation. Through icons and narratives of Nicholas we see iconic practice without the

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 31-33.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 37-40. Maguire illustrates this by citing an episode in the life of Saint Peter’s disciple, the Sicilian bishop Pankratios, whose life was written during the second iconoclastic period. In the story, a young painter paints images of Christ, Peter and Pankratios. The story concludes, “So the young painter finished these paintings also, and *he wrote on each image its own name.*” Ibid., 38., from Stallman, “Life of St. Pancratius,” 11-12.

(explicit) baggage of sex and gender that accompanies virtually any discussion of a female saint.<sup>85</sup>

### 3.3.2: Virtues in Action: Nicholas the Wonderworker

Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker is, without question, one of the most popular saints in both east and west. So many stories are attributed to him that Pavel Florensky declares that “Nicholas groans under the burden of the numerous real or imagined cares he has taken on.”<sup>86</sup> Konrad Onasch calls him a “synthesized personality, a *hyperbagios*, a ‘super saint.’”<sup>87</sup> Maguire highlights the saint’s “indefatigable opposition to the force of envy in all its operations,” and ascribes his popularity “to his being somewhat of a generalist” whose miracles are wide-ranging and mundane in nature.<sup>88</sup> The late-ancient perception of a direct

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<sup>85</sup> This does not mean gender is absent. It only means that Nicholas is not utilized as a model for behavior which is openly acknowledged as gendered, and therefore limited to one sex or the other. Certainly his context allowed him behaviors and access typical primarily of men. However, unlike descriptions of the Theotokos explored below, Nicholas is not used to advocate for the practice of particular virtues in particular social “roles.”

<sup>86</sup> Konrad Onasch, and Annemarie Schnieper, *Icons: Fascination and Reality*, 205, no citation given for Florensky. St. Nicholas the Wonderworker is actually the fusion of the cults of two men from neighboring regions who lived hundreds of years apart. Nicholas of Sion was born in the village of Pharroa, Lycia, and was eventually ordained the bishop of Pinara. He died on 10 Dec. 564. His *Vita*, most likely written by a follower in the sixth century places Nicholas in a rural context, and includes passages describing the plague of the 540s, the felling of a “sacred tree” and dangerous sea voyages. During his lifetime he performed many healing miracles. However, by the tenth century, the cult of Nicholas of Sion was engulfed by that of the neighboring Nicholas of Myra, whose cult is actually mentioned in the *Vita* of Nicholas of Sion. Nicholas of Myra, whose feastday is 6 Dec., has attributed to him miracles which place his activity around 300 C.E., appearing in dreams and visions to Constantine I. Some stories however, are better dated to the ninth or tenth centuries, a century before the first attempt at a *Vita*. It is Nicholas of Myra who supposedly engaged in fisticuffs with Arius on behalf of the Theotokos at the First Ecumenical Council. However, there is no record of his name in the council lists. The lives and stories associated with these two men merge in Nicholas the Wonderworker, also (somewhat incorrectly) referred to as Nicholas of Myra. See Nancy Patterson Ševčenko, and Alexander Kazhdan, “Nicholas of Myra,” *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t174.e3788> (accessed 30 September, 2008); Nancy Patterson Ševčenko, and Alexander Kazhdan, “Nicholas of Sion,” *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t174.e3791> (accessed 30 September, 2008); Maria Gwyn McDowell, “St. Nicholas the Wonderworker,” in *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Orthodox Theology*, ed. John McGuckin (Blackwell, 2011).

<sup>87</sup> Konrad Onasch, and Annemarie Schnieper, *Icons: Fascination and Reality*, 205.

<sup>88</sup> Henry Maguire, *The Icons of Their Bodies*, 169.

relationship between envy and injustice also leads Maguire to note that “of all the saints who had a role to play in the administration of justice, the most important was St. Nicholas....”<sup>89</sup>

### **Drama vs. Austerity**

Maguire contrasts the vivid and emotional *Life of Nicholas* by the tenth-century writer Symeon Metaphrastes with the visual austerity of illustrations of Nicholas’s life in his biographical icons (see Figure 2).<sup>90</sup> Metaphrastes’s dramatic rendition of the three generals threatened with execution by the envious Governor Eustathios of Andriake (a port near Myra) is rendered in iconic detail as spare, generic and vague, showing neither the celebrating crowds nor details of the city that heighten the drama in the written tale, but only the three men, the executioner and the saint (see Figure 3).<sup>91</sup> Likewise, the story of the imprisoned men (generals again, victims of envy), freed as a result of Nicholas’ appearance in a dream to the Emperor Constantine is full of narrative drama. Yet in the Sinai icon (12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> c.), this event is simply depicted by three men sitting in shackles, arms raised in supplication (no figure available). In a fourteenth-century Russian icon, only the dreaming emperor and Nicholas himself appear (see Figure 4). Byzantine art is perfectly capable of showing vivid details of despair that would match the theatrical *Life* by Metaphrastes, yet in scenes of Nicholas’s life, these elements are absent.<sup>92</sup>

A particularly striking example of this iconographic austerity is the well-known episode concerning the poor man with three daughters forced to work as prostitutes in order to generate a dowry. The bishop’s secretive generosity to the poor man and his three unwed daughters is probably the most well-known and varied of his stories. Nicholas, seeking to

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<sup>89</sup> Henry Maguire, *From the Evil Eye to the Eye of Justice*, 227.

<sup>90</sup> This *Life* can be found in G. Anrich, *Hagios Nikolaos*, I (Leipzig, 1913).

<sup>91</sup> Henry Maguire, *The Icons of Their Bodies*, 173.

hide his generosity, drops a bag of gold down a chimney, throws it through a window, or perhaps places it in a freshly laundered sock. The full story, however is not depicted in his icons. Despite the immense popularity of the narrative, the Sinai icon shows only the poor man lying in grief on his bed, his poverty indicated by the subtle detail of bare feet (no image available).<sup>93</sup> Again, the omission of major actors is repeated in large frescos as well (see Figure 5).<sup>94</sup> Maguire's interpretation is that the spare narrative depiction allows for a wider range of intercessory prayers to and by the saint.

#### **The Useful Generic**

An icon properly identified (by name) and depicting virtues in action is simply a more "useful" icon. The scenes of Saint Nicholas's life were not meant by Byzantine artists to engage the emotions of the beholder in the same way as the elaborate scenes of the Virgin or events in the life of Christ. Rather, they "were reiterated assurances of help in different mundane situations, to which a generic character was appropriate to insure the breadth of their appeal; hence these images were drained of their specificity."<sup>95</sup> Returning to the example of the popular story of the poor man and his daughters, most of us do not have three daughters for whom we must provide, but many of us can certainly empathize with parents trying to provide for their families, and can be assured that Nicholas will pray for us whatever our specific needs. Icons depict the essential elements of a saint's life, and the accompanying narrative fills in the details. Note that visually "generic" situations regarding

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>94</sup> Such as the one in the Church of St. Nicholas at Bojana in Bulgaria. Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Maguire continues, "The scenes from the passion of Christ, in contrast, worked in the opposite direction. They were intended to engage the emotions of the viewer in contemplating the specific circumstances of the incarnation as an assurance of Christ's accessibility to human prayer and the intercession of the saints. To achieve this end, Byzantine artists who illustrated the life of Christ created a more participatory art, which in



the virtuous behavior of a particular person are not the same thing as a symbolic representation of virtue such as a blindfolded woman holding scales. Rather, it is a general situation in which virtue is enacted by a specific person towards others. Virtue is seen not as an abstract ideal, but a way of relating, specifically, the way a particular godly man or woman relates to others.

#### **The Virtues of Nicholas**

Icons, and their accompanying narratives, depict *actions* that embody particular virtues in unique circumstances. Nicholas embodies the virtue of compassion as he identifies and seeks to alleviate the suffering of women who must engage in sex-work in order to survive, and of a father who can only lie by and watch. Nicholas acts with generosity by giving money to this impoverished family. He practices the virtue of justice by interceding on behalf of those wrongly imprisoned. It is interesting to note that both sets of generals freed through Nicholas's intercession were, according to the accompanying narratives, imprisoned due to envy. Envy for late-ancients, remember, was an active, causative force responsible for the miscarriage of justice and the source of misfortune and sickness. Nicholas's frequent replacement of John the Baptist in *deesis* (intercessory) icons with the Theotokos highlights his role as an intercessor for divine justice.<sup>96</sup>

Icons and their narratives underscore that becoming fully human cannot be envisioned without virtuous acts, because relationship is embodied in our actions towards

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many respects was more detailed than the Gospel text. The same artists, however, when illustrating the life of Saint Nicholas, ignored the dramatic details provided by his biographers. Ibid., 186.

<sup>96</sup> Henry Maguire, *From the Evil Eye to the Eye of Justice*, 227. The *deesis* icon, taking its name from the greek word for "prayer," "supplication" or "intercession," is usually depicted with the Theotokos and John the Baptist flanking Christ as *pantocrator*, respectively on the left and right. Many interpretations exist regarding the choice of these two figures, but all commentators agree that John the Baptist, as the conclusion of the old covenant, and the Theotokos, the first person of the new covenant, together intercede on behalf of humanity. The *deesis*

one another. Virtue characterizes relationships that respect and, when necessary, aid the other. Instead of skipping from the *kenosis* of birth straight to death and resurrection, a disturbing trend in Orthodox theology, attending to the embodied virtues of the saints reminds us that Jesus came to “bring good news to the poor...proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Lk. 4.18-19). An important element of an iconodule theology of the saints is that while icons of Christ make present the invisible Christ, icons of the saints point to the ways in which the saint participates in the work of God through his or her own visible actions. Saints are not “super-human,”<sup>97</sup> but unique persons who embody virtue by acting towards others as the incarnate God would act. Nicholas embodies the ministry of Jesus in acting with virtue towards others.

Maguire is not, I think, quite correct in characterizing icons of the life of Christ and the Virgin as *more* participatory than those of the saints. To make his interpretation of the spare narrative depiction more precise, icons of individual saints are not as *emotionally* participatory as are those of vestal icons. Their goal is not to draw the beholder into participation in a particular event or situation, nor to help the viewer understand the love of God given this particular event. Instead, the saint issues an invitation to the beholder to practice virtue. By doing so, the saint invites the beholder to participate in the same transformative process that makes a saint a saint. ‘Generic’ scenes do not provide set rules for behavior. Instead, they witness to the way in which this particular person loved, granted mercy, and sought justice. The spare almost empty canvas allows the beholder to reflect on

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icon frequently appears on or immediately above the first horizontal beam in the iconostasis, over the entrance doors. See for example, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Deesis\\_Hagia\\_Sophia.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Deesis_Hagia_Sophia.jpg)

<sup>97</sup> Maguire and Onasch’s use of this language is unfortunate, undercutting as it does theology of incarnation and deification which lies behind iconography. Evdokimov is quite explicit: “A saint is not a superman but

similar but not identical current situations, and consider how he or she might respond. The spare detail, often within a shifting narrative, allows for the focus to be on the virtue or virtues underlying a particular act, on the qualities of character that would lead a person to do what the saint does.

#### Summary

The ‘taking in’ of the actions of a saint may come about in a variety of ways. In an encounter with a living person for instance, a request for help sometimes evokes a surprising suggestion for personal change. The expression of gratitude may lead to an internalization of the appreciated quality. The joy of a story evoked by a small image may lead to reflection on a particular way of relating to others. There is no single path to transformation. Changed behavior may begin as imitation, but as it becomes a habitual way of relating, it is a virtue. We are compassionate not simply because we want to be like Nicholas, but because compassion has become our way of relating to others. Caroline Walker Bynum notes that while medieval hagiographers repeatedly asserted that that saints were too dangerous to be imitated by mere mortals, "those holy women of whom we have records, especially those who were canonized or widely revered, were *chosen* by their contemporaries as heroines, mirrors, and lessons—as lenses through which God's power and human aspirations were focused toward each other.”<sup>98</sup> Icons of saints provide a lens through which we focus on a life lived well in relation to others. This focus may begin by observation, supplication, or gratitude, and move to imitation. But as the way of life envisioned in icons becomes both an intentional and habitual way of relating, it becomes a virtue. This is the nature of virtue, to

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someone who lives his truth as a liturgical being.” See Paul Evdokimov, *Art of the Icon*, 15; Konrad Onasch, and Annemarie Schnieper, *Icons: Fascination and Reality*, 205; Henry Maguire, *The Icons of Their Bodies*, 96.

<sup>98</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, 7.

be both a means and an end. Virtue is chosen, but it also becomes our disposition towards others, simply the way we relate to others. The “high” theological anthropology of the Orthodox Church posits the full human person as the one who is naturally virtuous.

### 3.3.3: Virtues in Context

Thus far, it is clear that iconodule theology posits icons as images of presence through which the beholder is invited by the saint depicted into a particular kind of life. This life is characterized as “Christian” by the fact that it is a life lived in an effort to relate as others as Christ would relate, to become the kind of people in which faith, hope, love, justice and mercy, compassion and care, kindness and self-control all are habitual ways of relating. Virtue is expressed in our relationships. We will see in the next chapter how virtue is also enabled by our relationships (we are socially ‘constructed’ into particular virtues), particularly those formed through the liturgy. Yet what is less clear is how virtue is contextual. We see elements of its contextuality in the simple acknowledgement that a particular virtue is called for in particular situations. Nicholas may have been a habitually just person, but we only see him act in a just manner because of an unjust situation that he sought to rectify. This is how we know he is just, because he acts justly in a context. Contexts, however are not only situational. They are social as well. As we will see later, modern theologians use biological sex and associated gendered qualities as a ‘context’ that *limits* the appropriate exercise of virtues, functions and roles. But is this limitation reflected in the practice of virtue by the holy men and women of our tradition? How does gender influence the ways in which men and women relate virtuously? How does gender serve as a context within which virtue is practiced?

In order to offer an answer to this cluster of questions, I will turn to images of the Theotokos. Of all the saints, notes Jaroslav Pelikan, Mary as the “eternal Feminine” has served as an archetype of womanhood in a way that Christ has never done for manhood.<sup>99</sup> Pelikan’s exposition of this archetypal role is an extended exegesis of Goethe’s *Faust*. It is no coincidence that Russian theology of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, strongly influenced by German romanticism, should likewise construct archetypal descriptions of womanhood exemplified by the Theotokos.<sup>100</sup> Here, however, I will examine images of Mary as they have been used throughout the Orthodox tradition, before *Faust* ever took the stage. What will become evident from this examination is the following: through her unique role as selfless Mother of God, a role no one else can take on as she has, Mary calls forth and exemplifies the full range of virtues required for human relationships, and enacts them through both ‘male’ and ‘female’ roles and functions.

#### **Theotokos: Types of virtue**

Byzantine icons of the Virgin Mary generally portray her in the company of Christ, theologically stressing the Incarnation in which the fully divine Christ receives his full humanity from his mother, the Theotokos.<sup>101</sup> We can loosely identify four main types of images that are easily distinguished from one another. The earliest Mother of God *Orans* (see Figure 6) depicts the Virgin with arms upraised in an ancient gesture of prayer and supplication. The Virgin Enthroned (see Figure 7) seats her in a place of royal authority, the

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<sup>99</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 165-75.

<sup>100</sup> Evdokimov’s anthropology and theology is heavily shaped by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russian thinkers such as Soloviev, Bhukarov, and Bulgakov, all of whom were strongly influenced by German romanticism and Faust’s “eternal feminine.” Ibid., 165ff; Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov: Orthodox Theology in a New Key*.

<sup>101</sup> The exception to this is the very early *Orans* types which will be discussed below, and the Virgin in her intercessory role, appearing in most *deesis* icons with John the Baptist (or St. Nicholas) and Christ as judge.

“Queen of Heaven.” As the *Hodegetria* (see Figure 8), a term meaning “she who leads the way,” Mary gestures with one hand towards the Christ-child she holds with her other arm. Finally, the most recently developed type is the Virgin *Eleousa* (see Figure 9), named for the Greek word “mercy.”<sup>102</sup> Each type has associated versions, often distinguished by famous sanctuaries in which an image was housed, cities that they are reputed to have saved from devastation, or by particularly important emotive or theological features of the icon itself. Toponymic epithets may refer to more than one type of image.<sup>103</sup> Each type is also embedded in varying liturgical and historical narratives that emphasize different aspects of the Virgin Mary, her relationship to Christ, and to all creation. Qualitative epithets emphasize the metaphorical or socio-historical role of a particular image, highlighting a particular quality of the image (“of tenderness”) or perceived role of the icon (e.g., Nikopoios, “victory bringer”). A single icon can have multiple names, such as the famous *eleousa* type, the “Lady of Vladimir” named for her protection of the city, and also known as the “Mother of Tenderness,” named for the quality of the relationship portrayed between the mother and her son.

There are two crucial elements to keep in mind (and to which we will return) regarding naming types of icons and the person made ‘present’ by the image. First, qualitative epithets designate *an established role or relationship*. An image receives a name because there is a widespread perception that the person imaged relates in a particular way, had or has a particular role, or exemplifies particular qualities or virtues. Qualitative names do not come out of nowhere. They are derived from the experience of the faithful that

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<sup>102</sup> Ouspensky and Lossky add a fifth, the Mother of God of the Passion. This type appears in Serbia in the fourteenth century, and is rarely included by other (especially Byzantine oriented) scholars as a main type of Marian iconography. Léonide Ouspensky, and Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, trans. G.E.H. Palmer, and E. Kadloubovsky, Revised ed. (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1999), 102.

establishes within the tradition a particular role or relationship between the faithful and the person depicted. Second, no narrative of the Mother of God, her theological significance or her symbolic representation of humanity (much less her symbolic representation of ‘Woman’) is complete without attention to the full range of her visual representations. To put it in a more pious manner, it dishonors the Virgin to ignore all the ways in which she has loved and cared for her Son’s brothers and sisters, the people of God.

Yet this is precisely the tendency in nineteenth and twentieth-century discussions of the Virgin, which revolve almost entirely around the *eleousa* type. Given this uniquely modern twist in depicting Mary as an ideal of ‘Woman’ rather than as the first deified *human* (who happens to be a woman), I will examine the *eleousa* type last. Its discussion will serve to move us from discussing actual images to discussing *conceptual images* of gender supposedly derived from actual images of a woman, the Theotokos. My purpose here is to set our discussion of gender and virtue in its *full* context, one in which a particular virtue, in this case selfless-love, is evinced by the Theotokos in a manner that bears no resemblance to the passively receptive qualities and limited roles of Mary as “the eternal feminine.” The values and roles perceived as necessary by a culture consistently shape the use of iconographic representations and interpretive narratives. Again, images and the virtues drawn from them have a context that shapes the roles played by the person exemplifying the particular or necessary virtue. There is simply no single consistent archetype of femininity, masculinity, or even humanity (outside of Christ) in Orthodoxy.

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<sup>103</sup> Such as the variety of images referred to as Virgin *Blachernitissa* (“little Blachernai,” a monastery of Constantinople), images which include *orans* as well as *eleousa* types.

## Hodegetria

The *hodegetria* (“she who leads the way”) type is linked to a prototype purportedly ‘written’ by St. Luke who sent it to “Theophilus” along with his famous text on the early church.<sup>104</sup> In this type, the Virgin carries in one arm (usually the left) her son; both figures are upright and gazing out at the beholder. Christ sits as if enthroned in her arms, positioned as *pantocrator* (See Figure 8).<sup>105</sup> With her free hand the Virgin gestures towards Christ (explaining the *qualitative* epithet for this type). Mary’s eyes are on the viewer, drawing us in. With her hand, she then directs our gaze to her son whose hand is raised in blessing. It is an icon of dynamic participation in which the beholder is drawn in by a gaze, pointed towards Christ-Emmanuel, and receives a blessing. Hers is “a gesture of presentation: the Theotokos shows to men the Son of God Who, by Her, has come into the world. Or again—it is the attitude of the Sovereign Who presents to Her Son the people of the faithful, to which the Christ-Emmanuel responds with a broad majestic gesture of benediction.”<sup>106</sup> The style emphasizes, like its descendent the *eleousa*, the sacrificial nature of motherly love. It does so, however in the context of war.

The rise of this style’s popularity and connection to the Constantinopolitan Marian cult is, according to Bissera Pentcheva, a story of imperial power. The same virgin

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<sup>104</sup> According to legend, it was later brought to Constantinople in the fifth-century by the Empress Eudocia (422-462) as a gift for her sister-in-law Pulcheria (399-453).

<sup>105</sup> Like the Virgin, icons of Christ also have types, though fewer (as Maguire argues, there is significantly less theological freedom in portraying Christ than his Mother). The *acheiropoietos* (ἀχειροποίητος) or “made without hands” derives from legends in which Christ’s face was impressed upon a piece of linen, and depict only Christ’s head framed with his halo and a cloth. Christ *pantocrator* portrays the divine Christ, fully human, often though not always seated on a throne. In one hand he holds a scroll or book, with the other he offers a blessing. The *mandorla* which surrounds him indicates divine light and infinity. Depending on the size of the image, Christ may be surrounded by angelic figures and symbols of the four gospels.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 81. Apparently not enamored with this style, Cavarnos says only that it is “more hieratic”, the “most austere form of the Holy Virgin” with a “passionless” expression. This is the sum total of his analysis. Fotis Kontoglous, and Constantine Cavarnos, *Byzantine Sacred Art*, 2nd ed. (Belmont, MA: The Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1985), 110.



motherhood that is much later idealized as a quiet and obediently receptive woman is, in war-torn Byzantium, framed as the righteous purity that girds men's loins for battle. "The Theotokos embodied two concepts vital for the context of war," says Pentcheva, "virginal motherhood, which is the source of Mary's invincibility, and motherly sacrifice — in selflessly offering her Child to the world, the Theotokos presented a model of selfless love indispensable for any state recruiting armies."<sup>107</sup> The closely linked development of icons as tools of personal and ecclesial religious devotion as well as symbols of divine blessing for imperial power occurs in the context of a perpetually warring Byzantine empire.<sup>108</sup> By the eleventh century, the *hodegetria* icon, housed at all times in the Hodegon (thus a possible toponymic source for this type's name), a monastery within the walls of Constantinople, became *the* processional icon for the rulers of the city. This shift in the imperial use of icons, itself a response (in part) to the immense surge in their use as a result of the successful quelling of iconoclasm, is well illustrated by shifting accounts of a battle that took place well before the iconodule "triumph of Orthodoxy." The *hodegetria* appears at the center of the narratives of a crucial battle during the Avar siege, fought on August 7, 626. It, and the Virgin it portrays, is honored as a battle leader who marches at the head of armies, protecting her city.

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<sup>107</sup> Bissera V. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 61.

<sup>108</sup> The Byzantine empire saw virtually no peace in its effort to recover territory lost as a result of the disintegration of the Roman empire. Under Justinian I (reigned 527-565), the empire fought the Vandals and Ostrogoths to the west, and peace with the Sassanid Persians allowed his successors to defend against the constant press of Bulgars, Slavs and Avars. The brief respite under Maurice (reigned 582-602) ended with his murder, used a pretext for Persian reclamation of Mesopotamia, Damascus and Jerusalem. While Heraclius (reigned 610-641) fought the Persians to the east, the Avars and Slavs laid siege to Constantinople only to be repelled on August 7, 626, according to 'eyewitness' accounts, by the Virgin herself, brandishing a sword. Both Heraclius in the East and his representative in the capitol, the Patriarch Sergius, carried icons as battle standards. Heraclius carried an *acheiropoietos* ("made without hands") image of Christ, and Sergius an icon of the Theotokos. Averil Cameron, "Images of Authority: Elites and Icons in Late Sixth-Century Byzantium," *Past and Present* 84, no. 1 (1979), 24. Though victorious, the siege and ongoing wars with the Persians to the east left Byzantine territories vulnerable to Arab attack from the south for centuries to follow. The empire was (again briefly) stabilized only at end of the ninth century.

*Avar Siege*

Seventh-century ‘eyewitness’ accounts of the Avar siege of Constantinople present a Virgin militant and warlike in defense of her city. According to these accounts, the Mother of God herself, *not* her icon, waded into the bloody fray. She “gave courage to our [soldiers].... And the Virgin [*parthenos*] appeared everywhere, winning uncontested victory and inflicting horror and fear on the enemies. She was giving strength to her servants and protecting subjects from harm, on the one hand, and destroying enemies, on the other.”<sup>109</sup> Theodore Synkellos (early seventh century) continues with his account: “In the sea battle, the Virgin sank men and boats together before her Blachernai monastery. Consequently the whole bay [i.e., the Golden Horn], if it is not too harsh to say, could be crossed without wetting our feet because of the dead bodies scattered at random.... It was proved most clearly that the Virgin [*parthenos*] alone fought this battle and won the victory.”<sup>110</sup> As Pentcheva notes, it is the Theomater’s virginal motherhood that is the source of both her purity and power. A poem of George of Pisidia (early seventh century) illustrates the connection well:

If a painter wanted to show the triumph of the battle,

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<sup>109</sup> From Theodore Synkellos, *De obsidione Constantinopolitana*, in *Traduction et commentaire*, ed. Makk, sect XIX, p. 82. Cited in Bissera V. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 64. Among contemporary accounts are those of the Avar’s themselves. Averil Cameron refers to a text in which the khagan of the Avars saw a veiled lady walking the ramparts of the city. See *Chronicon Paschale*, ed. L. Dindorf, 2 vols. (Corpus scriptorum historiae Byzantinae, Bonn, 1832), i, p. 725, line 9; Joannes Scylitzes, in *Georgius Cedrenus*, *Compendium historiarum*, ed. I. Bekker, 2 vols. (C.S.H.B., Bonn, 1838-9), i, p. 728, lines 23ff. Noted in Averil Cameron, “Images of Authority: Elites and Icons in Late Sixth-Century Byzantium,” 5-6, n. 12.

<sup>110</sup> From Theodore Synkellos, *De obsidione Constantinopolitana*, in *Traduction et commentaire*, ed. Makk, sect XXXIII, p. 87. Cited in Bissera V. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 64. Among “eyewitness” accounts which include Mary’s active participation in battle are a poem by George of Pisidia, a sermon attributed to Theodore Synkellos, and an excerpt in the *Chronicon Paschale*. Kristoffel Demoen, “The Philosopher, the Call Girl and the Icon: Theodore the Studite’s (Ab)Use of Gregory Nazianzen in the Iconoclastic Controversy,” in *Spiritualité De L’Univers Byzantin Dans Le Verbe Et L’Image* (Ithaca, NY: Brepols, 1997), 716-26; George of Pisidia, *Bellum Avaricum* in George of Pisidia, and Agostino Pertusi, *Poemi*, vol. 7, *Studia patristica et Byzantina* (Buch-Kunstverlag Ettal: Freisting, 1959), 176-224; Syncellus Theodorus et al., *Traduction Et Commentaire De L’Homélie Écrite Probablement Par Théodore Le Syncelle Sur Le Siège De Constantinople En 626*, vol. 19, *Opuscula Byzantina* iii (Szeged: Acta Universitatis de Attila Jósef Nominatae, 1975).

he might put forward the One who bore without a seed  
and only paint her image.  
For she alone always knows how to conquer nature,  
first by birth, and then by battle.  
For as she then gave birth without a seed,  
in the same way she now gives birth to salvation with no weapons,  
so that through both deeds she might be found to be a virgin  
indomitable in the battle as she was in giving birth.<sup>111</sup>

The Akathist to the Virgin, written in this time period, hymns Mary in the final two stanzas as, among other things, “Thunder, striking down the enemy,” “precious Diadem of godly kings,” “Tower of the Church,” “impregnable fortress of the Kingdom,” and the one through “whom enemies are cast down.”<sup>112</sup>

This violent vision of Mary may be only slightly more palatable to modern feminists than subsequent narratives that emphasize her obediential receptivity. Further, its use in worship illustrates the dangerous marriage in Orthodox practice between political success and divine sanction. In no way do I want to affirm these elements, though I will later discuss the irony that of all possible saints, it is the Theotokos who exemplifies the conquering warrior. My point here is that this vision meets the needs of an embattled society by unabashedly framing the virtuous qualities of the Virgin as the actions of a triumphant (and rather brutal) conquerer.

### *Strategos*

While contemporary accounts of the Avar siege place the Virgin herself on the battlefield, later accounts ascribe the power to the presence of her icon.<sup>113</sup> This refashioning

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<sup>111</sup> George of Pisidia, and Agostino Pertusi, *Poemi*.176, vv. 1-9. Cited in Bissera V. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 65.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 66. Pentcheva adds other sources in addition to the Akathist hymn, specifically, three middle Byzantine texts: a tenth-century prayer said before battle, a commemorative service for dead soldiers, and a *parakletikos kanon* of the early eleventh-century. See pp. 67-69, and notes 43-57 on pp. 216-217.

<sup>113</sup> There is no clear evidence of the presence of an icon of the Theotokos at the seventh century battle. Averil Cameron argues that the Emperor Heraclius in the East carried into battle against the Persians an *acheiropoietos*

of history is attributed by Pentcheva to the growing role of icons in processions and imperial propaganda following the iconoclastic controversy. While there is minimal evidence of an imperial or Constantinopolitan cult of icons pre-iconoclasm, *after* iconoclasm, the Theotokos and her icons were consistently adapted for war by attributing to them both poetic names that signified victory.<sup>114</sup> Qualitative epithets, often poetic and metaphorical, allow for a range of interpretation. *Nikopoios* ('victory bringer') and *Akatamachetos* ('invincible') "written next to any Marian image denote an ideal quality of the Mother of God: her ability to lend help in battle. Qualitative names *modify the function of an icon and transform it*, in these cases, into an object that can be carried in battle."<sup>115</sup> In a time of war, which was much of the time in the Byzantine middle-ages, the ideal qualities and virtues of the Theotokos are evident in her ability to lead in battle.

Names indicate and modify the function of an icon. Mary triumphs over nature, and this same courageous ability to restrain passion and persevere in the face of hardship is, in war-torn Byzantium, utilized to lead warriors to victory. In other words, icons have a function that is contextual. Framing Mary with military saints directs her narrative away from her historical person as a mother raising a child in remote region of Palestine, and toward her roles as a battle leader and protector of her people.<sup>116</sup> By the tenth-century, the *blachernitissa*, an icon which when not carried by emperors on military campaigns was stored

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("made without hands") image of Christ. The Patriarch Sergius who remained in Constantinople, is said to have carried an icon of the Theotokos. See Averil Cameron, "Images of Authority: Elites and Icons in Late Sixth-Century Byzantium," 24. Pentcheva goes into great detail, noting that Theodore Synkellos, a contemporary to the siege, places an *acheiropoiotos* of Christ in the hands of Sergius, and Marian icons around the walls. It is only in later accounts, written when Constantinople was unequivocally the city of the Virgin, that Sergius raises an image of Mary. Bissera V. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 38ff.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. 79, emphasis added.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 82ff.

at the Blachernai monastery, was referred to as the “general,” the “guardian of the army,” and the “invincible weapon.”<sup>117</sup>

The appellations attributed to Mary during this time hardly emphasize stillness, receptivity, intuition or passivity, favorite descriptors of twentieth-century theologians. These qualities had little value in the face of constant assault, and so they have no place in either the Byzantine iconographical or liturgical narratives. This association of the Theotokos with battle is maintained in contemporary Orthodox liturgy. Scripture readings for the Feast of the Dormition from the Book of Judith (Judith 15-16) associate Mary with military victory. Judith not only used her sex appeal to infiltrate the tent of the enemy leader and return with his head, she also gave battle instructions preceding and following her gory task. She, like Theotokos, functioned as *Strategos*, “general.”<sup>118</sup> Given the much later emphasis on genteel receptivity seen in the *eleousa* type, it is ironic that this toponymic epithet may very well have referred to an early version of this type. Even the “Mother of Tenderness” rises to do battle when her children are in danger, inspiring the poet George of Pisidia to exclaim to her, “Hail, general of active vigilance!”<sup>119</sup>

### A New Mode

Shifting now to the Virgin Enthroned and the Virgin of the Sign, I will add a layer to my mode of analysis. Rather than reading these icons solely in light of historical and liturgical texts, I will also ‘read’ these two icons from the perspective of a Christian woman

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 63. Pentcheva is citing Psellos, *Chronographia*, III.10-11, in *Imperatori di Bisanzio*, ed. Impellizzeri, I, 84; English tr. in *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, tr. Sewter, 69-70 (on Romanos III Argyros); Attaleiates, *Historia*, Bon ed., 152-153 (on Romanos IV Diogenes). As a toponymic term, *Blachernitissa* identifies the site of an icon’s storage. A number of styles are often identified by this term. For further discussion of the development of this novel image, which conflates the ancient *orans* image of the Theotokos with that of her holding a medallion of the Christ Child, see *ibid.*, 76, 145ff.

<sup>118</sup> In the Septuagint, this same word is used to describe Judith.

who claims, as a human person made in the image and likeness of God, the full share of potential virtues, capabilities and competencies granted to all human persons. Further, the capabilities and competencies that are both allowed me, and into which I have been raised and trained, are often perceived as specific to Western women of only the last hundred years (the truth of this perception is rightly disputed). Here I am making a particular claim, one which affects my reading of these two images. I am reading from a bias, a standpoint and an interest that directs my eyes as I read these images. This bias is no different in quality, even if it is in content, from the bias of hymnographers writing in a time of war who see in the Virgin their protector and guardian, nor a Russian emigré in Paris writing from the perspective of Russo-germanic romanticism. It is part of a contemplative method that permeates Orthodoxy, to reflect on and stand in the presence of the saints from within one's own social location. As I hope to demonstrate, this bias and its conclusions are not without support from within the Orthodox tradition.

#### **The Virgin Enthroned**

The majestic Virgin Enthroned (see Figure 7) seats the Theotokos on a jeweled throne, a place of royal authority as the “Queen of Heaven.” Her “stern” gaze and upright posture underscore her central role as Mother of God, “austere and inflexible.”<sup>120</sup> On her lap sits the Christ-Child, in the equally majestic posture of the Pantocrator, and she is frequently surrounded by bowing angels. In the south vestibule of Hagia Sophia, she is flanked by the Emperor John Comnenus (1118-1143) and his consort Irene who offer her

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<sup>119</sup> George of Pisidia, and Agostino Pertusi, *Poemi*, 182-83, vv. 130ff Cited in Bissera V. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 65.

<sup>120</sup> “Stern” is used multiple times by Lossky and Ouspensky to describe this type. Léonide Ouspensky, and Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, 89. “Austere and inflexible are the only two adjectives Cavarinos applies

donations (see Figure 10). A sixth-century encaustic places two warrior saints dressed in civilian attire, Theodore and George, on either side, underscoring her imperial rather than military presence (see Figure 11). Pentcheva notes that it was not until the late tenth and eleventh centuries that warrior saints appear in battle-dress, reflecting a shifting value regarding war and the Virgin's battle role.<sup>121</sup> Similarly, in the West, *Maria Regina* was frequently used to enhance the public perception of imperial power.<sup>122</sup>

Yet in the earliest known *Life of the Virgin*, which bears no stamp of imperial influence (its purported author, Maximus the Confessor, suffered horribly in imperial hands), calls the Virgin “queen and leader” over the children of her elderly husband Joseph, the “leader and teacher and ruler of all the members of his family....”<sup>123</sup> As a “disciple” of her son, this early text portrays the faithful and steadfast Mary as the leader of the many women who followed Jesus, including the “apostle” Mary Magdalene who, “to put it briefly, as the blessed apostle Peter was zealous and outstanding among the [male] disciples, so was Mary Magdalene among the myrrhbearers and women....”<sup>124</sup> After the resurrection, to which the text claims the Virgin Mary was the sole witness, *not* the other myrrh-bearing women, she willingly accompanies John in his preaching. Yet, “so that her honor would be unique and

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to this image, which he incorrectly labels as *Platytera*, an epithet more appropriate to the Virgin of the Sign. See Fotis Kontoglous, and Constantine Cavarnos, *Byzantine Sacred Art*, 110.

<sup>121</sup> Bissera V. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 85, 89.

<sup>122</sup> See Pelikan's chapter on the “Queen of Heaven” in Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*.

<sup>123</sup> (Ps.?) Maximus the Confessor, *Maximus the Confessor: Life of the Virgin*, trans. Stephen J. Shoemaker (New Haven: Yale University Press, forthcoming), 18. I am especially grateful to Stephen Shoemaker who offered his unpublished translation of this amazing text which unabashadly (though not without complications) portrays the Virgin Mary and other women as disciples and apostles who fully share in the ministry of the early church. The page numbers refer to section numbers of the text as translated by Shoemaker. Shoemaker has discussed the text and its implications in a number of articles. See Stephen J. Shoemaker, “The Virgin Mary in the Ministry of Jesus and the Early Church According to the Earliest Life of the Virgin,” *Harvard Theological Review* 98, no. 4 (2005): 441 - 467; *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford University Press, 2006); “Death and the Maiden: The Early History of the Dormition and Assumption Apocrypha,” *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 50, no. 1-2 (2006): 59 - 97; “The Georgian *Life of the Virgin* Attributed to Maximus the Confessor: Its Authenticity(?) and Importance,” in *Mémoires R.P. Michel Van Esbroeck, S.J.* (St. Petersburg: Byzantinorussica, 2006).

not joined with the apostles, but so that she would send them forth and not be sent forth, and so that she would lead the believing people and direct the church in Jerusalem with James the brother of the Lord who was appointed as bishop there,” Mary returned to Jerusalem.<sup>125</sup> There, she remained “at the center of the world” as “queen of all.”<sup>126</sup> As a leader in the Jerusalem church, “she was not only an inspiration and a teacher of endurance and ministry to the blessed apostles and the other believers, but she was also a co-minister with the disciples of the Lord, and she helped with the preaching, and she shared mentally in their struggles and torments and imprisonments.”<sup>127</sup> It was the Virgin who counseled and taught the apostles, who directed their preaching, and to whom they would return to report their success and their sufferings.<sup>128</sup>

What if this text, lost to public view until recently, shapes our ‘reading’ of the Virgin Enthroned? The Queen of Heaven sits on her throne holding in her lap the Word of God. She sits not in “austere” and hieratic glory, but as the woman to whom we in the church come for leadership. As one of the first followers of Christ, as the one who heard his questions as a child and his teaching as an adult, who accompanied him in his ministry, who managed the many women who followed him (to the scandal of his contemporaries), this queen is no figurative ruler. She teaches the Word as one who dandled him on her knee. She certainly knows the suffering that is the consequence of preaching the good news. As one who has suffered herself, she is uniquely able to offer comfort, and as queen-mother she intercedes with the Judge. Yet her role in the community is hardly limited to intercession. As a capable and knowledgable woman, she leads the people of God, in part by encouraging

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<sup>124</sup> (Ps.?) Maximus the Confessor, *Maximus the Confessor: Life of the Virgin*, 71.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 98.



them to persevere through suffering to continue in their tasks. She directs the disciples of God to go forth and preach the good news of her Son. As queen and leader of the Church, she continues to be surrounded by the saints whose lives reflect the transformation of the good news. She is a woman capable of leading, bearing authority, teaching, exercising wisdom and pastoral compassion.

### **The Virgin of the Sign**

The perception of a capable and virtuous woman who stands at the center of the community of the saints is both deepened and expanded in the Virgin of the Sign. This “most revered” type incorporates an *orans* image with the presence of Christ over her breast.<sup>129</sup> *Orantes* are ancient Roman images of women and men, hands raised in prayer and supplication. The earliest known such images of the Virgin are of a woman standing, hands raised, with the simple inscription “Maria” or “Mara,” dating to the beginning of the fourth century. Also traced to a similar time is the first Virgin *orans* with Christ on her breast, found in Cimitero Maggiore.<sup>130</sup> As the Virgin *orans*, the Theotokos takes on a twofold role. First, as *homo adorans*, she stands before us as one who is engaged in the essential act of being human, worship.<sup>131</sup> Here, the Virgin models for us and invites us an essential element of a more full humanity. Second, she stands before us as the church at prayer, a symbolic role emphasized in both Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism.

The towering mosaic of the Virgin *orans*, more popularly known as the Great Panagia (“all holy”) in the apse of Hagia Sophia in Kiev (1037, see Figure 6) is a rare depiction of

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>129</sup> Léonide Ouspensky, and Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, 77.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid. As a source they cite N.P. Kondakov’s *Iconography of the Mother of God*.

<sup>131</sup> According to Alexander Schmemmann, whose work will be explored in more detail below, making Christ present in prayer is *the* task of humanity as *homo adorans* and the church. Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of*

Mary at prayer with no immediately visible presence of her son (but who is certainly present on nearby walls). More frequently the apse of an Orthodox church features the Mother of God together with her Son (see Figure 12). It is Christ's presence on her breast or in her womb (either interpretation accurately describes his placement in relation to her body) that adds the epithet "the Sign," from Isaiah 7.14: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel." In this image, Christ is "God-with-us." The presence of Jesus on the Virgin's breast modifies the image. The prayer of the the individual person and the corporate body is tied to the presence of Jesus within it by visually tying Jesus to the body of a woman.

The Virgin of the Sign underscores that prayer is always shared between at least two 'persons.' Prayer, whether it is prayer of supplication, gratitude, contemplation, or transformation, includes the one praying and Christ via the Spirit who prays with, and *from within*, the person. In this icon, we see ourselves in Mary, hands raised in prayer with Christ whom, like the Virgin, we bear in our bodies. The one within the church also prays *within us* as the church. This does not simply mean that we do not pray alone, but that Christ participates in the world *through* the prayer of the people of God. The famous Yaroslavl Virgin (See Figure 13) depicts Christ's hands raised in parallel to the Virgin's, visually underscoring the shared prayer between Mother and Son, church and Christ, individual and Christ. Christ, incarnate through the womb of this praying woman, is incarnated again and again as the one who prays within us.

Like most icons of the Virgin, this image reminds us that the early arguments for the term *Theotokos* underscored not Mary's role, but the full divinity of the one whom she bore.

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*the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy*, 2nd rev. and expanded ed. (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988), 101.

When it appears on the apse of a church (a frequent location), this image is often referred to as *platytera*, from the Greek phrase *platytera ton ouranon*, “she who is wider than the Heavens.” This qualitative name, derived from the liturgy of St. Basil, highlights the strangeness of the Incarnation in which the Virgin contained the uncontainable, and in which an earthly creature bore heaven in her body. The *mandorla* of shaded blue that typically surrounds Christ in these images, sometimes sprinkled with stars on a field of dark blue, is an image of light and divinity. All icons of the Transfiguration, where Christ’s divinity was revealed to his followers, depict Jesus surrounded by a *mandorla*. In the Virgin, the infinite dwells within the finite. Likewise, the church at prayer is the place where infinity dwells.

Yet the church here is not an abstract image or a concept, but a woman. It is typical to portray the relationship between humanity and God as a *receptive* woman who responds to the *initiative* of a male deity. This all too common view reifies outdated Aristotelian biology. Worse, it glosses over the significance of the “strange and new exchange” in which Christ takes his flesh from a young woman, by which, Symeon the New Theologian continues, Christ makes the saints “sharers of His own, deified flesh.”<sup>132</sup> Deification happens in the flesh, God is in-*carne*. The flesh God ‘uses’ is not some special, divine flesh, but the free-offering of a faithful young woman. “As we have said, it is by means of this flesh that He Who is Son of God and son of the virgin communicates the grace of the Spirit—i.e, of divinity....”<sup>133</sup> For Symeon, this means that the flesh and blood of the Eucharist is not simply the flesh and blood of Christ, but of his mother.

Just as we all receive of His fulness, so do we all partake of the immaculate flesh of His all-holy Mother which He assumed, and so, just as Christ our

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<sup>132</sup> *First Ethical Discourse*, IX. Symeon the New Theologian, *On the Mystical Life: The Ethical Discourses*, trans. Alexander Golitzin, vol. 1: The Church and the Last Things (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995), 58.

<sup>133</sup> *First Ethical Discourse*, IX. Ibid., 59.

God, true God, became her son; even so we, too—O, the ineffable love for mankind!—become sons of His mother, the Theotokos, and brothers of Christ Himself, as through the all-immaculate and ineffable marriage which took place with and in her....<sup>134</sup>

The salvific effects of the Eucharist are not simply initiated by a woman who agrees to bear the Son of God who then becomes our offering. The woman herself is present in the flesh of her son. The altar table bears a son *and* a mother, the “flesh of the Lord is the flesh of the Theotokos.”<sup>135</sup>

Symeon pushes his imagery even further, undoubtedly discomfiting his all-male monastic audience on purpose, or, perhaps, taking advantage of the veneration of the Virgin typical among monastics in order to press them to think more deeply about their life of faith, lived through their bodies. According to Symeon, we not only take in the flesh of the mother in the flesh of the Son via the Eucharist, but the Son becomes like his mother, giving birth to new children. While Mary ceases from conception and bearing children, “her son both engendered and continues to the present to engender those who believe in Him and keep His holy commandments.”<sup>136</sup> Christ not only “engenders” but gives birth: “the immortal and incorruptible Word of the immortal and incorruptible God, however, begets and gives birth to immortal and incorruptible children, after having first been born of the virgin by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>137</sup> Paradoxically, this birthing *by* Christ is simultaneously a birthing *of* Christ. The Word is a “kind of seed” that is conceived in the hearts of the faithful.<sup>138</sup> Addressing an all-male monastic community, Symeon declares “Blessed is he who has seen the light of the world take form within himself, for he, having Christ as an embryo

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<sup>134</sup> *First Ethical Discourse*, X. Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> *First Ethical Discourse*, X. Ibid., 60.

<sup>136</sup> *First Ethical Discourse*, X. Ibid., 59.

<sup>137</sup> *First Ethical Discourse*, X. Ibid., 60.

<sup>138</sup> *First Ethical Discourse*, X. Ibid., 56.

within, shall be reckoned His mother, as He Himself Who does not lie has promised, saying: 'Here are my mother and brothers and friends' [Lk 8:2]."<sup>139</sup> Faithful Christians, born of Christ their Mother, become women who receive the Spirit, women who bear and birth Christ, women who are his mother. Christ births the church from within, birthing each believer. And like the Virgin of the Sign, the believer "carries God consciously within himself as light, carries Him Who has brought all things into being and created them, including the One who carries Him now."<sup>140</sup>

The Virgin of the Sign does not support a simple 'one-way' reading, in which the feminine human receives and bears the initiatory masculine divine. Male and female conceive and bear, male and female give flesh to one another, and in their shared flesh grow to the maturity of one who gives birth to God through spiritual effort and virtuous practice. Reading the Virgin of the Sign in conjunction with the words of Symeon, allows these visual and verbal metaphors to do precisely what metaphors are supposed to do, "cast up a network of associations that through their jolt and strain compels new possibilities of vision."<sup>141</sup> Given this reading of the Virgin of the Sign, how is it possible to so neatly divide the Christian experience into appropriate male and female roles and modes of being? If the flesh of Christ is that of a woman, if it is a woman whose flesh we eat, if to see God incarnate is to see someone who is made of the flesh of a woman, if Christ himself is a woman who births the faithful, if the Christian life is to conceive and bear God precisely as this woman has already done, on what basis do we forbid the flesh of women in any space of the Church, the body of women from imaging the body of Christ, the hands of a woman from distributing the flesh and blood of Christ?

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<sup>139</sup> *Tenth Ethical Discourse*. Ibid., 168.

<sup>140</sup> *Eleventh Ethical Discourse*. Ibid., 135.

## The Eleousa

Turning now to the final, and chronologically most recent, of the four types, the *eleousa*, we will see how it is possible restrict women from far more than just the altar. My brief, initial ‘look’ at the icon will intentionally steer away from gender-specific interpretations of this image, in keeping with the readings that preceded. I will then turn to Paul Evdokimov’s reading, which serves as a bridge to move from actual images to conceptual images. Nonna Harrison in particular closely examines the use of conceptual (“verbal”) images and their role in defining the appropriate virtues, capabilities and roles of women (and, perhaps less obviously, men) in the church. This bridge also takes us into the twentieth-century, a century particularly concerned with categorizing and assigning virtues according to masculine and feminine associations. Élisabeth Behr-Sigel and Harrison’s exchange regarding the ordination of women, discussed below, highlight the influence of conceptual images and their contextual and shifting nature. Evdokimov and Harrison’s reflections are as much a sign of the times as are Behr-Sigel’s and my own initial forays into a relatively new arena of sustained theological and anthropological consideration.

The *eleousa* is likely the most clearly and intentionally emotive style of any icon prevalent in the Orthodox tradition.<sup>142</sup> More popular in Russia than Byzantium, perhaps the most famous version is the icon of Our Lady of Vladimir (See Figure 8), alternatively known as the “Mother of Tenderness.”<sup>143</sup> The Vladimir icon retains an aspect of its predecessor, the *hodegetria*, in the gesture of Mary’s hand toward her son. In subsequent versions

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<sup>141</sup> Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 58.

<sup>142</sup> From the Greek for “mercy” or “pity.” In Russian, the term is *Umileniye* which is insufficiently translated as mercy, compassion, pity, or tenderness. Ouspensky and Lossky prefer “Lovingkindness.” Léonide Ouspensky, and Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, 93.

developed from the Byzantine original, both of the Virgin's hands hold her son as he, with "unselfconscious eagerness" pushes himself against her, their cheeks pressed against one another in a gesture of love and comfort.<sup>144</sup> Unlike the preceding styles, the emphasis here is not on the divinity of Christ or imperial glory. Rather, it is an icon "full of a natural human feeling—of mother-love and tenderness."<sup>145</sup> Recall that Gregory of Nazianzus experienced his priesthood, his teaching, the nourishment it offered, and the affection he felt towards his lost congregation, as one of tender mothering.<sup>146</sup> The epithet *eleousa* emphasizes its qualitative rather than toponymic function, and first appeared in the late-ninth century, corresponding to the rise of the appellation "Mother of God" and the subsequent disappearance of the epithets *Maria* or *Hagia Maria*.<sup>147</sup> Niki Tsironis notes that the initial relevance of the Theotokos in the iconoclastic controversies was theological: she gave "matter" to Christ. Three centuries later, however, the promotion of tender motherhood resulted from a felt need to emphasize her sympathetic qualities rather than her doctrinal utility. First introduced in tenth-century poetry, the association of motherhood and tenderness was then incorporated into icons and liturgy, a typical example of incorporating a new theme into standard religious practice.<sup>148</sup> As a mother, the Virgin has special access to her son, making her a particularly effective intercessor.

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<sup>143</sup> Its other nickname, *Vladimirskaia*, reflects the favor in which this image is held by the residents of the city it is reputed to have saved, Vladimir. The original was given as a gift from Constantinople to a ruling family of Rus' in the mid-twelfth century.

<sup>144</sup> Rowan Williams, *Ponder These Things: Praying With Icons of the Virgin* (Brewster, Mass.: Paraclete Press, 2006), 22.

<sup>145</sup> Léonide Ouspensky, and Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, 92.

<sup>146</sup> See Chapter 2.2.3

<sup>147</sup> For a discussion of the difficulty of distinguishing similar images associated with the Eleousa church in Constantinople, funeral and processional rites, and its apparent use as an icon which made present divine mercy or loving kindness, see Bissera V. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 169-87.

<sup>148</sup> Niki Tsironis, "From Poetry to Liturgy: The Cult of the Virgin in the Middle Byzantine Era," in *Images of the Mother of God: Perception of the Theotokos in Byzantium* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 92. According to Tsironis, the language of tenderness was introduced by the Patriarch Photios in his tenth homily given in commemoration of a no longer extant mosaic in Hagia Sophia. See *ibid.*, 95.

An intriguing meditation on this type of image is offered by Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury. While not Orthodox, his expertise in Orthodox theology is well-known and respected. He also sees in the *hodegetria* Mary as a disciple and witness to Christ. In the *eleousa*, a descendent of the *hodegetria*, “the reference is broadened out: Mary is creation itself embraced by Christ, and more specifically human creation, invaded by Christ and disoriented, disarranged by his coming.”<sup>149</sup> In this icon, the eager scrambling of the child illustrates “divine urgency, divine hunger,” the utterly undignified love of God for creation.<sup>150</sup> Williams sees in this icon a God who initiates, who so loves creation that “he cannot bear to be separated from it and goes eagerly in search of it, hungry to find in the created ‘other’ the reality of his own life and bliss.”<sup>151</sup> What makes this meditation so intriguing is that Williams identifies in the gaze of the Virgin a sense of sobriety and tragedy at the weight of divine love, and the fear that perhaps we cannot bear such a passionate lover.<sup>152</sup> As with all iconic gazes, an invitation is issued to the beholder to participate with Mary in bearing the burden of God’s love. The love of God is challenging, life-disrupting, and life-transforming. It is hardly a comfortable love, unsettling our conceits with its unfailing, insistent, and joyful presence. Like the Virgin of the Sign, the we are invited to bear this eagerly undignified and “*shameless*” love into the world, offering this wriggling child who wraps himself around our neck to others.<sup>153</sup> Perhaps I find this meditative imagining so compelling precisely because it offers an alternative to contemporary Orthodox narratives of

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<sup>149</sup> Rowan Williams, *Ponder These Things*, 38.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 30-31.

<sup>153</sup> The term “shameless” is from Williams, emphasis in his text. Ibid., 27. A paragraph preceding the use of this word is worth quoting at length: “The Lord here does not wait, impassive, as we babble on about our shame and penitence, trying to persuade him that we are worth forgiving. His love is instead that of an eager and rather boisterous child, scrambling up on his mother’s lap, seizing handfuls of her clothing and nuzzling his



the image, narratives that are so entangled with restrictive views of women they are hard to bear.

Among Orthodox, tenderness and *sorrow* dominate descriptions of this image, creating a contrast between the *eleousa's* suffering love and the pre-iconoclastic portrayals of the Virgin Enthroned and the *hodegetria*. The sadness of the mother's gaze shifts the emphasis to the long-suffering love of a parent who knows the inevitability of her son's Passion. Evdokimov characterizes her gaze in the *Vladimirskaia* as a "fixed stare of the eyes that looks off into eternity and gives the face the expression of a dense and gripping affliction. The corners of the mouth reinforce this sadness."<sup>154</sup> The compassionate love of this mother extends to all humanity, "this godlike compassion transfigures the most instinctive part of human nature, which links man to the whole of creation—motherhood. Contact with the Deity transforms motherly tenderness into all-embracing love and grief for the whole of creation."<sup>155</sup> Icons of lovingkindness are posited as visual expression *par excellence* of the grieving love of Mother Mary for suffering humanity.

If compassion for humanity was all that was read into this icon, perhaps the associations would not be so disturbing. Note, however that in Evdokimov's statement above, motherhood is inextricably tied to suffering. It is inevitable that motherhood involves suffering, but suffering hardly characterizes *all* of motherhood. However, the next step is where the real problem begins. First, he links the Virgin with holiness. Mary, says Evdokimov, "personalizes human holiness," appearing as the "Living Consolation" who "safeguards and protects every creature and thus becomes a figure of the church in her

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face against hers, with that extraordinary hunger for sheer physical closeness that children will show with loving parents." He goes on to imagine Mary as "half-embarrassed" by the affection of her child. Ibid., 23-24.

<sup>154</sup> Paul Evdokimov, *Art of the Icon*, 265.

<sup>155</sup> Léonide Ouspensky, and Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, 93.

maternal protection.”<sup>156</sup> This initially seems to be an interpretation congruent with the long-standing metaphor of Mary as the church. The enemies are no longer marauding tribes and hostile nations, but enemies of holiness and griefs that must be consoled. This shift correlates with a new context and a corresponding set of perceived needs to which the Virgin, as she always has, responds. Yet for Evdokimov, protection is no longer a required function served by the Virgin who is a mother, but it is inherently “maternal,” it is a *feminine* quality.

More problematic is that the possible ways in which this feminine quality may be expressed is bound not by perceived contextual needs (such as the need for a battler leader, or a discerning pastor), but by idiosyncratic ideals of womanhood. Evdokimov sees in Mary the antitype of Eve, “the Woman at enmity with the Serpent, the Woman robed in the Sun, the image of the Wisdom of God in its foundation principle, that is, the integrity and chastity of being.”<sup>157</sup> She is “the Woman restored in her maternal virginity,” an “image of the church who carries salvation in herself while still waiting for it.”<sup>158</sup> Constantine Cavernos uses terms such as “melancholy, “quiet,” “patient, meek” “serene, benevolent, motherly, chaste,” and in a single paragraph, describes her gaze, her nose, the placement of her hands as “modest” and her mouth as “shy.”<sup>159</sup> Notice Evdokimov’s emphasis, in even such a brief description, on

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<sup>156</sup> Paul Evdokimov, *Art of the Icon*, 259.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid. To be clear, the Eve-Mary typology is quite ancient, mentioned by both Irenaeus of Lyons (d. c. 202) and Justin Martyr (c. 103 - c. 165). It is not, however, a common way to describe images of Mary, unless Eve makes an appearance. Also for the first time in the twentieth century, this typology has been offered as a reason for the exclusion of women from the priesthood. See “Conclusions of the Consultation: Report” (Paper presented at the InterOrthodox Symposium: Rhodes, Greece, Katerini, Greece, 30 October - 7 November 1988).

<sup>158</sup> Paul Evdokimov, *Art of the Icon*, 262, 266.

<sup>159</sup> Fotis Kontoglous, and Constantine Cavernos, *Byzantine Sacred Art*, 110. The entire paragraph is worth citing as an illustration of just how many adjectives can be used to describe a fairly limited set of qualities, all of which are stereotypically seen as culturally appropriate to women, but many of which would seem strange if applied to men. “Her eyebrows are arched, lively, and long and narrow. Her eyes are almond-shaped, shaded, brown, deep, serious yet very sweet, with their whites clear but shaded. Her gaze is melancholy, simple, straight, quiet, sympathetic, lovable, sorrowful but at the same time gladdening, stern but at the same time compassionate,

“consolation,” “chastity,” “virginity,” “carrying,” and “waiting,” all echoed in Cavarinos.

Each of these terms expresses ways of human relating that are important in certain circumstances and situations. If interpreted in a traditional manner, these qualities are essential aspects of a fuller humanity envisioned via the Mother of Tenderness.

How is it possible to read these images so differently? And is Evdokimov’s reading the only *Orthodox* option? If it is, is it the last word on interpreting this icon?

### ‘Woman’

What Evdokimov introduces in his reading of Our Lady of Vladimir, and considerably extends in his text *La Femme et le salut du monde*, is a *conceptual image* of ‘Woman’ rather than a woman who exemplifies shared human virtues in situations of particular need.<sup>160</sup> In his attempt to positively respond to the feminist concerns of Simone de Beauvoir, Evdokimov posits Mary as the ideal virtuous Woman. Using the building blocks of Jungian archetypes and the iconic image of Mary’s virginal motherhood, he constructs a Victorian ideal of womanhood as receptive, patient, silent, interior, asexual and nurturing.<sup>161</sup> In Mary Evdokimov finds the salvation of the world, not according to the traditional

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most saintly, spiritual, innocent, meditative, blameless, hope-inspiring, patient, meek, most modest, far from every kind of carnal thought, human but divine, guileless, sisterly, noble, reproving, wakeful, serene, benevolent, motherly, chaste, cool, scorching to all those who have evil thoughts, tender, piercing, searching, unfeigned, princely, entreating, immovable. Her nose is long and narrow, Judaic, lean, with thin nostrils, a little curved, modest. Her mouth is small, shy, prudent, closed, pure, shaded near the cheeks as if she were slightly smiling. Her chin is curved, reverent, unaffected, humble. Her cheeks are chaste, pure, smooth, fragrant, shy, pale with a very slightly rosy hue. Her neck is inclined humbly, and joins the chin in a soft shadow. Her whole face is hieratic and religious, and testifies that she is of an ancient race.”

<sup>160</sup> Paul Evdokimov, *La Femme Et Le Salut Du Monde*. It is available in English as Paul Evdokimov, *Woman and the Salvation of the World*. For an excellent summary, see Sarah Hinlicky Wilson, “Woman, Women, and the Priesthood in the Thought of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel.” See also, Peter C. Phan, “Gender Roles in the History of Salvation.”; Christopher P. Klofft, “Gender and the Process of Moral Development in the Thought of Paul Evdokimov.”

<sup>161</sup> On archetypes, see Paul Evdokimov, *Woman and the Salvation of the World*, 23. On feminine virtues, see 155, 258

expression of the Theotokos as the first fully deified human,<sup>162</sup> but because, as ‘Woman,’ she saves men from their energetic and “ecstatic” functionality simply by being “enstatic”,<sup>163</sup> by listening, intuiting, interiorizing, by “becoming a pure oblation.”<sup>164</sup> The feminine is the inherently motherly and religious principle, more naturally *receiving* the spiritual. Selfless-love, which in the tradition expresses itself via a Virgin warrior-queen leading men into battle and an ecclesial leader, at Evdokimov’s pen becomes *only* long-suffering, receptive motherhood, exemplified by the archetypical feminine. Further, because this is simply how *Mary is*, this is how *all women are*. A woman who “acts” in any way that de-emphasizes her essential nature as expressing “being” denies her very nature as a woman.

I want to be very clear here: the problem is not that Evdokimov reads a particular set of virtues either into or out of Our Lady of Vladimir. The problem is his simultaneous restriction of shared *human* virtues to the feminine, and the consequential reduction of the virtues, capabilities and charisms of supposedly exercised by women and men. It is clear that Evdokimov’s symbolic interpretation of the Theotokos, and the *conceptual* interpretations of ‘Woman’ and the feminine derived from his theology, are singular and somewhat idiosyncratic to the narrative he chooses to emphasize above others. There are other, older and far more long-standing interpretations of the symbolic Virgin that share some of the virtues extolled by Evdokimov, while also exemplifying other virtues. Further, the capabilities and roles through which these virtues are enacted do not correspond to only stereotypically female roles. Mary as warrior, general, church leader, and royal ruler are all stereotypically male function, ably exercised by a woman. Evdokimov, out of sympathy with

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<sup>162</sup> Evdokimov does highlight Mary as the first divinized human person, the “perfect union of the human and the divine.” He does not clearly explain, however, how it is that she can be this as well as the archetype of the feminine, how she can be the model for all human persons but then also only that of women. See *ibid.*, 213.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

early feminist concerns chose a particular narrative that he considered dignifying for women. That some women, myself among them, do not find in his interpretation a broad enough recognition of human (much less female) uniqueness and diversity does not change his good intentions.<sup>165</sup> Nor, however do his good intentions alone make his limited narrative choice adequate for the experiences of all women (and men).

Given both the varied ‘readings’ of other Marian images in the tradition, and the wide range of female experience that does not fit into his category, it seems important to acknowledge that the *eleousa* type can be read differently. Evdokimov’s reading may be the most popular Orthodox interpretation, but need it be the *only* interpretation? Is his the last word in interpretation?

### Summary

Two crucial points regarding the Theotokos should be kept in mind before we move on. The first essential point is that the Church has interpreted the virginal motherhood of the Theotokos in a variety of ways that are often related to the needs of a given situation or place. The Theotokos is not only an image of domestic piety, though at times she certainly has been that. Pentcheva notes early in her study that Mary’s influence is embodied in the Orthodox East by names that resonate with power and theological significance: *Theotokos* (Bearer of God), and *Meter Theou* (Mother of God) or *Mati Boz̑iia* (Russian), Theometer,

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>165</sup> According to his wife, by the late nineteen-sixties he was revising his opinions on the matter, but was unable to publish them due to his sudden death in 1970. Letter from Tomoko Faerber-Evdokimoff to Michael Plekon, 1998. An indication of his revised opinion may be reflected in the unfinished article, “Panagion and Panagia,” published in 1970. He still presents distinct female charisms in light of Jung, but interestingly enough, he expands his earlier argument that the motherly tenderness of the Theotokos is a (and perhaps the only true) human figure of the *fatherhood* of God. However, the change in emphasis is slight, and motherhood remains the sole way in which women relate to the world. See Paul Evdokimov, “Panagion and Panagia: The Holy Spirit and the Mother of God,” in *In the World, of the Church: A Paul Evdokimov Reader*, ed. Michael Plekon, and Alexis Vinogradov (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001).

Panagia (All Holy) or *Bogorodica* (Russian).<sup>166</sup> *Meter Theon* is inscribed on many (if not all) icons of the Virgin, shortened to the Greek Characters “MP ΘY” that appear on either side of her head.

The second essential observation is that particular virtues do not limit the roles or functions through which the virtue is enacted. “Selfless love” is not applicable only to child-rearing. Pentcheva argues that in the *hodegetria* type icon, Mary’s gesture towards her son “overcomes the instinct of preservation and care,” which when placed in a military context, invokes “the voluntary sacrifice and selfless love exacted from both the soldiers and their mothers.”<sup>167</sup> This underscores that readings of the Theotokos which imply that her faithful practice of virginal motherhood meant only *one* thing are too simple. Interpretation of her virtues and actions, the sort of behavior intended as either model or inspiration for her followers, depends on the proximity of other symbols and images in their social context. Virtues are ‘generic’ in the sense that a particular virtue, such as justice or mercy, does not necessarily dictate a single course of action (thus the importance in Catholic thought of prudence and Orthodox thought of discernment), or role in society or the church. Both their interpretation and application in real life are influenced by social context, situation, gifts and needs.

### 3.4: Conceptual Icons: Gender and Priesthood

At this point, we will return to Élisabeth Behr-Sigel and her exchange with Nonna Harrison. Through the work of Harrison in particular, we can see the shift from ‘written’ or actual icons, to *conceptual* icons, verbal and poetic metaphors that are meant, like icons, to

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<sup>166</sup> Bissera V. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 2.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

point beyond themselves to some quality or aspect of Christ and God. By taking a closer look at the iconic argument in light of the preceding discussion of iconodule theology and practice, we are now better equipped to evaluate its strengths and its flaws.

### 3.4.1: The Iconic Argument and Priesthood

The core assumptions underlying the iconic arguments that supposedly limit the priesthood to males are: 1) the priest embodies only one primary symbol that is singular in object and meaning; 2) this primary symbol is Christ; 3) that the meaning of that symbol is some quality that is particular to a gender; and 4) that the material of the symbol (in this case the body of the priest) must correspond to the singular, gendered meaning of the symbol. Not all arguments that utilize iconic symbolism to maintain an all-male priesthood share each of these assumptions. Both Elisabeth Behr-Sigel and Kallistos Ware initially shared the first assumption, and accordingly rejected the possibility of female priests.<sup>168</sup> In his reconsideration of the subject, Ware deemphasizes the symbol of the priest acting *in persona Christi* as being too Roman Catholic, instead focusing on the priest as *in persona Ecclesiae*, a view he argues is more in accord with Orthodox liturgical symbolism.<sup>169</sup> Behr-Sigel shares this reorientation, but also directly addresses the disturbing inconsistency between the long-held belief that in Christ all of humanity is assumed, and the idea that women cannot image Christ.<sup>170</sup> Nonna Harrison has made a similar argument any number of times from patristic

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<sup>168</sup> Kallistos Ware, “Man, Woman and the Priesthood of Christ.”; Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, “Women in the Orthodox Church: Heavenly Vision and Historical Realities,” in *The Ministry of Women in the Church* (Redondo Beach, CA: Oakwood Publications, 1991).

<sup>169</sup> Kallistos Ware, “Man, Woman and the Priesthood of Christ.” Ware is correct on this point, which will be made very clear in the next chapter.

<sup>170</sup> See also the conclusions of two colloquia held by Orthodox and Old Catholics in 1996, in Greece and Poland. The co-chairmen, Anastasios Kallis (Orthodox) and Urs von Arx, stated the following in their conclusion: “We have reached the common conclusion that there are no compelling dogmatic-theological reasons for not ordaining women to the priesthood. The soteriological dimensions of the church and its mission is decisive for us: the salvation of humankind and the entire creation in Jesus Christ in whom the new

sources, particularly Gregory of Nazianzus's comment to Cledonius, "The unassumed is the unhealed, but what is united with God is also being saved" (*Epistle* 101.5), or the popularized shorthand, "what is not assumed is not saved."<sup>171</sup> The idea that a woman cannot act *in persona Christi*, whether as a priest or as lay woman made in the image of God, undermines the centrality of the Incarnation, in which the Son of God took on all of our humanity in order to heal it, making possible divine-human communion. Any element of our humanity not assumed by God is not healed. The consequences of implying that a woman's humanity is somehow not as fully present in Christ as is a man's jeopardizes the totality of the incarnation, and the salvation of women.

While Harrison and Behr-Sigel share much, their differences illustrate how one can reject the idea that the priest is primarily a symbol of Christ and its corollary, that a woman cannot symbolize Christ, but still maintain that the singular symbol to which the priest points is masculine and must be indicated by a male body. In a response to her work that Behr-Sigel called "irenic," Harrison characterizes arguments against female priests as those from tradition, those based on women's inferior nature, and the iconic argument.<sup>172</sup> Unequivocally rejecting the second argument, Harrison argues that the liturgical tradition,

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creation is being accomplished. We were especially guided by a conviction that was central to the ancient church: only that which has been assumed and united to God has been saved. It is human nature, common to men and women, that has been assumed by our Lord." Urs von Arx, and Anastasios Kallis, "Common Considerations: The Orthodox-Old Catholic Consultation on the Role of Women as an Ecumenical Issue," *Anglican Theological Review* 84, no. 3 (2002): 501-06. Originally printed in German, Urs von Arx, and Anastasios Kallis, eds. *Bild Christi Und Geschlecht*, vol. 88(2), Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift (1988).

<sup>171</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *On God and Christ*, 158. See for example, Nonna Verna Harrison, "The Maleness of Christ."

<sup>172</sup> Nonna Verna Harrison, "Orthodox Arguments Against the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood."; Élisabeth Behr-Sigel, "The Ordination of Women: An Ecumenical Problem: A Reply to a Reply," 20.



where “spiritual realities are actualised” excludes women due to the iconic significance of the priest.<sup>173</sup> What is odd, however, is how she arrives at this conclusion.

Consonant with iconic theology, Harrison argues that symbols do not represent themselves, but indicate “the divine reality present in and beyond them.”<sup>174</sup> Turning to Maximus the Confessor (among others), Harrison argues that humanity is, in its ideal relation to God, female, that is, “brides in relation to Christ the bridegroom,” creatures who possess nothing ourselves but *receive* all our life from God.<sup>175</sup> Characteristic of much patristic thought, literal gender becomes allegorical, which Harrison argues is also metaphorical/iconic.<sup>176</sup> The virgin-mother embodies a particular, late-ancient ideal of human excellence to be sought by all human beings.<sup>177</sup> As a result, it is the one who has truly ‘become’ virgin-mother who has transcended male and female.<sup>178</sup> Note here that Harrison is arguing that the ideal Christian, man or woman, exemplifies virgin motherhood. We can see here echoes of Symeon the New Theologian. To be a Christian is to bear Christ in purity. Behr-Sigel remains in agreement with Harrison up to this point, affirming humanity is *symbolically* female in its relation to God, that is, *receptive*. However, she qualifies her agreement with a caution, “if taken literally, does not this symbolism of the marriage appear to be tied to an interpretation of the biological process of procreation, which is now out-of-date and known to be incorrect?”<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 8. Harrison’s corpus is an extended elucidation of patristic views on gender which make untenable the supposed inferiority or inherently subordinate status of women. This article provides an excellent summary of her views on this subject which she continues to develop.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>176</sup> Nonna Verna Harrison, “The Maleness of Christ.”

<sup>177</sup> Nonna Verna Harrison, “Orthodox Arguments Against the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood,” 15.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>179</sup> Her full comment is, “In this perspective, all creation, all mankind, men and women, is symbolically female in its relationship to God, as some Fathers of the Church would hold. As far as the spiritual message is concerned, I agree completely. However, if taken literally, does not this symbolism of the marriage appear to be tied to an interpretation of the biological process of procreation, which is now out-of-date and known to be

When Harrison turns to the *liturgical* role of the priest, she does what Behr-Sigel describes as a “*volte-face*.”<sup>180</sup> The priest, Harrison notes, is “in some sense an icon of the Mother of God,” facing with the congregation towards the east during the *epiclesis* in which he *receives* the Holy Spirit. The Theotokos “fulfilled the universal human vocation of royal priesthood better than any other person, receiving the divine Son into herself and offering him to the Father. In this work of receiving and bringing forth divine life men and women alike function in a feminine way.”<sup>181</sup> These comments seem to allow that the priest could (if not must) be female as the Theotokos was female. Yet when the priest turns towards the congregation, he shifts from representing the “royal priesthood of holiness” shared by all believers (and implicitly feminine), to the properly “liturgical priesthood”:

So a man ordained to the liturgical priesthood can receive the gift of leading and focusing this prayer because of the royal priestly character of his humanity as such. The iconic character of his maleness is manifest when he turns toward us. Then, as he bestows Christ's blessings and sacraments, we encounter him face to face and in him the divine bridegroom.<sup>182</sup>

Notice that the presider receives gifts of leadership not because of his maleness, but because humanity itself has a “royal priestly character.” However, the priest’s *liturgical* priesthood, displayed only for a moment, is one-dimensional and divinely bestowed. In other words, the bridegroom is a *singular* icon and, it seems, the primary icon of the divine in the liturgy. Further, it overrides other symbols that Harrison fully acknowledges, such as that of the priest who stands *in persona Theotokos*. A full discussion of the liturgical symbolism within the

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incorrect? The female, as we now know, is not merely the soil in which the male plants the seed. She makes her own contribution, without which the child, the fruit of both, cannot come about. If we wish to preserve, as I do, the ancient biblical symbolism of the marriage between God and his people, we must see in it, without interpreting the terms too rigidly, the symbol of the communion, through grace, with the God of Love, which is the vocation of mankind, and thus of every man and every woman.” Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, “The Ordination of Women: An Ecumenical Problem: A Reply to a Reply,” 24.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>181</sup> Nonna Verna Harrison, “Orthodox Arguments Against the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood,” 19.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 21.

liturgy will be presented in the following chapter. Here, I am focusing on the conceptual association of particular qualities with one gender, which also requires a corresponding sexed body.

### 3.4.2: Gender Reversals

Underscoring the oddity of this *volte-face* is that Harrison's scholarship consistently affirms the "multidimensionality" of both priesthood and gender. Harrison has dedicated her considerable talent to exploring gender in late-ancient Christian texts. Harrison complicates the classical misogynist antithesis between male strength and virtue, and female weakness and vice by highlighting the "surprising shifts and reversals in gender imagery" that serve to elevate the qualities associated with women as virtues in their own right.<sup>183</sup> Acknowledging the misogynist "typos" of late-ancient rhetoric, she argues for a simultaneous (and perhaps unintentional) overturning of stereotypes by a trajectory that uses fluid imagery. She identifies repeated gender reversals throughout patristic theology in which the male or female ascetic is bride to Christ's bridegroom, mother of Christ whom they bear in spiritual childbirth, as well as the male Christ-child who is birthed.<sup>184</sup> Gender is allegorical, mystical and eschatological. Gendered language in patristic theology utilizes the powerful associations with particular roles and functions through metaphorical and iconic *language* that creates new, sometimes shocking associations. Further, virtue is unitary and, in the end, the Good includes all virtues. Language and imagery that utilize sexed functions and roles are essentially iconic and allegorical, and human wholeness requires the practice of all virtues, regardless of their association with one gender over another.<sup>185</sup> Fluid gender

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<sup>183</sup> Nonna Verna Harrison, "Feminine Man in Late Antique Ascetic Piety," 57.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>185</sup> Nonna Verna Harrison, "The Maleness of Christ," 133, 147.

language, applied to both males and females, serves to express the complex and dynamic relationships between human persons and between the human being and God. Human wholeness is found in pursuing all virtues, regardless of their gendered association.

Subsequent to her initial response to Behr-Sigel, Harrison adds an interesting twist, reflecting the earlier work of Evdokimov. Symbolically male and female virtues remain necessary to a full Christian life, yet the “aim” of each set is different. Symbolically feminine virtues such as “purity, chastity, humility, obedience, gentleness, compassion, meekness and patience, innocence, simplicity, inwardness, openness, and perceptiveness... aim directly at the ultimate goal, the creature’s union with God.”<sup>186</sup> Symbolically male virtues, “courage, perseverance in hardship, assertiveness on behalf of truth and justice, restraint of passions and combat against evil are equally necessary to the spiritual life” but unlike feminine virtues, they “have the essential but instrumental purpose of overcoming obstacles” to union with God, not aiming directly at such union.<sup>187</sup> According to Harrison, Christian writers do not merely re-value feminine virtues, giving them a shared place alongside masculine virtues. Instead, the trajectory of their work places symbolically feminine virtues *at the center* of the Christian life, while symbolically masculine virtues simply enable the removal of obstacles to achieving the central, feminine, virtues. In other words, male virtues are instrumental and secondary, means to an idealized end of embodied feminine virtues. In this twist, human persons strive to attain “a spiritual femininity like that of the Mother of God.”<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

### 3.5: The Theotokos: Exception or Rule

How is it, then, that despite the multidimensionality of gendered language, despite the material diversity of iconic portrayals of virtuous relationships, and despite the multiple iconic roles of the priest in liturgy, the iconic argument seems so convincing in its exclusion of female bodies from the priesthood? This brings us back to the material of icons, the bodies in and through which virtues are practiced, written and communicated. Mary embodies the ideal feminine and essential human virtue: receptivity to God. Neither Evdokimov nor Harrison attends to historical depictions and narratives of the Theotokos. In Harrison's case, doing so would offer support to her argument regarding the fluidity of virtues and their associated capabilities and roles. The core of both Evdokimov and Harrison's approach is a re-valuation of the feminine, elevating it *above* the masculine. How is this, even if it might be temporarily more appealing to women, any better than the longstanding elevation of male virtues? Is this not something we should seek to escape, moving instead towards recognizing the importance of all virtues? Traditional depictions of the Theotokos do not support an elevation of the feminine over the masculine. As *strategos*, the *Theo Meter* exemplifies and calls forth precisely the virtues Harrison labels as masculine, "courage, perseverance in hardship, assertiveness on behalf of truth and justice, restraint of passions and combat against evil..."<sup>189</sup> In the context of war-torn Byzantine society, these virtues do not take second place to symbolically feminine virtues. They *are* the ideal, because they are what is necessary in that time and place.

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

The violent narratives through which some of these images are interpreted hardly appeal to feminist values of dialogue and peaceful mediation. Yet images of combat are central to the Christian life:

For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. (Eph. 6.12-14)

This imagery is discomfiting in light of Christianity's history of using violence in supposed service of the gospel. Yet such language pervades the ascetic and spiritual traditions of virtually all Christian groups precisely because evil must be resisted in our efforts to shape our bodies and souls into bearers of God. It is possible, I suppose, to argue as Harrison does that at some point in time we will have the luxury of practicing only those virtues that aim directly at union with God rather than those which overcome obstacles to such union. Perhaps this is what *theosis* looks like in the eschaton. Here and now, however, *theosis* requires the full range of virtues. It is important to remember that the Theotokos *does not become male*. Instead, as a woman, a mother of selfless-love, she exemplifies virtues that male warriors find inspiring, and that allow her to serve as a leader of the Jerusalem church. The Theotokos remains who she is, a woman. It is as a woman and mother that the Theotokos acts and relates, using the virtues required by the situation.

### 3.5.1: Selective Exceptionalism

So, on what grounds do we parcel out virtue? Here, the importance of the trajectory of the Gospel cannot be understated. As individuals, perhaps even as communities, we move towards greater expansion of the possibilities for divine life in and through human relationships, a divine life that does not abide by social, cultural or even religious bounds. If

this trajectory is visible in the writings of theologians steeped in androcentric and misogynist cultures, how much more should it be visible in cultures that are slowly shedding such limitations? The truth is, biology has indeed been destiny. Yet cultures shape and emphasize this destiny differently. The Orthodox tradition simultaneously affirms and challenges the social roles of men and women. We live in a time in which such social roles are no longer as clear as they once were. The variety of narratives attached to Mary and her icons cannot be used to affirm only a small subset of the roles and behaviors attributed to her. The very existence of exceptions such as the “manly woman” or Mary as *strategos* indicates that social, sex and gender-based roles do not have the last word. Exceptions do not prove rules, they indicate their inadequacy.

It is especially important to remember the problematic nature of exceptionalism in light of the fact that many of these narratives may or may not be historically factual. We know that the historical Mary was not a general but a betrothed young woman displaced from her home among an oppressed people, and the mother of a boy who in adulthood was executed as a criminal dangerous to both state and religion. Among the dangerous use of the many narratives surrounding the Theotokos is the tendency to employ ahistorical symbols and interpretations to restrict the lives and roles of actual men and women. Behr-Sigel highlights this danger of reifying subsequent narratives by allowing them to reshape and sometimes override the real life of Mary.<sup>190</sup> Elizabeth Johnson highlights historically based interpretations of Mary that simultaneously meet the needs of contemporary women who do

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<sup>190</sup> Élisabeth Behr-Sigel, “Marie Et Les Femmes,” in *Théologie, Histoire, Et Piété Mariale: Actes Du Colloque De La Faculté De Théologie De Lyon, 1-3 Octobre 1996*, ed. Jean Comby (Lyon: Profac, 1997). English available in Élisabeth Behr-Sigel, “Mary and Women,” in *Discerning the Signs of the Times: The Vision of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel*, ed. Michael Plekon, and Sarah E. Hinlicky (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001).

not see themselves in either the *strategos* or passive mother.<sup>191</sup> It is an unfortunate use of past historical realities to limit the present when the present no longer reflects the same limitations that at one time were taken as givens.

Exceptions, disruptions to the status quo, continually appear in the Orthodox tradition. Icons give us a window into the lives of individuals who enacted virtue in a particular social location, through particular roles and unique gifts and personal qualities. These roles did not always correspond to what was considered “appropriate” for their sex. There is a long list of women who stepped out of their “place” as prophets, teachers, and preachers of the gospel. We have no indication that they intended their actions to challenge a social system, though it is very likely that their actions did so. Instead, these women responded to God’s work in their lives as uniquely gifted women called to roles and actions atypical of their sex. Their lives are a witness to their particular participation in the work of God using their unique talents and gifts.

Why then, if we so consistently honor women for their virtues and charismatic activity, do we insist on norms that make such an activity difficult if not impossible for most women? In light of these women, why do we insist on such norms at all? On what basis are these rules constructed? Despite its obviously sexist basis, the “manly woman” is as much of a compliment as is possible given a society in which women were assumed to lack virtue. At the very least, it acknowledges, perhaps with surprise, perhaps a bit grudgingly, perhaps with genuine delight, that this woman is indeed a woman of virtue, a woman of God. It reveals a sort of experiential disruption of classically assumed gender capabilities when confronted with the good news of Jesus Christ lived in the body of a woman. How ironic

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<sup>191</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2003).



that centuries later, in a social context in which woman are seen to be as capable of virtue as men, a rule is constructed that limits the “appropriate” virtues of women in such a way that simply reinforces the barriers that these “manly women” of the past consistently broke.

Icons inevitably portray sexed and gendered persons, and the narrative that interprets the icon often enhances a sex-based or gender-shaped role. We *choose* our narrative.

Evdokimov chose a narrative he thought would honor and dignify women. And in a way, his argument did precisely that. It is *right* to respect intuition, silence, waiting, nurturing, tenderness, gentleness. It is *right* to elevate these virtues in the face of modernity’s obsession with the rational, mechanical, external, and functional. Certainly for too long these qualities of human relationship have been ignored or dismissed for their lack of productivity, their seeming lack of ‘reason.’ But his interpretation simply moves real women into a gilded cage and tarnishes the bars imprisoning men. Evdokimov’s opinion of women’s religiousness is so elevated one wonders what place men have in holiness at all, and yet he maintains that the priesthood must be male because it is men who express and witness, women who intuit and receive. The fact is that real men and women do not fit these paradigms, and our failure to allow them to step out of these paradigms is our failure to see them for who they are—as unique persons before God. Instead, we reduce them to a cultural construct. In Evdokimov’s case, to one of tender motherhood. Had the Virgin *stragegos* reigned alone, perhaps women would have been reduced to only a protective violence against the enemy. In either case, women are reduced. It is only together, and in concert with many other images and narratives, that these visions begin to form a picture of what it is to be fully human.

### 3.6: Conclusion

In conclusion, I want to draw out some possible implications of what iconography says about ethics in the context of the priesthood. I will return to this more fully in my final chapter. The second chapter examined the theology of Gregory of Nazianzus and John Chrysostom who present the liturgical presider as an icon, specifically, an icon of our new, virtuous humanity. This chapter develops what it means to say that a living human person can serve as an icon by stepping back and looking at relevant aspects of an Orthodox theology of icons. An icon requires bodily *particularity* on the part of the person imaged, which is a constituent element of the *uniqueness* of the person. The wood and paint icon ‘points’ to the person depicted, who is *present* to the beholder. The gaze of the beholder, however does not stop on the person depicted, but also sees through that person to Christ. This is because the person present in the icon is a saint who exemplifies one or more aspects of what it is to be more fully human, that is, a person more like Christ who is fully human as well as fully divine. The saint is a person whose life is *ekstatic*, oriented *for the other* through the active practice of virtues in relationship. Through the icon, the person imaged invites the *participation* of the beholder into the very life that made the saint a saint. This saintly life is characterized by divine-human participation in which a person becomes more fully human through life-long growth into virtue that is *theosis*. In Nicholas, we see a variety of virtues in action, and in the Theotokos, we see how one unique person can practice virtue in a variety of roles, from a military general to discerning church leader to a long-suffering mother. Icons allow us to see *theosis* as it happens through virtuous relationships. The measure and the expanse of that humanity is found in the person of Christ birthed by all those who make up the cloud of witnesses that surrounds us in our churches, in our homes, and in that liminal space between the now and not yet. This human embodiment has shape, form,

solidity in virtuous relationships. To deny any person the ability to fully enact their particular assortment of virtues and talents and gifts denies both the person and her community the opportunity to experience how this particular person uniquely transfers our gaze to Christ who is the embodiment of all virtues.

The image of Nicholas is not used to restrict the arenas in which the virtues he embodied may be expressed by the faithful. Use of the Virgin's image, however, at least in contemporary discourse, tends to follow a different path, in which she is proffered as a model for a subset of humanity, and then further used to limit their roles. Instead of selfless love being a shared human virtue whose most evident proponent is Christ, not Mary, selfless love is a virtue for women. The next step down the path is restricting selfless love to the arena of motherhood and wives, simply ignoring the way in which the same virtue once exemplified the woman who led men into battle as their *strategos*. The path closes in before us, narrowing into further restrictions, denying girls a place in the altar, women a place of service as deacons and priests.

The path appears inevitable, logical, the singular interpretation of the paradigmatic figure of Mary blocking our view in the same way thick underbrush obscures other paths through the forest. We forget that at some point in our journey, we stood at a fork and chose one path over another. We *choose* which interpretation to pursue just as we choose a path in the forest. Choice is a human necessity. Very few of us can be all things to all people; we are only able to exercise our virtues in particular ways among particular peoples. The problem with Evdokimov's work is not simply that he attempts to elevate 'feminine' virtues, itself a serious problem for men. It is that he posits these virtues as *primarily* feminine and *for* women. Whether he intended it or not, the followers of his logic use his theology to restrict the manner in which women and men may exercise their capacity for

virtuous relationships, both regarding the virtues they may express and the roles and functions in which they may express them. This theological restriction then blinds us to the uniqueness of the men and women before us, the varied ways in which virtuous participation in God is expressed by individuals as a service to the community.

What then, is wrong with a male priesthood? On the one hand, nothing. A male priest can exemplify the virtuous humanity that we are all (including the priest) becoming. The priest, as a living icon, serves the same ultimate function: to invite the faithful into a participatory life of *theosis*. The presider does this through two primary avenues. First, the presider is called to model our new humanity, i.e., to be one who attempts to live a life of virtuous relationships, a life to which we are all called. Second, the presider engages in particular functions, such as offering theologically sound teaching and preaching (primary for both Gregory the Theologian and Chrysostom), pastoral discernment and care, and presiding at the liturgy. Just like all men and women, in their bodies of flesh rather than wood and paint, priests make the invisible person of Christ visible, always drawing our gaze from their bodies towards the One in whom we all become fully human. A male priesthood becomes problematic, however, when it is exclusively male. Our gaze is arrested at flesh and blood in a manner no less idolatrous than allowing our gaze to be filled by wood and paint. The icon, that at one point revealed the divine, ceases to do so, because the gaze is filled with the visible. As Marion notes, idols mirror precisely the degree of the divine that the one gazing is able to see. If we see only male fatherhood in the priest who is an icon of humanity, we see only males as icons of Christ.

At best, an exclusively male priesthood gives lie to the eschatological fullness of the Orthodox liturgy, revealing it to be, perhaps, only a few steps ahead of a sexist world that denies irreducible uniqueness to men and women. At worst, the liturgy only partially

facilitates, and may actually impede, the deification of *both* men and women because it does not allow us to see the embodied fullness of our humanity in *all* of our icons. It is not enough to conceptually reject poor arguments against a female priesthood. It is not enough because seeing *is* becoming. The long and hard-fought tradition of wood and paint icons is a battle for the radicality of an incarnation in which all matter is transformed through participation in the work of the Spirit. We need to *see* female icons of transfigured humanity in flesh and blood as well as wood and paint. We need to see women who can set forth the image before us, being like God and making others to be like God. We need to see this in the liturgy, since it is in the Eucharist, embodied on the table as well as in each and every person in the assembly, “thine own of thine own,” that we express eschatologically and experience temporally our unique, irreducible and free human personhood.

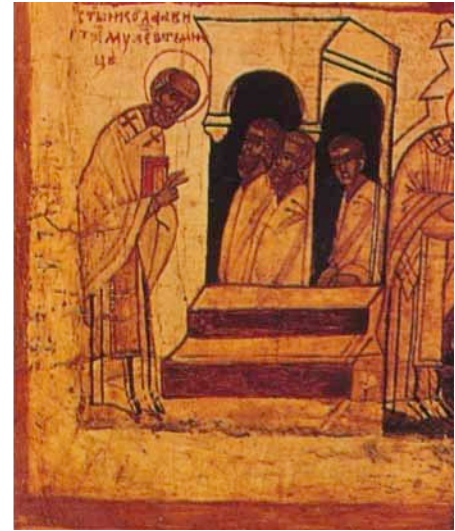
### 3.7: Illustrations



**Figure 2: The Life of St. Nicholas**

Russian

14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century



**Figure 3: Nicholas consoles three unjustly imprisoned men.**

Detail



**Figure 4: Nicholas appears to the Emperor Constantine in a dream and admonishes him to orthodoxy at the Council of Nicea, 325.**



**Figure 5: Nicholas saves three women from prostitution by throwing money for their wedding into their home.**

Detail





**Figure 1: Christ *Pantocrator***  
Dome of the church in Daphni, Greece  
11<sup>th</sup> century



**Figure 6: The Virgin Orans without Christ**  
Mosaic, Apse, St. Sophia Cathedral, Kiev  
ca. 1037



**Figure 7: The Virgin Enthroned**  
Mosaic, Apse of Hagia Sophia  
9<sup>th</sup> century





**Figure 8:** Theotokos *Hodegetria*  
Byzantine  
14<sup>th</sup> century



**Figure 9:** Our Lady of Vladimir  
Byzantine  
Currently house in Tretyakov Gallery,  
Moscow  
Early 12<sup>th</sup> century



**Figure 10:** The Virgin Enthroned,  
flanked by John II Comnenus  
(1118-1143) and Irene who  
present gold and a scroll listing  
donations to the Theotokos.  
Mosaic, Hagia Sophia  
ca. 1100





**Figure 11:** The Theotokos Enthroned, flanked by Sts. George and Theodore in civilian dress. Encaustic, St. Catherine's Monastery, Sinai 6<sup>th</sup> century



**Figure 12:** Virgin of the Sign  
Holy Wisdom Temple, New Skete, Cambridge, New York  
ca. 1980s



**Figure 13:** The Great *Panagia* (Orans)  
Originally in Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Yaroslavl  
Currently house in Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow  
13<sup>th</sup> century

## Chapter 4: Virtuous Liturgy

O maker and benefactor of all creation! O King of all the ages! Receive your church which approaches you through your Christ. Fulfill what is useful for each of us; bring all to perfection; count us worthy of the grace of sharing in your holiness; and gather us all together in your holy, catholic, and apostolic church...

The Liturgy of St. James

### 4.1: Introduction: Liturgy as Icon

Icons of saints provide focused visions of individual lives lived in loving relationship to God and neighbor. Yet the reign of God is not merely about transformed individuals, but a community of loving relationship that enables the transformation of both individuals and all creation.<sup>1</sup> John Zizioulas characterizes Johannine language, with its emphasis on *seeing* the glory of God, as iconic. The reign of God must be *seen* in the world, even if it remains unrecognized by the world. Zizioulas claims that

...the only way to depict the image is through liturgy. Only by gathering the community together around the table of the Lamb can you paint the icon of the kingdom which for John amounts to painting the image of Christ himself. The kingdom in its glory is visible and for this reason it is in iconic language that we can speak about it; but the iconic language is liturgical, which means it requires an event of communion and therefore a community in order to be realized. And it is not simply liturgical but it is Eucharistic, that is, centered on the table of the Lamb of God....<sup>2</sup>

The image of Christ is seen in individual saints, but it is also seen in the worship and

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<sup>1</sup> In this chapter I will distinguish between “creation” and “the world.” Because Orthodox theology believes in the renewal of all creation, I find the use of “the world” to imply a hostility between the ecclesial community and what is ‘outside’ to be problematic. However, I also acknowledge that there is a difference between the gathered community of the church, and human community in general. When I use the word “creation” I am referring to the renewal of all creation, which includes “the world.” When I refer to “the world,” I am drawing on the perceived difference without agreeing that they are necessarily pitted against one another.

relationships of the gathered saints, the worshipping church, the body of Christ. The icon of the liturgy makes every effort to show what *will* happen, “not the state of things as they have been in history but as they will be in the end.”<sup>3</sup>

Zizioulas’s comments offer (at least) two insights and a problem. The first insight is this: the eucharistic liturgy is a new “iconic layer” in my argument, a layer in which the icon is not the individual who relates to ‘the other’ in virtue, but the community-in-relation, “a certain set of relationships,” a *pattern* of relating between persons that constitutes the gathered community.<sup>4</sup> This icon is one of *visible* relationships between living saints, and as the liturgist Alexander Schmemmann emphasizes, between the church and the world. It points to what the reign of God *will* look like. The second insight is that the liturgy *teaches* us how to relate. In the words of Schmemmann, the liturgy should “inform, shape and guide the ecclesiastical consciousness as well as the ‘worldview’ of the Christian community.”<sup>5</sup> The liturgy should be explained and understood as directly pertaining to life, “as, above all, an icon of that new life which is to challenge and renew the ‘old life’ in us and around us.”<sup>6</sup> The eucharistic icon, “the gathered community, is the only setting from which we can extrapolate ethical actions.”<sup>7</sup> Ethical behavior, and the guidelines for that behavior, come from the liturgy. If my argument in the previous chapter is correct, that an essential part of what makes a saint a saint is virtuous relations with ‘the other,’ then according to Zizioulas, it

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<sup>2</sup> John Zizioulas, “Action and Icon - Messianic Sacramentality and Sacramental Ethics,” in *Whither Ecumenism: A Dialogue in the Transit Lounge of the Ecumenical Movement*, ed. Thomas Wieser (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1986), 66.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>5</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Life: Lectures and Essays on Christian Development Through Liturgical Experience* (New York: Dept. of Religious Education, Orthodox Church in America, 1974), 88.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> John Zizioulas, “Action and Icon,” 68.

is the liturgy that communicates to its participants what it is to be virtuous. Liturgy is the source for virtuous relations.

Yet positing the liturgy as the only place where we see, and then derive, ethical relationships leads to a serious problem: Zizioulas's language, if not read carefully, runs the danger of reifying the visible without critique. The liturgy provides a way to "see" the reign of God, Christ himself, according to the passage cited above. Seeing is more than words, which Zizioulas claims "are necessarily bound and conditioned by history," making history rather than the future the starting point of revelation.<sup>8</sup> Because the liturgy is a vision of relationships, the living and present reign of God, it is (supposedly) not bound by history, unlike mere words. The liturgy is intentionally *future*-oriented. The future orientation of the liturgy, its effort to incarnate today the future of the gathered community, is an effort by Eastern Christianity to be faithful to its vision of an eschatological reality. Yet it is far too easy to read into this theology (which we will see is quite similar to Schmemmann's) an assertion that what we see in the liturgy *now* is what *will be* our eschatological reality. The "seeing" in the liturgy excludes women from the priesthood (and for the vast majority of Orthodox churches today, from the altar entirely). Male and female saints, as individuals, are embodied images of Christ who are called to embody all virtues. Yet within the liturgically formed body of Christ, women are excluded from particular relationships (which as chapter two argued, are based in particular skills and the modeling of virtue) in a manner no man is. Is exclusion then a part of the reign of God? As we will see, exclusion within the liturgy diminishes the visibility of the eschatological hope liturgical theologians posit as the very goal of liturgical practice.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 67.

### 4.1.1: Key Elements

Four elements consistently appear in Orthodox theologies of liturgy: the liturgy is an anticipatory participation in the eschatological future of the people of God; participation in the liturgy encourages and directs the transformation of persons into the likeness of God (*theosis*); this transformation occurs through the liturgical relationships forged among the ‘saints’; the communion of saints embodied in the liturgy is *for* the world. In this chapter I will affirm each of these elements. My affirmation of these elements, however will be followed by a challenge: the liturgy as it is currently practiced fails to anticipate and make possible relationships that recognize men and women as unique, irreducible and free. The community cannot receive the gifts given to individuals for the benefit of the community, and in turn, is inhibited in its ability to pass those gifts on to the world. This failure, regardless of its intentionality or not, is a failure to love persons within the very community Orthodoxy declares as *a primary locus* of becoming fully human. This failure to love inhibits the transformation that is possible through the unique sharing of gifts with the community. The eucharistic community fails to embody as fully as it might the eschatological hope of God to the world. It does not fully become an “icon of the kingdom.”<sup>9</sup>

### 4.1.2: Failure of the elements

My argument rests on the inadequately developed but repeatedly asserted second and third elements noted above: the liturgy makes possible transformation through relationships.

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<sup>9</sup> Note that I do not declare that the community fails in its purpose completely. God works good to those who love, and transformation is abundantly evident through the liturgy. My argument is that there are areas where we unintentionally inhibit, and may even undermine, divine-human relationships. However, the liturgy is certainly not the only place where transformation as *theosis* happens, despite the claims otherwise by some liturgists. *Theosis* as our transformation by the Spirit into divine likeness occurs anywhere the Spirit is active, who, according to Orthodox vespersal prayers, is “everywhere and in all things.” All of creation is a ‘locus’ of

Ritual theorists and ethicists alike have highlighted the unique importance of worship as formative of the human person and moral action. Further, communal ritual worship forms not just individuals, but shapes the ecclesial community in its internal relations and its relations to the human community and all of creation. As we will see below, it comes as no surprise to Orthodox theologians that the liturgy is intentionally formative of human relationships. Liturgical relationships then, are an inherently *ethical* concern, even if some (Schmemmann and Zizioulas in particular) eschew any direct connection with “ethics,” conceived as a particular preoccupation of Western Christianity.<sup>10</sup> The Armenian Orthodox Vigen Gurioan, however, regards the liturgy as a rich source of ethical content through its encouragement of a virtuous life.

Yet for the liturgy to serve as a source of virtuous relations for individuals, the ecclesial community, society or creation, it must also *be* a locus of virtuous relationships. If, as I noted in the first chapter, becoming fully human entails a recognition of both self and other as unique, irreducible and free, then should not the liturgy be a place that anticipates and nurtures this ‘becoming’ in its ritual and sensory practices? The liturgy, as anticipation of the eschaton, is consistently posited as a place of *idealized, anticipatory* relationships. Yet it is in the presumed charisms and roles of men and women, and all that these imply about who they may become in Christ, that the Orthodox liturgy fails to see each person as unique, irreducible and free. Instead, the liturgy sensorially affirms rigid gender-based roles that do not correspond to the beautiful fluidity of the polyvalent metaphorical roles entered into by the celebrating community, to the textual language of the liturgy, nor to the actual qualities that characterize the flesh and blood participants.

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*theosis*, all relations, any ‘thing’ or person through which God in the Spirit can work. The liturgy however, is claimed by theologians as a unique locus for the work of the Spirit.

### 4.1.3: Order

My argument regarding liturgy proceeds as follows. First, I describe the iconic purpose of the liturgy, using in part the language of ethics. Second, I emphasize the liturgy as participatory, a eucharistic movement into the joy of the Lord and a joyful return to the world. Third, I discuss liturgical participation as the formation of iconic relationships, noting the interrelationship between function and symbol. In this section I discuss visions of the liturgy that fail to incorporate key aspects of an Orthodox understanding of icon and symbol in their efforts to exclude women from the priesthood. Sharing the concern for clericalism present in my theological interlocutor, I argue that the rigid divisions required to sustain a “masculine” priesthood and a “feminine” church are only possible where this practice of shared celebration is lost or obscured. Here, I am extending the arguments of Kallistos Ware that the priest is *in persona ecclesiae* and of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, that we are all icons of Christ. Finally, I will argue that a critical joy must take into account the joy and suffering of all members in order to assess liturgical practice and the participation of women.

### 4.1.4: Success

The success of my argument as a whole does not depend on a single theology of the priesthood since, as we will see, Zizioulas and Schmemmann emphasize and sometimes disagree regarding different aspects of the priesthood. Rather, its success depends primarily on adequately demonstrating the fluidity of polyvalent images and metaphors symbolized through particular worshipping bodies, and secondarily on the essential element of shared liturgical celebration, concelebration. As an ethicist, I will maintain the use of virtue language as the link between the priest as an icon of a new and virtuous humanity, the saints

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 64. Here, Zizioulas is approving Daniélou’s characterization of Western Christianity.

as diverse participants in the virtues of God, and the liturgy the place where these elements come together as the living, virtuous “icon of the kingdom” composed of unique, irreducible and free members.

This chapter addresses several tensions in Orthodox theology that will each be discussed in reference to Orthodox liturgical theologians and ethicists. First is the tension between the eschatological future and hope of the church as the communion of the saints, and its incomplete witness in the ever-transforming embodiment of Christ in the world. Second is the tension between the personal and the communal, the uniqueness of the individual as formed through, expressed in, and recognized by the community, and the transformation of the community through both individual and communal influence. Third is the tension between the life of the community and the life of the world, between which there is a dynamic and two-way exchange. While this chapter will primarily focus on the recognition of individual uniqueness through communal practices, it should be kept in mind that who we are as a community says a great deal about who we are to the world and the kind of community we believe can and should flourish around us. Finally, there is the irresolvable tension between an eschatological *vision* of the reign of God, and its present and future fulfillment. In other words, we are a community for the world, and our resolution of these issues within our own ecclesial body reflects the resolution we seek in creation, into the eschaton.

### **4.2: A Purposeful Liturgy**

Saints image Christ for us. They remind us of the full humanity to which we are all called by uniquely manifesting elements of the full humanity we see in Christ through relating in virtue to others. In the saints we see what it is to be a human person of love, joy,



peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). We see in the saints what it is to have Christ dwell in and through a unique person, at a particular time and place, and transform him or her into someone more fully human.

This transformation is not only the result of a personal relationship between the individual and Christ, though it certainly must include that. We are just as significantly transformed through the influence of our culture and social location, our family, friends and associates, all of whom contribute to who we are and who we are becoming. It is this recognition that supplies the energy behind the long-standing Christian insistence that we seek out relationships with other Christians, that we place ourselves, through baptism and lifestyle, in the family and society of the church so that our formative influences can be Christian. Within the church, we can see what it is to be more fully human through divine-human participation. We are challenged, convicted, encouraged, and energized by what we see, hear, experience and sense in the “cloud of witnesses who have gone before us” (Heb. 12.1). These witnesses are present in the icons of the saints who go before us, as well as in the living men and women around us who demonstrate divine-human communion in their daily lives.

Often forgotten amidst the mantra repeated endlessly by the Orthodox, that we are to fast, pray, receive the sacraments, and read scripture (though this last is admittedly a far too recent addition for many Orthodox), is that these ascetic practices are *a means* of developing the Christian life. The purpose of these disciplines is to help us *become* people for whom the fruits of the spirit are our capabilities, dispositions, and way-of-relating. The goal of the Christian disciplines is not necessarily the discipline itself, though prayer as the way in which we converse with God often has no other purpose than to converse with our divine

lover. The goal of the disciplines is to transform us into people who delight in conversing with God, and who relate to the world the way God as a human would relate, as Christ-like neighbors, with whom we also delight in ‘conversing.’

Yet this transformation is not individualistic. Schmemmann speaks of liturgical worship as that unbroken experience that makes the church into what the church is, “the sacrament of the world, the sacrament of the Kingdom—their gift to us *in Christ*.”<sup>11</sup> The liturgy, as a place where history and the eschatological future are brought together, makes the world a sacrament, a dwelling place of the grace of God. According to Schmemmann, the Church exists *for the life of the world*. In this line of thinking, life is found in relationships exemplified in the Church and lived in the world. Bruce Morrill believes that the “value of turning to the Orthodox version lies not only in its jarring difference of expression (its otherness, if you will) but also, under Schmemmann’s tutelage, in its assertion of the irreducibly social (as opposed to individualistic) dimension of salvation. To assert Christ’s messiahship requires that believers take history (time) and society seriously, but precisely on the basis of the vision of the kingdom of God.”<sup>12</sup> It is with this social dimension of salvation that we are primarily concerned.

#### 4.2.1: A Virtuous Public

The Armenian Orthodox theologian and ethicist Vigen Guroian shares this eschatological and world-oriented vision. Following the work of the first North American Orthodox ethicist, Stanley Harakas, Guroian develops a robust analysis of specifically Orthodox liturgical practices as intentionally seeking to form a “virtuous public.” Guroian,

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<sup>11</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 8. In this short sentence, “their” refers to the experience and liturgy of the church, who offer us the gifts of these two sacraments.

like Schmemmann, emphasizes the concrete envisioning of the reign of God through worship. “Through worship the Church juxtaposes present realities to the pattern of actions by which God seeks to establish communion between himself and humankind. It evaluates those same realities by the values that sustain that communion and, in light of all this, brings what action is necessary into the world for the sake of the Kingdom.”<sup>13</sup> These *patterns of actions* are ethics whose source is the liturgy. With Paul Ramsey, Guroian adds to *lex orandi, lex credendi* the clause, *lex bene operandi*.<sup>14</sup> Orthodox interpretation of the phrase depends not on the rank of the elements in relation to one another, but “upon their unity, continuity, and commensurability under the life of worship. The human being is, above all else, a worshipping creature whose very act of worship, if it is not perverse, is to establish or deepen belief and to do good.”<sup>15</sup> The *homo adorans* of Schmemmann, to whom we will be introduced below, is for Guroian the person who worships by doing good.

Guroian’s effort is directed towards establishing worship as an experience of the reign of God that orients Christian action in the world. Carefully walking through the Armenian prayers of baptism, chrismation and Eucharist, Guroian highlights the way in which liturgy places individuals into a “pattern of divine activity” that is “corporate and relational.” In baptism we receive “the divinely bestowed ability to cooperate with God to his glory and purpose.”<sup>16</sup> This freedom is the “graced capacity of a creature made in the image and likeness of God to become a son or daughter of God.”<sup>17</sup> “The actions and words” of the baptismal rite

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<sup>12</sup> Bruce T. Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory: Political and Liturgical Theology in Dialogue* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2000), 104.

<sup>13</sup> Vigen Guroian, “Seeing Worship as Ethics,” 101.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Ramsey, “Liturgy and Ethics,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 7 Fall 1979 (1979): 139-71.

<sup>15</sup> Vigen Guroian, “Seeing Worship as Ethics,” 76.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

bestow upon persons (ontologically) and call them to (ethically) a certain disposition and character. If the baptized conscientiously strive to cultivate this character within themselves, it will mark them off radically from the selfishness, pride, vengefulness, will to power, and violence of this fallen world that condemn it to death unless it, like they, is transformed. A baptismal ethic engenders persons of humility, purity of heart, contrition, gratitude, and peacefulness. These virtues constitute the christic character that Christians must make their own through constant and conscientious spiritual struggle.<sup>18</sup>

Baptism is an introduction into an ongoing eucharistic action of gathering and sharing a meal that “seeks to re-create the world through the formation of a eucharistic public that is sent out into society to transform it into the image of God’s Kingdom of light, liberty, and love. The truth the liturgy publicizes is inseparable from the vision of that Kingdom for which the Church prays.”<sup>19</sup> In baptism the gifts of the Spirit are conferred upon all, calling them to the same apostolic vocation made possible by sharing and practicing virtue.<sup>20</sup>

Guroian’s analysis is consistent with a larger movement within the study of ethics, the turn towards the importance of narrative and story as shaping human agency.<sup>21</sup> In 1979, a full issue of the *Journal of Religious Ethics* was devoted to the topic of liturgy and ethics. In it the liturgist Don Saliers posits the following thesis:

The relations between liturgy and ethics are most adequately formulated by specifying how certain affections and virtues are formed and expressed in the modalities of communal prayer and ritual action. These modalities of prayer enter into the formation of the self in community. Beliefs about God and world and self which characterize a religious life are dramatized and appropriated in the mode of the affections and dispositions focused in liturgical occasions.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 91. When Guroian uses the term “public” he is following William W. Everett, “Liturgy and Ethics: A Response to Saliers and Ramsey,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 7, no. 2 (1979): 203 - 214.

<sup>20</sup> Vigen Guroian, “Seeing Worship as Ethics,” 98.

<sup>21</sup> This turn is primarily though not exclusively due to the work of Stanley Hauerwas. See Stanley Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics*, 3rd ed. (Trinity University Press, 1985).

<sup>22</sup> Don E. Saliers, “Liturgy and Ethics: Some New Beginnings,” in *Liturgy and the Moral Self*, ed. Don E. Saliers et al. (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1998), 17. Originally published in “Liturgy and Ethics: Some New Beginnings,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 7 Fall 1979 (1979): 173-89. Virtually all the authors in the *JRE* issue refer

The development of Saliers's argument bears striking similarity to elements of Schmemmann's work. The norms and practices of ethics require a vision of the world that must be continually exercised, enacted.<sup>23</sup> We will see this enactment in Schmemmann's ascent into the reign of God through the liturgy and the joyful return to the world. Worship is normative in its shaping of Christian dispositions, though not all who participate are necessarily shaped. Worship provides the "fundamental imaginal framework of encounter with God in Christ which forms intentions in and through the affections that take God in Christ as their goal and ground."<sup>24</sup>

### 4.2.2: Bodily Formation

The means by which we learn to become a people who are neighbors working for the life of the world is varied. The liturgy, like icons, is pedagogical. It teaches us through sermons, scripture reading, hymns and prayers the history of God's work in and through creation, of God's faithfulness to a stubborn, rebellious but chosen people. It invites us to celebrate that death trampled death, that we are all resurrected into a new life where love is the rule, not fear. It teaches us for whom we are to pray: the sick, the suffering, those who are in prison. It teaches us *that* we are to pray, to mourn, to rejoice. As an "imaginal framework," however, the liturgy teaches us these things in a symbolic, iconic, participatory and bodily rather than primarily cognitive manner.

The words of the liturgy are offered through the physical practice of worship. The liturgy 'teaches' in a bodily, expressive, ritualized manner where we learn by seeing and

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to Stanley Hauerwas's arguments regarding moral significance of the continuity and identity of the self which is formed in the narrative stories and ritual and moral practices of a particular community.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 24. In light of Orthodox trinitarianism, it is worth noting that this encounter "with God in Christ" occurs by the participatory activity of the Spirit.

doing. We learn what it is to be neighbors *by actually doing so, in the liturgy*. We do not simply learn *about* who we are to become through divine-human participation, as if a list of specific rules and behaviors were sufficient to create loving and grace-filled people. Remember, Mary did not write a book, she birthed a savior, a person with whom we grow in relationship. Liturgy teaches us to whom we are to related, and how we are to be in relationship. We pray for the world together through shared litanies. Standing, sitting and kneeling, processing, singing and eating, we move our bodies to the rhythm of love presented in the liturgy. We learn to love by seeing and *practicing love*. It is in the liturgy that we learn to recognize the unique and irreducible image of God in each one of our brothers and sisters. We recognize and receive our own gifts. We receive the gifts of one another. We recognize and receive these gifts through practicing them ourselves, or seeing them practiced by another. Then, recognizing ourselves and one another as each able to contribute uniquely to the community of the saints through our gifts, capabilities and virtues, we go out to share with the world our freedom to love one another. It is through practicing our theology in word and body, deepening belief and doing good, that we worship.

The study of ritual as practice, a particular method within ritual theory, highlights the formative quality and bodily dynamic of Orthodox worship. The emphasis on practice as formative is important given the heavy emphasis on symbol found in any discussion of Byzantine liturgy. Understanding ritual as a formative practice coincides with the transformative element in iconodule theology and practice. This manner of approaching ritual adds planks to the bridge I am building between iconodule theology and liturgical practice. The Roman Catholic ethicist and liturgist Mark Searle notes that symbolic definitions portray ritual as “an activity that conveys meaning,” though hardly a singular meaning. “It is also important to recognize the essential polyvalence of ritual: the fact that it

carries different meanings for different people, and that it operates at several different levels and in several different fields simultaneously.”<sup>25</sup> Talal Asad’s anthropological studies of Benedictine monasticism nuance this communication of meaning. “Ritual was not primarily a symbol system aimed at the production of meaning but a *technology* — an acquired aptitude or embodied skill — aimed at the production of a ‘virtuous self’, i.e., a person who is obedient, humble, chaste, charitable, compassionate, hospitable, and wise.”<sup>26</sup> Ritual conveys *many* meanings and capabilities through and for relationships.

According to ritual theorists who emphasize practice, ritual is not an activity that expresses cultural patterns, but is an activity “which makes and harbors such patterns.”<sup>27</sup> Catherine Bell argues that the practice approach emphasizes “flexible sets of schemes and strategies acquired and deployed by an agent who has embodied them.”<sup>28</sup> Among points key to practice theory are the following. First, ritual derives from a context that influences why some actions are chosen over others. For example, Schmemmann is quite concerned that the introduction of the silent recitation by clergy of certain prayers in the liturgy is the result of an external cultural split between sacred and secular that misunderstands the mutually sacred roles of all worshippers.<sup>29</sup> A ritual practice, in this case, silent clergy prayer, is exacerbated

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<sup>25</sup> Mark Searle, “Ritual,” in *Foundations in Ritual Studies: A Reader for Students of Christian Worship*, ed. Paul F. Bradshaw, and John A. Melloh (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2007), 12.

<sup>26</sup> Asad is summarized here by Nathan D. Mitchell, “New Directions in Ritual Research,” in *Foundations in Ritual Studies: A Reader for Students of Christian Worship*, ed. Paul F. Bradshaw, and John A. Melloh (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2007), 105.

<sup>27</sup> Catherine M Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*. (Oxford University Press, 1997), 82.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. Bell here is summarizing her ground-breaking work, Catherine M Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>29</sup> Schmemmann often decries silent anaphoral prayers as a modern phenomenon. This is simply not historically true. Gregory Woolfenden gives an excellent summary of the history of audibility of the anaphora. At the very least, anaphoral prayers were consistently audible until the fifth/sixth centuries. Eusebius and Chrysostom both give the impression of prayers said aloud while all others remained reverently silent. Justinian’s Novella 137 issued in 565, condemning the secret recitation of the prayers indicate that the practice was growing. As an extant ancient practice, albeit a controversial one, Schmemmann’s invective against it as a “modern” development reflects his oftentimes poor reading of liturgical history. However, his theological assessment of its deleterious

due to a societal context that separates sacred from secular. This change then results in an internal, ritualized confirmation of this externally introduced worldview. Not all introductions are negative. The important point here is that context and ritual are mutually formative.<sup>30</sup>

This internalized confirmation of an externally introduced ritual practice demonstrates a second key feature of a practice approach to ritual: “the most subtle and central quality of those actions we tend to call ritual is the primacy of the body moving about within a specially constructed space, simultaneously defining (imposing) and experiencing (receiving) the values ordering the environment.”<sup>31</sup> In short, the body learns best from what it *does*, receiving and granting value through its actions. In the case of silent prayers, what our bodies learn is that certain words are said and heard only by those in the altar. The bodies in the altar have permission to pray in a different way than bodies outside the altar.<sup>32</sup>

Schmemmann is concerned that different values are granted both to the words said and those saying them according to physical location and audibility. Bodily participation receives and imposes the perception of a separation, *within the church*, of a sacred and secular split based on audibility and hierarchical role. It is not important which came first, the cultural shift or the rise of clericalism Schmemmann so abhors. What practice theory highlights here is the way in which bodily movements and actions simultaneously define and receive particular values.

To complicate matters further, bodily learning is often implicit and unstated, and the process by which a ritual comes to be is unknown. Yet human beings make meaning with

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effects reflects the historical controversy over its audibility. See Gregory Woolfenden, “Praying the Anaphora: Aloud Or in Silence?,” *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 51, no. 2-3 (2007): 179 - 202.

<sup>30</sup> This insight undergirds Bell’s work. See Catherine M Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice, Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.



the same eagerness that oxygen fills a vacuum. As a result, and here is the third element practice theory highlights, ritual action promotes “the authority of forces deemed to derive from beyond the immediate situation.”<sup>33</sup> Because ritual is what we *do*, often without any immediate explanation for how it came to be or why we do it, the tendency is to grant authority to the ritual based on something external to the ritual itself. In other words, we look for a reason outside of the practice itself. This reason, in the case of Orthodox liturgical practice, might be an elaborate mystagogy, or simply, “we have always done it this way” (whether that is true or not). As we will see, Schmemmann repeatedly condemns the Orthodox tendency to refuse to allow rituals to speak for themselves, instead imposing on them an external interpretation that reflects little to nothing of the practice itself.

What must be understood here is that bodily actions within liturgy can be viewed as having the legitimacy of external authority while simultaneously promoting that authority. Searle claims that the liturgy, unique among expressions of faith, is “carried out.” It is “uniquely a matter of the body: both the individual and the collective body.”<sup>34</sup> Thus, what our bodies *do*, where they stand, sit, kneel, where they move or remain, matters. “Every invocation,” declares the theologian Witvliet, “of the maxim *lex orandi, lex credendi* implies that human activity is always prior to human cognition or belief.”<sup>35</sup> Searle insightfully comments that

While it is possible to reconstruct the beliefs of a community on the basis of their fragmentary verbal expression in the rite, it is more important to trace the trajectory of the ritual doing and to ask, not what is being said, but what

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<sup>32</sup> The phrase “in the altar” is indicative of the Orthodox liturgical space where the altar is its own space, often almost entirely invisible from the nave due to a solid iconostasis, *into* which clergy and altar servers move. The altar is not something which one is *on*, but rather, *in* or *in front of*.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Mark Searle, “Ritual,” 13.

<sup>35</sup> John D. Witvliet, “For Our Own Purposes: The Appropriation of the Social Sciences in Liturgical Studies,” in *Foundations in Ritual Studies: A Reader for Students of Christian Worship*, ed. Paul F. Bradshaw, and John A. Melloh (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2007), 37.

is being done. In Ricoeur's phrase, the symbol gives rise to thought. But the ritual symbols is an enacted symbol: it is an embodied parable....<sup>36</sup>

Parables communicate values, insights and truths. Bodily movement, placement, visibility or invisibility are enacted symbols that tells us a story. We enter into that story in order to live by it for the rest of our lives. Combined with the way in which bodily action both receives and promotes values that are perceived to have the stamp of divine approval, it is hardly a leap, then, to argue that the permission and restriction of bodily movement reflects and imposes values that claim authority from God. There must be a reason, we assume, that women are not permitted to serve as priests, even if our theology fails to support the practice.<sup>37</sup>

The Orthodox liturgy prioritizes bodily movement and, as Schmemmann repeatedly argues, its movement (and its traffic snarls) indicates our beliefs. He questions whether what we currently *do* is what we mean to do. Do our present actions teach what we mean them to teach, or do our present actions detract from our theology? Yet here are questions he and others do not ask: If, as he argues, the priest carries in his body *all* the bodies present, then on what grounds do we exclude *some* bodies? What thought rises from the exclusively masculine enacted symbols in the altar? From the exclusively male embodiment of priesthood? From (almost) exclusively male preachers, teachers, spiritual directors, counselors and confessors? What are the unintended consequences of bodily exclusion when the movement of female bodies is restricted?

What we do with our bodies in ritual reflects the values we associate with our bodies and simultaneously communicates those values, which we then associate with the divine.

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<sup>36</sup> Mark Searle, "Ritual," 14.

How we act as men and women in the liturgy communicates what we believe about men and women as becoming human in God, and forms us in those beliefs and the actions that flow from them, for better or worse. Orthodoxy believes men and women to be full sharers in the image of God, baptized as priests, prophets and rulers, co-participants in the virtues of God through *theosis*. Do these core theological beliefs shape our practices, or do our liturgical practices call these beliefs into question? If we do not fully share, according to our capabilities, in all functions of the image of Christ in our liturgy, can we expect the liturgy to help us become persons who understand and practice the call to all baptized Christians, to become priests, prophets and rulers? I firmly believe that the church (and the world) is populated by men and women who have understood this calling in their lives, who have become virtuous persons of love. I simply do not think the liturgy, as it currently stands, deserves all the rhetorical credit we bestow upon it. God works, often despite our work.

### 4.2.3: Exclusion of Exclusion

Gurioan, who as an Armenian Orthodox is acutely aware of the ethnic and national struggles that characterize Orthodoxy in America, indicts its failure to exhibit a compelling vision of the reign of God “because it has made the eucharistic meal a privilege of independent ethnic cults...rather than the public expression of the virtues, values, character, and hope of the kingdom of God.”<sup>38</sup> This admission of failure in embodying the eucharistic vision of God’s reign is crucial. Gurioan is adamant that “Christians must derive their ethics from the experience of God’s Kingdom and truth that is found in the Church’s

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<sup>37</sup> Hopko as much as says this. We must presume “theological and spiritual reasons” for male priesthood given the presence of women in all places except among priests and bishops. Their absence can hardly “be attributed...to evil or ignorance.” Thomas Hopko, “Presbyter/Bishop: A Masculine Ministry,” 140.

worship.”<sup>39</sup> The church “offers its social ethic as an expression of its own inner being.

Judgment, repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, and *philanthropia* ... are a way of life.”<sup>40</sup>

Without exercising these ethics within the church, “the Church has no true knowledge of itself and, therefore, is incapable of discriminating between the world’s standards and those that belong to the Kingdom of God.”<sup>41</sup> It is worth noting Guroian’s brief acknowledgment

that the liturgy may not always be its own best source. “For I believe,” says Guroian,

that Christian ethics loses its character and capacity to inspire human conduct for the good when the eschatological imagination is impoverished. My analysis and Schmemmann’s join, however, in the shared conviction that the decay of liturgical practice is a principal source of the loss of an eschatological vision within the whole of Christian life. I say this not withstanding my belief also that when Christian liturgy becomes distorted or corruptive, Christian ethics may be in a position to purify the liturgy. But the fundamental fact is that only the liturgy can give back to ethics that eschatological vision which it has lost and which energizes Christian life and inspires Christian mission.<sup>42</sup>

Guroian here allows that liturgy and formation are not inherently circular, that practice and belief may not coincide, and that liturgical practices may be critiqued by ethics.

My point here is not simply to show the parallel reasoning between Orthodox and non-Orthodox ethicists and liturgists. To non-Orthodox I am arguing that the question of the liturgical ‘place’ of women is not simply a sacramental question (as it tends to be for some Roman Catholics), but a properly ethical question regarding how we relate. To Orthodox, I am noting that liturgy and ethics are already intertwined in such a way that we cannot refuse to examine our liturgy for its ethical content. The focus of many ethical theorists is on worship as a source for ethical action *outside* the liturgy, the “virtuous public”

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<sup>38</sup> Vigen Guroian, “Seeing Worship as Ethics,” 94. Guroian here is referring to the serious issues of language and ethnic orientation of Armenian churches, but his indictment can fall equally on any Orthodox jurisdiction in North America, where ethnic and cultural loyalty is rife.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 97.

that exists for the life of the world. My concern is for ethical relationships *within* the community. Among others, the Roman Catholic religious Margaret Farley notes the problem of presuming the right formation of persons in a liturgy that may itself not fully exemplify respectful relationships between worshippers.<sup>43</sup>

I am not alone in criticizing liturgical practice. Schmemmann regularly criticizes the failed relationships within the liturgy, though he does so, as he vehemently argues again and again, as an internal critique of proper liturgy opposed to degenerated liturgical practices. Schmemmann's concerns are not about moral formation of persons, though he asserts the liturgy as the only adequate source of transforming the world. Rather, he mourns the lost experience of eschatological (and transforming) joy. Zizioulas criticizes any liturgy that excludes persons from eucharistic participation based on "natural" qualities. Any introduction of division into the Eucharist, any actions that do not affirm diversity and otherness, destroy and possibly invalidate the Eucharist.

Thus, a Eucharist which excludes in one way or another those of a different race or sex or age or profession is a false Eucharist....The Eucharist must include all these, for it is there that the otherness of a natural or social kind can be transcended. A Church which does not celebrate the Eucharist in this inclusive way risks losing her catholicity.<sup>44</sup>

Here he acknowledges that not every Orthodox liturgy practices what we presume to preach. His critique deserves extended discussion, but its attention is exclusion *from* the liturgy, not exclusion *within* the liturgy. I will build upon his claim that the only acceptable exclusion is the "exclusion of exclusion," redirecting his criticism to a new object, the exclusion of

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<sup>42</sup> Vigen Guroian, "Liturgy and the Lost Eschatological Vision of Christian Ethics," 29, emphasis added.

<sup>43</sup> Margaret A. Farley, "Beyond the Formal Principle: A Reply to Ramsey and Saliers," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 7 Fall (1979): 191-202.

<sup>44</sup> John Zizioulas, "Communion and Otherness," 355.

women within liturgical practice.<sup>45</sup>

### 4.3: Icons of Participation

The liturgy as an icon of the reign of God is, like all icons, dynamic. The striking difference between the liturgical icon and icons of saints enriches our understanding of the dynamism inherent in iconic representations. When we gaze at an icon of a saint, we see an individual whose life of virtue witnesses to and invites us into the activity of the Christian life. The icon of the liturgy, however, does not depict an individual. Rather, it is, as Guroian highlights, a corporate and relational pattern of divine activity carried out by individual persons. What we ‘see’ in the liturgy is a pattern of relationships that point to, and, therefore, draw us into participation in, divine relationships. The icon of the liturgy does not make present a person in quite the same way as does the icon of a saint. As an icon of a pattern of divine activity the liturgy both points us towards and engages us in the life of the tri-personal God, who from eternity exists in dynamic movement of personal relations. These relations are beautifully characterized by Catherine LaCugna as the perichoretic “divine dance” into which human persons are drawn through salvation history.<sup>46</sup> The liturgy, in which Jesus is the body of worshippers (formed in unity by the Holy Spirit) who offer, where he is the body (transformed by the Holy Spirit) offered on the table, and where he is the body receiving, is a unique moment in time where the people of God dance with their eternal lover, learning by dancing how to become lovers of both the world and God.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 356.

<sup>46</sup> Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 274.

### 4.3.1: Movement into Joy

Certainly one of the most compelling visions of liturgy as movement comes from the always polemical pen of Schmemmann. Schmemmann's vibrant liturgical theology frequently railed against "the West" (rather unfairly conceived and blamed), especially Roman Catholic scholasticism. But his insightful critique was equally leveled against increasingly common liturgical practices among the Orthodox such as inaudible prayers, infrequent communion, the absence of the vernacular, and a creeping clericalism that only affirmed what he considered the devastating (and non-existent) division between the sacred and secular. His work wields considerable influence upon contemporary Orthodox conceptions of the liturgy. Not only is his work respected among a wide-range of academics and theologians, but his more popular work is still avidly read by lay members of Orthodox churches in North America.<sup>47</sup> Where the ancient ecclesial practices such as frequent communion and baptismal liturgies have been restored, we have Schmemmann to thank. Schmemmann's vision of the liturgy remains unequalled among Orthodox (and even non-Orthodox) theologians and liturgists. It is, for many, an unquestionably compelling vision.

Schmemmann characterizes the entire liturgy as "*sacramental*, that is, one transforming act and one ascending movement. The goal of this movement of ascension is to take us out of 'this world' and to make us partakers of the *world to come*."<sup>48</sup> There is no single sacramental

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<sup>47</sup> His most widely-read and influential book remains *For the Life of the World*. Other significant works include: Alexander Schmemmann, *Great Lent*, Rev. ed. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974); *Of Water and the Spirit: A Liturgical Study of Baptism* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974); Alexander Schmemmann, and Asheleigh E. Moorhouse, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, 3rd ed. ed. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986); Alexander Schmemmann, and Thomas Fisch, *Liturgy and Tradition: Theological Reflections of Alexander Schmemmann* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990); *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000; reprint 3). For an excellent review of Schmemmann's impact on liturgical theology, see Robert F. Taft, "The Liturgical Enterprise Twenty-Five Years After Alexander Schmemmann (1921-1983): The Man and His Heritage," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 53, no. 2-3 (2009): 139-77.

<sup>48</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 42.

moment in the liturgy of the Church, but a series of sacramental movements flowing from one into another that together are sacramental.<sup>49</sup> Key to Schmemmann's theology is that the liturgy is not a *place* in which Eucharist is done by a select few, but rather a gathering of celebrants that are *the form* of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is not a thing, simply the body and blood on the table, but an event, a gathering, an assembly.

This contrast initiates three threads that Schmemmann follows throughout each liturgical moment. The first thread is the *shared work of the liturgy*. Each liturgical movement is *work* shared by all the celebrants, presider and people. The second thread is Schmemmann's repeated affirmation of *lex orandi, lex credendi*, the premise that theology proceeds from the living experience of the worshipping assembly, the *ordo* itself.<sup>50</sup> The final thread is that these movements make the Church into what the Church is, "the sacrament of the world, the sacrament of the Kingdom—their gift to us *in Christ*."<sup>51</sup> The church exists, as the title of his popular book indicates, "for the life of the world." For Schmemmann, there is no polarization between world and Church, a belief symptomatic of the urgent problem of secularism.<sup>52</sup> This polarization manifests itself in either the reduction of the Church to the world and its history, or a complete separation of the Church from the world. Neither are acceptable to him. In the Eucharist, celebrants bring their gifts from the world, enter into the joyful advent of God, and joyfully return those gifts to the world.

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<sup>49</sup> This is most evident in his posthumously published final work, *The Eucharist*, in which each chapter describes discrete sacramental movements. They are the Sacraments of Assembly, Kingdom, Entrance, the Word, the Faithful, Offering, Unity, Anaphora, Thanksgiving, Remembrance, the Holy Spirit and Communion. See Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*. For an excellent summary, see Janet M. Bellotti Puppo, "Sacrament of Deification: The Eucharistic Vision of Alexander Schmemmann in Light of the Doctrine of Theosis" (PhD Diss, Duquesne University, 2007), 328ff.

<sup>50</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 13.

<sup>51</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 8.

<sup>52</sup> Schmemmann defines secularism as "the progressive and rapid alienation of our culture, of its very foundations, from the Christian experience and 'world view' which initially shaped that culture—and the deep polarization which secularism has provoked among Christians themselves." *Ibid.*, 7.



The threads of the liturgy are held together by joy, the crossweave if you will. Joy is “*the only really transforming power in this world.*”<sup>53</sup> Joy is gained only by participating in the “dimension,” the “new time” of the reign of God.<sup>54</sup> The liturgy is our journey, procession, pilgrimage, ascension, and movement from the world into this new dimension.<sup>55</sup> The Eucharist as liturgy is an ordered ascent into the joy of the Lord (Mt. 25:21), a joy *whose only entrance* is the eucharist.<sup>56</sup> This “dimension” of joy adds depth, color, vivacity to our vision. It is the *telos* of the liturgical journey that moves through the liturgical acts of assembly, blessing, entrance, Word, offering, anaphora, thanksgiving, and remembrance, restoring a joyful vision and offering an anticipatory experience of the reign of God. This experience of joy *precedes* any effective ministry to the world. Schmemmann critiques contemporary liturgical practice for severely truncating the joyful experience of participants due to various factors such as inaudible prayers wrongly supposed to be only clerical, and mystical symbolism that has reduced the liturgy to “didactic dramatizations.”<sup>57</sup> By opening the door to experience, Schmemmann perhaps unintentionally allows the voices of women who do not share his joy in the liturgy (because they cannot share fully in its movement) to critique practices in much the same way his own abridged joy resulted in critical analysis and constructive challenge.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>55</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), 30.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 27; Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 25.

<sup>57</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 31.

### Assembly and Entrance

The joyful journey of the Eucharist begins with the gathering of the people. The sacrament of assembly is the “first liturgical act,”<sup>58</sup> initiating a “real separation from the world” as participants leave home and journey towards the church.<sup>59</sup> Based on early processional liturgies, it appeared that all participants assembled at the church door and entered the church together, a dynamic obscured today in all but episcopal services (and the liturgical practice of the Communities of New Skete in Cambridge, New York).<sup>60</sup> Today, the presbyter and, if present, the deacon are already in the altar, likely having completed the preparation of the gifts under cover of a poorly attended (if at all, by any other than a chanter) *orthros* or matins service. Only in the episcopal service where the bishop is publicly vested among the people and remains on the *bema* (the slightly raised area in front of the altar that in the early church extended all the way into the middle of the nave) until what is now called the “Little Entrance” of the Gospel book do we retain a shadow of the ancient practice in which clergy, people, and Word of God (the gospel book) gathered and entered the church together, remaining assembled before the altar table. What is crucial here is not the historical reality of a change in liturgical practice, but Schmemmann’s effort to “reclaim the original movement” of the liturgy, insisting that the “first and basic act of the eucharist,”<sup>61</sup> is a shared, public gathering (*synaxis*).<sup>62</sup> Following his teacher Nicholas Afanasiev, Schmemmann

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>59</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *Sacraments and Orthodoxy*, 31.

<sup>60</sup> Whether this happened for all liturgical services is unknown. Early liturgical practice varied from region to region, with little consistency until the growth of large urban and ecclesial centers.

<sup>61</sup> Teva Regule, personal conversation, Oct. 21, 2010.

<sup>62</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 15.

asserts that the mutual dependence between the presider and the people is one of “*co-serving* or *concelebration*.”<sup>63</sup>

The current first *rite* of the liturgy, if not the first sacramental act, is the blessing of the Kingdom by which the assembled verbally initiate their movement into joy. By confessing the reign of God as our “highest and ultimate value, the object of our desire, our love and our hope,” we, the assembly, *begin* by proclaiming our *end*.<sup>64</sup> Even here, where the presbyter voices the blessing, Schmemmann emphasizes that the answering “amen” of the assembly “*seals* each prayer uttered by the celebrant, thereby expressing its own organic, responsible and conscious participation in each and every sacred action of the Church.”<sup>65</sup>

Schmemmann emphasizes this same shared participation in the “Little Entrance.” This “Sacrament of Entrance” bears crusted layers of centuries of symbolic and mysteriological interpretations of both movement (i.e., Christ going “out” to preach the gospel) and space (the altar is “in” while nave is “out”) that serve to separate the “initiated” from the “uninitiated,” clergy from laity, nave from altar.<sup>66</sup> Current practice, in which the Gospel book is carried out of the altar, around the nave, and back into the altar, creates a polarity between clergy-laity rather than church-world, where the church no longer includes *all* those gathered, but only the clergy. Here, Schmemmann argues, we see the consequences of an introduction into the life of the church of the false distinction between secular (the people) and sacred (the clergy).<sup>67</sup> According to Schmemmann, there should only be a single

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 14, emphasis is in the original. Afanasiev’s theology of concelebration is elaborated in *The Lord’s Supper*, originally published in the L’Orthodoxie et L’Actualite 2-3, 1952. An english edition is in process. Nikolai Afanasiev, *The Lord’s Supper*, trans. Alvin Smirensky (Forthcoming).

<sup>64</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 47.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 61. Schmemmann’s argument is not intuitive for many readers here. Current practice creates a pole of clergy-laity which *incorrectly* corresponds to a pole of church-world, by which he means, secular-sacred. The

pole, that of church-world, where church is inclusive of all celebrants, presider and people. This single pole is a helpful ideal in that it reminds us that the people and clergy celebrate *together*. However, as with many idealistic pictures, it runs the danger of overlooking, or perhaps underestimating, the reality that both clergy and people are also and unavoidably *in* the world even as they are *in* the church.<sup>68</sup> This tendency to idealize his ‘restored’ liturgy permeates Schmemmann’s work despite his simultaneous attempts to reform it. It is by pointing out how this ideal falters in the presence of capable women that I simultaneously share and critique Schmemmann’s vision.

In protest against this the dynamic of clergy-laity rather than church-world, Schmemmann argues that the Entrance, which has slipped in order from being first to second, is not a symbol of Christ’s preaching mission to his people (a common mystagogical interpretation that emphasizes the priest/gospel book alone as Christ), but instead a continued ascent of the gathered to the altar table in the person of the priest:

For the only altar is Christ himself, his humanity—which he has assumed and deified and made the temple of God, the altar of his presence. And Christ has ascended into heaven. The altar, thus, is the sign that in Christ we have been given access to heaven, that the Church is the “passage” to heaven, the entrance into the heavenly sanctuary, and that only by “entering,” by ascending to heaven does the Church fulfill itself, become what it is. And so, the entrance at the Eucharist, this approach of the celebrant—and in him, of the whole Church—to the altar is not a symbol.<sup>69</sup>

This dense quotation offers two elements worthy of note. First, the presbyter is still, even at the altar table, a member of the assembly, *in the person of the church*. He does not, upon entering the altar, switch roles. In him, in the body of the priest, we all enter and stand in

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ideal is a pole of church-world, where church includes clergy/laity, and the world is where the clergy/laity are sent by the liturgy.

<sup>68</sup> A second danger, more obvious in theologies which misread Schmemmann, is that the pole of church-world leads to a withdrawal from the world rather than an invigorated engagement with it.

<sup>69</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *Sacraments and Orthodoxy*, 36, emphasis added.

the altar.<sup>70</sup> The presbyter, from the entrance into the church through this moment, stands *in persona ecclesiae*. Only *after* the ascent of the whole assembly into the altar, carried by the body of the presbyter, does the presbyter, for the first time, turn his face towards the assembled, “as one of the gathered but also as the image of the Lord, vested in his power and authority” and grants us peace as we listen to the Word.<sup>71</sup> Even when the presbyter stands *in persona Christi*, he is still *in persona ecclesiae*. This fluid movement of the priest, turning back and forth, cannot be jeopardized by any theological interpretation that reduces the priest to one way of relating, only one way of “facing,” compromising the concelebration of the gathered assembly.

Second, it is worth unpacking for a moment Schmemmann’s comments regarding the symbolism of the altar, or rather, its lack of symbolism. Throughout his work, Schmemmann is disturbed by a modern understanding of symbols as *illustrations* bearing some visual *resemblance* to its object. The presumption of resemblance is the absence of what is illustrated.<sup>72</sup> Instead, the ancient world understood that a symbol participates in the reality it symbolizes. It is about *presence*, not absence. When Schmemmann declares that the altar is not a symbol but is Christ, even as what we see is not Christ but a decorated table covered with a cloth and various objects, we must understand that Schmemmann is declaring Christ present. Christ is the only altar remaining in the world on which we can offer our sacrifice.<sup>73</sup> It is to Christ that we ascend, and it is only upon arriving at Christ that the priest can turn and grant peace to the assembled as the one who “makes present the priesthood of Christ himself.”<sup>74</sup> The altar obviously *is* a symbol, not of absence but of presence, one that participates in its

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<sup>70</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 63.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *Sacraments and Orthodoxy*, 36.

reality that is Christ.<sup>75</sup> Note that Schmemmann does not say that the priest makes Christ present, since Christ is already present as the table on which the offering is made, and in the assembled “body of Christ.” Rather, the priest makes present a particular aspect of Christ, his priesthood. Momentarily jumping ahead in the liturgy, it is worth noting that Christ is *everywhere* in the liturgy: Christ is the assembled body, the one on which the offering is made (the table), the one who offers (the worshippers), the offering (the bread and wine), and the one who receives (the communicant).

### Symbolic Presence

Schmemmann’s paradoxical language here is a part of his consistent polemic against mystagogical and symbolic interpretations of the liturgy. He is outraged by a growth of interpretations that he believes serve only to obscure the order and transforming power of liturgy. As church buildings changed, as diverse liturgical practices were unified in the great liturgical centers of Orthodoxy, the pragmatic reasons for liturgical actions were obscured. Processional psalms with repeated refrains sung by chanters and laity as all the celebrants gathered and processed from station to station (originally building to building, building to shrine, etc.) devolved into tidbits of antiphons sung by standing chanters. Silent processions in which deacons carried to the altar the bread and wine deposited by the people in a space outside the church to the altar are now circular movements of clergy who carry the gifts, beginning and ending in the altar.<sup>76</sup> These strange circular processions, the maintenance of

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>75</sup> To underscore just how polyvalent a symbol the altar table is, Chrysostom calls the body of a poor person who is assisted by charity an altar on whom we make an offering as if to Christ. See *Homily XX*, on 2 Cor 9.10. In John Chrysostom, *Chrysostom: On the Priesthood, Ascetic Treatises, Select Homilies and Letters, Homilies on the Statutes*, Electronic, 1995 ed., vol. 9, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1889).

<sup>76</sup> This space developed into a small building called the *skenophylakion* which was usually located at the northeast corner, outside the church. The procession of the bread and wine, carried by the deacons, went from outside

the form without the practical necessity, gave rise to symbolic explanations. Various parts of the liturgy now represent moments of Jesus' life and ministry, each rite easily representing any number of distinct moments depending on the interpreter, reducing "ninety percent of our rites to the level of didactic dramatizations."<sup>77</sup> So many interpretive options exist, declares Schmemmann, that

What use could such a believer have for complex and refined explanations of what this or that rite 'represents'...? He cannot keep up with all these 'symbolisms,' and they are unnecessary for his faith. All he knows is that he has left his everyday life and has come to a place where everything is different and yet so essential, so desirable, so vital that it illumines and gives meaning to his entire life. Likewise he knows, even if he cannot express it in words, that this other reality makes life itself worth living, for everything proceeds to it, everything is referred to it, everything is to be judged by it—by the kingdom of God it manifests.<sup>78</sup>

Janet Bellotti Puppo interviewed Paul Meyendorff, who commented that Schmemmann's "visceral negative reaction' stems from the subsequent application of external symbolism to worship as the sole meaning of the action."<sup>79</sup> Meyendorff goes on to offer an alternative explanation that nuances Schmemmann's polemics:

Symbolic interpretation developed in the fourth century with mystagogical catechesis. The symbolic was simply another added layer to the various strata common to the Platonic worldview of late antiquity: literal, spiritual, anagogical, topological and typological. When the literal sense was lost, i.e., when prayers were read silently, all that was left to the people was a symbolic interpretation.<sup>80</sup>

To be clear, Schmemmann rejected mystagogy while simultaneously engaging in it himself.

The difference (according to Schmemmann) was that his attempts to interpret the liturgy arose

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to inside. Now, the current table of preparation sits usually inside or perhaps to the north side of the altar. The procession still starts at this space of preparation, proceeds outside the altar through the north door, around a portion or all of the nave, and returns to the altar table through the central doors. The preparation table is generally no longer accessible by the people.

<sup>77</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 31.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>79</sup> Interview between Puppo and Meyendorff, 4 May, 2006. Cited in Janet M. Bellotti Puppo, "Sacrament of Deification," 312.

from the text and action of the liturgy itself, not an externally imposed interpretation to fill the silence.<sup>81</sup>

A balanced approach to liturgical symbolism, not always exemplified by Schmemmann, includes three elements that should be kept in mind as we later move to the place of women at/in the altar. First, resemblance or illustration has no relevance to the participation of a symbol in its reality. I.e., the symbol does not need to look like its reality. Jesus did not look like a table. The symbol of the church as “body of Christ” does not mean that Jesus had innumerable hands and feet.<sup>82</sup> Second, a symbol manifests a spiritual reality only to the degree that it is able, which implies the third, no symbol manifests the full spiritual reality:

One reality manifests (ἐπιφαίνω) and communicates the other, but—and this is immensely important—only to the degree to which the symbol itself is a participant in the spiritual reality and is able and called upon to embody it. In other words, in the symbol everything manifests the spiritual reality, but not everything pertaining to the spiritual reality appears embodied in the symbol. The symbol is always partial, always imperfect: ‘for our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect’ (1 Cor 13:9).<sup>83</sup>

Schmemmann’s use of “everything” should be read as rhetorical hyperbole. Not “everything” about the object that manifests the spiritual reality does so clearly (much less ‘naturally’ as some Catholic theologians would have it). The function of a symbol, says Schmemmann, is to whet our appetite, to intensify our thirst, to create in us the desire to fulfil the symbol of Christ’s presence by making Christ present in the world, thereby revealing to creation what is

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Robert Taft notes that Schmemmann’s iconic language is perfectly in line with Byzantine mystagogy, a “tradition that, ironically, Fr Alexander himself neither understood nor accepted.” Robert F. Taft, “The Liturgical Enterprise Twenty-Five Years After Alexander Schmemmann (1921-1983): The Man and His Heritage,” 170. See footnote 23 (on the same page) for a list of sources for Schmemmann’s negative views, as well as a number of more positive discussions of mystagogy as a literary tradition.

<sup>82</sup> The Roman Catholic argument that “natural symbolism” requires that only a male represent Christ makes no sense in an Orthodox context where many objects and persons incompletely manifest various aspect of the thing symbolized. Why a table can symbolize Christ, but a female body which shares in the life of Christ cannot, makes an insistence on a shared natural likeness seem suspiciously arbitrary.

<sup>83</sup> Meyendorff in Janet M. Bellotti Puppo, “Sacrament of Deification,” 312.



already but not yet true, that we are “a single, all-embracing sacrament.”<sup>84</sup> If a table can symbolize the presence of Christ because of what it does, bear an offering, surely a female body can symbolize Christ because of what it does, bear Christ in the world.

Making Christ present in the world is *the task* of the church, and the fulfillment of our *telos* as human persons. We are *homo adorans*, creatures for whom worship is our essential act.<sup>85</sup> Janet Bellotti Puppo connects this priestly vocation of worship, of sanctifying and transforming all of creation by offering it to God, with *theosis*.<sup>86</sup> Schmemmann’s vision of the priestly role of the human person, rooted in his baptismal theology, makes all human life potentially liturgical. Schmemmann precisely defines *leitourgia* as “an action by which a group of people become something corporately that they had not been as a mere collection of individuals—a whole greater than the sum of its parts.”<sup>87</sup> In the liturgy of the Church, the Church *becomes* what it is: “Thus the Church itself is a *leitourgia*, a ministry, a calling to act in this world after the fashion of Christ, to bear testimony to His Kingdom.”<sup>88</sup> Each person within the liturgy also becomes what he or she is. This shared work begins within the Eucharistic Liturgy and continues as the “liturgy after the liturgy” is to fulfill our baptismal calling to be priests, prophets and kings.<sup>89</sup> For Schmemmann, the ascent of the celebrants ends in a return to the world to engage in ministry for the life of the world. In and through the gathered Church, the priestly vocation of humanity is made clear.

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<sup>84</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 39-40.

<sup>85</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 101.

<sup>86</sup> Janet M. Bellotti Puppo, “Sacrament of Deification,” 297.

<sup>87</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 25.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> The “the liturgy after the liturgy” is best discussed by the Romanian theologian, Ion Bria. See Ion Bria, *The Liturgy After the Liturgy: Mission and Witness From an Orthodox Perspective*. (WCC Publications, 1996).

## Eucharist

The Eucharist is frequently characterized, certainly by western liturgists, but Byzantine as well, as the quintessential priestly ‘moment.’ It is in the ‘moment’ of consecration that the presbyter is portrayed by some at his most singular, most distinct, most unique, and for some, his most ‘male’ role.<sup>90</sup> Given this (often popular) perception, it is worth carefully unpacking the anaphoral prayer in light of its supposedly exclusive nature. Schmemmann rejects any reduction of the eucharistic liturgy to a single significant moment, even as he recognizes the Eucharist as the height of the liturgical ascent, what the liturgist Alkiviadis Calivas calls the “chief part.”<sup>91</sup> Not only does Orthodox liturgical theology reject the idea of a “moment” of consecration, they also reject the perception that only one person, the presider, is consecrating the Eucharist. The Eucharist, beginning with the anaphoral dialogue, is *a shared act of thanksgiving*.

The anaphora is the central element of the second portion of the liturgy. It is a single prayer composed of an opening dialogue between presider the people, responses of the people, praise for the work of God in and on behalf of creation, remembrance of the work of Christ, words of institution, offering, the hymn of praise, epiclesis, reminders of the benefits of communion, the intercessions, and concluding doxology and blessing.<sup>92</sup> “The anaphora,” says Calivas,

is the great Eucharistic Prayer of the Church. While the celebrant, by virtue of his ordination, is charged with the responsibility to say it, he accomplishes

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<sup>90</sup> After a presentation on the possibility of female priests in which I offered an abbreviated version of my arguments regarding Gregory of Nazianzus and John Chrysostom, an Orthodox woman critiqued me for neglecting the “obvious” importance of having a male utter the the most sacred words of liturgy, those of institution. She gave no support for her critique, but considered it self-evident.

<sup>91</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 159; Alkiviadis C. Calivas, *Aspects of Orthodox Worship*, vol. 3, Essays in Theology and Liturgy (Brookline, Mass: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2003), 209.

<sup>92</sup> Alkiviadis C. Calivas, *Aspects of Orthodox Worship*, 213. Schmemmann divides the prayer somewhat differently, referring to its elements as the Sacraments of anaphora, thanksgiving, remembrance and the Holy Spirit. Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*.

this act for, with, and on behalf of the people. It is not his prayer but the prayer of the Church, of God's holy people. At the Divine Liturgy, as in all the sacraments, the clergy preside and minister - and their role is absolutely essential - but the celebration is the work of all the people of God, clergy and laity together.<sup>93</sup>

The essential, shared nature of the anaphoral prayer is highlighted by its consistent use of the first person plural, "we", and the subject of the active verbs. The heart of the anaphora has received particular attention. It is reproduced here as it appears in many liturgical books:

Priest (inaudibly): Remembering therefore this saving commandment, and all that came to pass for our sake — the Cross, the tomb, the resurrection on the third day, the ascension into heaven, the enthronement at the right hand, the second and glorious coming.

Priest: Offering You these gifts from Your own gifts, in all and for all.

People: We praise You, we bless You, we give thanks to You, and we pray to You, Lord our God.<sup>94</sup>

Calivas and Meyendorff highlight three actions of the assembly: to praise, bless and thank.

These three verbs are the "only adequate response" according to Calivas, to the "remembering" and "offering" that preceded.<sup>95</sup> By remembering the work of God in salvation history and offering bread and wine, the emphasis in the Eucharist is meant to be on the "sacrifice of praise." This "sacrifice of praise," a phrase sung by the people to open the anaphora, is the praise, blessing and thanksgiving of the people. The Eucharist, the "thanksgiving," is not the bread and wine alone, but the actual, verbal offering of the people

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<sup>93</sup> Alkiviadis C. Calivas, *Aspects of Orthodox Worship*, 213.

<sup>94</sup> The Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, in *The Liturgikon*, trans. Leonidas Contos (Northridge, CA: Narthex Press, 1996), 85-86.

<sup>95</sup> Alkiviadis C. Calivas, *Aspects of Orthodox Worship*, 210. The translation of the liturgy above reflects an ongoing debate regarding the form of the verb "offer." In texts found through the fourteenth century, the Greek form is προσφέροντες, "offering," an adverbial participial which, with the preceding "remembering," describes the actions of the community, "we praise...we bless...we give thanks." After the fourteenth century however, the Greek form προσφέρουμεν, "we offer," appears, making the object, that which is offered, the gifts. While this is a fine point of grammar, both Meyendorff and Calivas strongly argue for a return to "offering" in order to emphasize that what is being offered is not the bread and wine alone, but the "sacrifice of praise."

in response to the gifts offered to us. In other words, *the work of the people is the Eucharist*.<sup>96</sup>

Given the way that silently recited anaphoral prayers obscure the co-participation of people and presider, it cannot be emphasized enough that the people's response to the priest is not a musical interlude "whose purpose is to cover the voice of the priest who, according to current practice, recites the next part of the anaphora inaudibly in or in a low voice... It is itself an offering, a sacrifice of praise. It is the only possible response of the Church to what she remembers and offers to the Father: the Paschal mystery...."<sup>97</sup> Calivas ties the petitionary phrase, "and we pray to you, Lord our God..." to the epiclesis, the invocation of the Holy Spirit. Each act of the anaphora leads to the next, and these acts are *shared* by all the participants.

Paul Meyendorff emphasizes the liturgy as the work of the entire people of God, a place in where "the priestly function is exercised by the entire community, by virtue of their baptism. The function of the ordained clergy is to preside over the priestly community, to unite their priestly prayer."<sup>98</sup> He, like Calivas, highlights the consistent use of the first person plural that is meant to include all of the celebrants.<sup>99</sup> The anaphora is "all one sentence, and the only active verbs are those which express the action of the gathered assembly."<sup>100</sup> As a

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<sup>96</sup> Richard McCall extends the arc of the anaphora: The plot of the eucharistic prayer, then, resolves into an unfolding structure of actions: *thanking and blessing we remember; remembering we offer; offering we petition; petitioning we invoke*. In all these acts, however, we do what God, through God's self-offering, enables us to do. We respond to who God is as revealed in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; and it is this mighty act which authorizes or — to use another word which would come to include much theological polemic — institutes, that act which is our making Eucharist. Richard D. McCall, "The Shape of the Eucharistic Prayer: An Essay on the Unfolding of an Action," *Worship* 75, no. 4 (2001), 326. Here, McCall ties in the blessings which precede the prayer with the epiclesis that follows. This overarching tie reflects the basic theological structure of the Jewish prayers from which they originate, "a theology of worship in which *supplication* is grounded in *anamnesis*." Ibid., 322.

<sup>97</sup> Alkiviadis C. Calivas, *Aspects of Orthodox Worship*, 210.

<sup>98</sup> Paul Meyendorff, "The Liturgical Path of Orthodoxy in America," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 40, no. 1-2 (1996), 56.

<sup>99</sup> Robert Taft has repeatedly highlighted this feature as well. See Robert F. Taft, *Through Their Own Eyes: Liturgy as the Byzantines Saw it* (InterOrthodox Press, 2006).

<sup>100</sup> Paul Meyendorff, "The Liturgical Path of Orthodoxy in America," 56.

single prayer that consistently uses the first person plural, common verbs that lead from one element to the next, and which are spoken together in a continuous dialogue, the anaphora highlights the relationship between presbyter and community as one of common celebration. This celebration, however is not “common” simply because people are present (all Orthodox know that a presider may not celebrate the eucharistic liturgy alone), but because their words are as much a part of the consecration of the Eucharist as are the words of the presider.<sup>101</sup>

### Variety of Symbols

To conclude this section on movements of the liturgy, I would like to draw attention to three elements crucial for my larger argument. First, concelebration is *the primary* focus of the liturgical presentations of Schmemmann, Meyendorff and Calivas. They are all clearly responding, negatively, to the distancing of laity from clergy. While, as we will see below, distinct members of the body perform distinct actions, they do so as a single body, engaging in a shared celebration. Second, with only a few exceptions during the liturgy, the presbyter stands not facing the people, but facing East, with the people. Again, the point here is that the clergy celebrate *with* the laity, not for them. The dominant ‘position’ of the presbyter is

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<sup>101</sup> Meyendorff highlights a fascinating survey given to Russian bishops (in Russia, not North America) early in the twentieth century, in which they somewhat unexpectedly called for large-scale reforms in liturgical and parish life. Suggested reforms included the development of a more manageable parish (as opposed to monastic) *typikon*, greater lay participation, congregational singing, performance of hymns and readings in a manner comprehensible to the people (apparently an endemic problem associated with chanting), the audible reading of liturgical prayers, the elimination of repetitious litanies, more scriptural reading and the restoration of liturgical preaching. Meyendorff cites this data in two very similar articles, Ibid; Paul Meyendorff, “Liturgical Life in the Parish: Present and Future Realities,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 48, no. 1-4 (2003): 143 - 153. I have reproduced footnote 8 from the latter article *in toto*. The survey responses are published in three volumes, *Otzyvy eparkhial'nykh arkhieerev po voprosam o tserkovnoi reforme* (St. Petersburg, 1906). For an analysis, see J. Cunningham, *A Vanquished Hope: The Movement for Church Renewal in Russia, 1905-1906* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1981). See also the unpublished M.Div. thesis at St. Vladimir's Seminary by John Shimchik, "The Responses of the Russian Episcopate Concerning Worship -1905 and the Liturgical Situation in America" (1980).

*in personae ecclesiae*. As I already noted above, even when Schmemmann speaks of the presider as acting in the person of Christ, he (or she) remains in the person of the church.

Finally, note the absence of gendered roles or language in these interpretations. This is not because I have conveniently ignored difficult texts, but because these authors do not mention biological sex or gendered metaphors and supposedly corresponding roles in their interpretations of the liturgy. Their language appears to be “gender neutral.” As we will see, gendered descriptions only appear when the question of bodily resemblance between Christ and the presbyter arises. Otherwise neutral language is then “filled” with male meaning, throwing it off balance. This occurs in part by emphasizing explicitly gendered images that simply do not arise in the work of the theologians discussed above (with the exception of the one time Schmemmann publicly addresses the prospect of female priests).<sup>102</sup> It also occurs by ignoring the fluidity of the symbols that *are* present, such as the symbolic presence of Christ in the altar, the presider, and the assembled people. This “filling” of neutral language with male symbols begs us to ask, why now? Why only when women ask to be included do interpretations arise that exclude women?

Certainly silence does not mean absence, and perhaps these liturgical acts are simply undiscovered expressions of gendered roles. In this case, the liturgical language regarding the presider purports to be neutral, while in reality it has been recently “discovered” as primarily male. However, if our liturgy is really filled with gendered meaning and relationships that we are only now discovering, it seems reasonable that three criteria should be met: First, a gendered symbol or interpretation cannot simply ‘trump’ a differently gendered symbol. In other words, a ‘feminine’ act such as the raising of hands in prayer facing East does not have a higher value than the ‘masculine’ act of witnessing through

preaching the gospel.<sup>103</sup> The reality is, the liturgy includes both acts; however, they are presumed to be gendered. Second, if the same act is legitimately imaged with both masculine and feminine metaphors, it cannot be arbitrarily limited to only one sexed body, the male. Third, interpretations should not deny, restrict or eliminate the fluidity of the the presbyterial ‘image’ that is already present in the liturgy. As I will argue below, fixed gendered roles are only possible in the liturgy if we deny the fluidity *already present* in liturgical symbols. Further, denying the fluidity of symbols also denies the concelebration of the liturgy, and reinstates the very clericalism Schmemmann, Calivas and Meyendorff seek to eliminate.

#### 4.3.2: Iconic Relations

I hope it is clear at this point that the “pattern of actions” (Gurioan) that is the liturgical movement of the Church into the reign of God is a *shared work*. Yet it is obvious from the liturgy that the shared work of the whole does not negate particular roles and actions by some. I suspect that many who disagree with female priests will not be persuaded by my argument thus far, namely that the liturgy *as a whole* is a concelebration. They might argue that someone still presides, and the presiding of one does not exclude the participation of all others. In other words, all women and most men still participate despite their physical presence outside of the altar, despite their non-presbyteral role. This is a reasonable position, especially since I am not advocating for the removal of ordained offices. Rather, I am homing in on what it is about the relationships formed within and by the worshipping body that necessitates different roles in worship. If, as Zizioulas argues, ordination is about

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<sup>102</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, “The Ordination of Women.”

<sup>103</sup> I am not necessarily agreeing that these actions are inherently masculine or feminine, simply acknowledging that they have been so characterized.

relating in a particular way within the community, then the ordinand must be someone who is able to relate in the required manner. I am then questioning the presumption that the manner of relating required by the presider can only be done by male bodies. Relationships form us, tell us about who we are and are not as persons, they permit or prevent us from recognizing and exercising our God-given capabilities and virtues. The relationships shaped within the liturgy are (in theory) the source for all of our relationships, to other human persons, to creation itself. If liturgical relationships tell us something about ourselves that is false, we will carry that misperception into every other relationship we have. The focus of this section is on clarifying the relationships formed within the liturgy, with a particular focus on the unique way in which the presider relates. The fundamental question that underlies this focus is this: can a woman relate in the ways required in the liturgical role of the presider?

### **Ordained into Relationships**

All Christian relationships begin in baptism. Schmemmann, following Afanasiev, and John Zizioulas maintain four ordinations, the first of which is shared by *all* members of the church and grounds the other three ordinations that are entered into by only a few. Schmemmann regards baptism as a person's entrance into new life and chrismation as ordination into membership within the church. Baptism grants a new nature, while in chrismation the person receives his or her "own unique *personality*, personal life, to be personally a living member of the body, a witness to Christ, a son [or daughter] of God, a partaker in the 'royal priesthood' of the Church."<sup>104</sup> Zizioulas does not delineate as firmly

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<sup>104</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Life*, 97. For the thought of Afanasiev on ordination, see the first two chapters of *The Church in the Holy Spirit* which considerably develop this idea. Nikolai Afanasiev, *The Church of the Holy Spirit*.



between baptism and chrismation, which except in the case of already baptized Christians entering Orthodoxy, happen simultaneously. The rites of baptism, chrismation and Eucharist, the latter of which is immediately given to the new member, initiate a person into a particular relationship within a particular, concrete community. According to Zizioulas, that this result of baptism “implies ordination is clear from the fact that the baptized person does not simply become a ‘Christian,’ as we tend to think, but he becomes a *member of a particular ‘ordo’* in the eucharistic community.”<sup>105</sup> Ordination designates the *ordo* in which a person participates. Ordination is not the reception of a particular power or grace either passed on via apostolic succession or delegated by a community.<sup>106</sup> Rather, ordination is what creates the community in the first place, and to say that each member of the body is ‘in ministry’ is to say that each person is in a particular relationship within (and without) the community: “If ordination is understood as constitutive of community and if the community being the *koinonia* of the Spirit is by its nature a *relational entity*, ministry *as a whole* can be describable as a complexity of relationships within the Church and in its relation to the world.”<sup>107</sup> Concurring, Schmemmann states that in the “assembly of the Church...all are *ordained* and all *serve*, each in his [or her] place, in the one liturgical action of the Church.”<sup>108</sup>

What then designates the different *ordos*, the different ministries that result in different relationships within the gathered community? Zizioulas points out that in 1 Cor 12 Paul defines the Body of Christ “*only in terms of ministry* (membership of the Body equals charismata and vice-versa).”<sup>109</sup> The Spirit, by pouring out *charismata* (gifts) on particular

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<sup>105</sup> John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 216.

<sup>106</sup> See Ibid., 215. This is one element of Zizioulas’s objection to the ‘Catholic’ model of ordination, and the more ‘Protestant’ model of the priesthood of all believers. Schmemmann holds a slightly different view, which will be addressed below.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>108</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 88.

<sup>109</sup> John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 212, unless otherwise noted, emphasis is in the original.

persons, creates a community in which all members have a particular place within the eucharistic assembly, a place indicated by charism. The phrase, ‘the ministry of the Church’ does not indicate that the Church *possesses* ministry: “The being of the Church does not precede her actions or ministries. Charismatic life (i.e., concrete ministries) is constitutive of and not derivative from the Church’s being.”<sup>110</sup> The church is constituted as a ministering body, which means that each member of the body is ‘in ministry.’ Zizioulas is adamant that ministry is not delineated by a particular set of tasks or functions, but is “describable only in terms of *the particular relationship* into which it places the ordained.”<sup>111</sup> The church comes into being as its members relate to one another in a particular manner. Note the similarity here between Zizioulas’s theology of the person as constituted by particularity recognized in relationship and the church as constituted by the relationships between its members.

### Functional Relationships

Yet here we run into a problem with Zizioulas’s insistence on a sharp separation of *function* and *relationship*. Certain relationships within the community are the result of function, and functioning creates relationships.<sup>112</sup> Zizioulas correctly notes that 1 Cor 12 describes the body only in terms of ministry as giftedness, that to be a member of the body is to be gifted

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 217 n. 20.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>112</sup> Some relationships, such as those created by love and friendship are not created as a result of functioning, though there are certain expected ways of relating upon which love and friendship often depend. A short example (which conveniently has implications for priestly symbolism discussed below) makes the point. A parent (a relationship) has the responsibility (functions) to provide for the physical and emotional needs of the child, to nurture the child into maturity. A parent may succeed or fail in some or all of the functions which meet his or her parental responsibility. What is interesting is how the relationship is frequently defined by that success or failure. A biological parent who egregiously fails to fulfill the responsibilities of parenthood may not be considered, by the child (and perhaps other relations), as a “real” father or mother. Conversely, the individual who does fulfill parental responsibilities may be considered a “real” parent. Adoptive parents know this well, that being a parent is about doing particular actions on behalf of a child. This does not exclude love, but reminds us that love unaccompanied by appropriate action may not actually *be* love. Children with absent or inadequate parents know that biological relationships do not necessarily equal loving relationships that *do*

and to be gifted is to be a member. However, Zizioulas fails to address the gifts themselves, which are *functional*. The same Spirit gives a variety of “gifts,” “services,” and “activities” specifically “for the common good” (1 Cor 12:4-7). The diverse gifts granted by the same Spirit are *functional*, they serve a purpose and the person who has a gift of the Spirit *does something* that serves the community. A teacher is someone who teaches, a prophet someone who discerns voice of God, the healer someone who heals. A minister is someone who heals, discerns, preaches, teaches, prays, and so on. Ministry is *precisely describable in functional terms*. Despite Zizioulas’s insistence otherwise, if the Church is constituted by its charismatic life, it is constituted by what it does. The Church *is* what it *does*.

What may be less obvious, however is that *doing something*, such as exercising a gift of the Spirit, *establishes a relationship*. To relate to a person is to *do* something in relation to that person, whether to teach or learn, feed or be fed, listen or speak. No relationship is passive, even when one relates via silence and stillness.<sup>113</sup> The liturgy establishes relationships between its members through *relating*. This is a verb, an action, which establishes a noun. There is no such thing as a relationship that does not involve *relating* in some manner, and the quality and nature of a relationship is defined by the quality and nature of the relating.

This inextricable connection between function and relationship does not obviate Zizioulas’s argument however. His concern seems to be that functional language makes unique persons and ministry *dispensable*, and ministries *interchangeable*. Here, he echoes his concern regarding persons, that they cannot be reduced or repeated. By viewing the four ‘orders’ of laity, deacons, presbyters and bishops

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parenting. Parenting is about relating in a particular way, which includes (though is not reducible to) fulfilling particular functions. The success of the relationship is intertwined with the success of the function.

<sup>113</sup> Here I am challenging the classic separation of the contemplative and active life. Both involve acting, relating to another, but in different ways.

...as parts of a relational whole we can affirm and justify their distinctiveness and specificity, and hence their indispensability. The laity will thus become the *laos* who is gathered from the world to realize in the community of the Church the eschatological unity and salvation of the world in Christ. The deacons, whose existence causes so much embarrassment to theology of the ministry precisely because their eucharistic role has been lost, will regain their profound significance as bearers of the world (in the form of the gifts and petitions of the faithful) back to the head of the eucharistic community in order to bring them back again to the world (in the form of the Holy Communion) as a sign of the new creation which is realized in the communion with God's life. The presbyters will become again the synedrion of the community portraying in liturgical as well as in actual terms the important and lost dimension of judgment with which the Church relates *ad intra* and with the world. Finally, the bishop will cease to be everything and become the head of the community that unites it in itself and with the other communities in time and space....<sup>114</sup>

The very words Zizioulas chooses, "distinctiveness," "specificity" and "indispensability" echo the key characteristics of a 'person.'<sup>115</sup> Ordination puts an individual into relationship, making a "person... an *ek-static* being" viewed not via her "limits" but as one "becoming a related being."<sup>116</sup> Yet within the Church, ecstatic relationships of service involve doing something particular. Notice that each order listed in the quotation above *does* something: the *laos* witnesses to and manifests (I am interpreting "realizes" here) the salvation of the world in Christ, the deacon bears the gifts to and from, the presbytery judges and the bishop unites one community to another.

Zizioulas's intention is to regard ordination from a viewpoint other than the classic ontological versus functional split. Here, I think Zizioulas offers a key insight: "...it becomes impossible in this state to say that one simply 'functions' without implying that his being is deeply and decisively affected by what he does. In the same way, it becomes impossible to imply in this state that one 'possesses' anything as an individual.... Ordination

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 222-23. This is of course, a highly idealized vision which appears to assume a bishop at the head of each church, and says nothing about the actual tasks carried out by each order.

<sup>115</sup> The person wants "to exist as a *concrete, unique* and *unrepeatable* entity." Ibid., 46.

and ministry as communion are precisely and only describable in terms of love.”<sup>117</sup> Zizioulas adamantly resists the reduction of ministry to a job description that does not also include the reality that, by doing something, we forge relationships. Further, he resists the tendency to think that ordination itself creates a fundamental change in the person. Rather, change occurs because a person is invited, through ordination, to relate in a particular manner, and this new way of relating affects who they are as a person. The first ordination, shared by all, is baptism into a new way of relating to one another, to the world, and to its creator. The baptized are invited to be known by their love for one another (Jn 13:34). Love is, as the saying goes, a verb. Yet Zizioulas again stretches a rhetorical boundary when he declares that communion “can only be describable in terms of love,” but refuses to give love concrete content. He is so concerned to avoid the language of individualism that he entirely neglects to address the long Orthodox tradition of asceticism and virtue that is meant to both express and further love. The form love takes is shaped by need, capabilities, charisms and relationship. A parent loves a child in a different manner, and with different actions, than a child loves a parent.

What is important here, and to which we will return, is that functioning, doing, and relating, shape the unique personhood of both the doer and receiver. In any relationship, all the participants are changed, hopefully for the better. But what happens when a person has a capability that might allow her to relate in a particular way that both develops her own uniqueness and uniquely serves her community, but is prevented from doing so because her community cannot even imagine the possibility that such gifts are present in a body like hers? If the woman gifted at preaching and teaching is denied the means to do so, multiple

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 226.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 226-27.

unique relationships and the growth that comes from them are missed: hers, and those to whom she might have preached or taught. The community is diminished by such a divide, both in its internal life and its ability to be an icon of the reign of God.

### **Functional Symbols**

The premise that a woman cannot serve as a liturgical presider assumes that there is a distinctive quality to this position that a woman lacks, either because women are incapable of embodying or exercising the required capabilities and virtues, or because of insufficient symbolic ‘resemblance’ between the female body and the priestly prototype. This raises two interrelated sets of questions: what are the functions, capabilities, virtues and relationships required of the presider; second, to what or whom does the priest as icon point, in what or whom does he participate?

Regarding the first question, there is simply no single function or relation that is established between presider (as bishop/priest) and other liturgical participants. As an icon of our new humanity, the priest is called to embody for us what it is to be (or be in the process of becoming) transformed, to participate in divine-human communion. This is a tremendous task (recall Gregory’s “art of arts”), to live in such a way that one’s life persuades others to live similarly. Each metaphor utilized in Gregory and Chrysostom highlights capabilities, practices, virtues and relationships crucial to effective priesthood, including teaching, pastoral discernment and persuasion towards virtue. Remember that for both Gregory and John Chrysostom, teaching via preaching was a primary task of the leader of a community. The respect accorded to teaching is ancient. From the earliest days of the

church, presiding at the Eucharist, giving thanks, was the prerogative of those who served an essential community function—that of teaching the word of God.<sup>118</sup>

Yet teaching is not the only role of the leader of a community. “While the clergy and the laity are both under the rule of God and both share equally the new life in Christ,” says Calivas,

the striking difference between them is that the clergy are set apart to offer the sacraments, maintain the unity of the community, teach and guarantee the Orthodox faith, supervise the disciplinary rules, and promote the philanthropic activities of the community through the exercise of servant leadership, an all-embracing pastoral concern, care, love and solicitude for the people.<sup>119</sup>

Since the purpose of this dissertation is not to precisely define the functions of the clergy, I will not settle the precise nature of the capabilities and virtues of the priesthood, other than to say that the priest must have the capability to responsibly fill the tasks of teaching, leadership, and pastoral care. Women are capable of each of these tasks and have done so in varying capacities throughout the centuries.<sup>120</sup>

### *Ministry of Christ*

The second question, to whom or what does the priest as an icon point, is by far the more problematic for women. If the priest acts *in persona Christi*, or in Orthodox rather than Roman Catholic language, is an icon of Christ, is it impossible for a woman to embody

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<sup>118</sup> In the *Didache*, a Syriac text based on text written close to 70 C.E., we see the high regard given to those who teach. Itinerant teachers, “*didaskalos*” and prophets were invited to give thanks at the Eucharist (it is unclear whether this thanks was in addition to or instead of the given prayer). Written at a time when ministers (teachers and prophets) were still itinerant, local congregations may not have had a recognized teacher or prophet regularly in their midst. See the *Didache*, ch. 10.7. Perhaps one of the most interesting studies of priestly offices in the early church by an Orthodox is the research of Nicholas Afanasiev. His pertinent work, recently translated into English from Russian, is Nikolai Afanasiev, *The Church of the Holy Spirit*.

<sup>119</sup> Alkiviadis C. Calivas, *Aspects of Orthodox Worship*, 9.

<sup>120</sup> The importance of actual ability should not be underestimated. Some of Chrysostom’s most vicious castigations of fellow clergy are due to their ordination for reasons other than genuine ability. It is also worth noting that few men or women are experts in all these areas. The late-ancient practice of having a single bishop

Christ? Putting aside the tremendous soteriological and iconic problems with declaring women unable to embody the image of God in Christ (which is precisely what Orthodox mean by being an *eikon* of God), the more important issue here is this: is the priest functioning as an icon of Christ? In the liturgy, who precisely *is* Christ?

For Zizioulas, the unequivocal answer to this question is, the community, the *ekklesia*. Zizioulas frames *all relationships, all ministry*, within the community by the ministry of Christ. Zizioulas reminds his readers that virtually all ministerial titles in the New Testament are attributed to Christ by the primitive Church.<sup>121</sup> Further, it is Christ who is offered, offers, and receives the Eucharist.<sup>122</sup> While the Father initiates the mystery of Christ by sending the Son to draw all creation into participation in God's trinitarian life, "Christ cannot be isolated from the Holy Spirit in whom he was born of the Virgin; in whom he became able to minister on earth, and in whom finally...he can now minister to this pre-eternal plan of God for creation in or rather as the Church. What, therefore, the Spirit does through the ministry is to constitute the Body of Christ here and now by realizing Christ's ministry as the Church's ministry."<sup>123</sup> This is only possible if we allow for what Zizioulas consistently refers to as a "pneumatologically conditioned Christology."<sup>124</sup>

Aristotle Papanikolaou draws attention to the priority Zizioulas gives to this pneumatologically conditioned Christology over its reverse, a co-existent Christologically conditioned pneumatology. Each has particular ecclesial implications, the first, in Zizioulas's estimation, emphasizes a eucharistic ecclesiology, the second a 'missionary-historical'

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but many presbyters and deacons, each of whom were quite likely gifted in different ways, is an excellent way to meet the needs of a community without placing unreasonable expectations on a single person.

<sup>121</sup> John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 210 n. 2. See also Stylianopolis.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 210. See also Aristotle Papanikolaou's discussion in Aristotle Papanikolaou, *Being With God*, 34.



ecclesiology.<sup>125</sup> The latter defines the church in terms of its mission to expand the dispersion, led by the Spirit, but *following* Christ. Thus “the church becomes the ‘body of Christ’ in the sense where the head (Christ) proceeds and leads the body, and the body follows in obedience.”<sup>126</sup> Papanikolaou points to Zizioulas’ final analysis of a Christologically conditioned pneumatology as implying “distance between the head and the body.”<sup>127</sup> This emphasis on ‘headship’ and its implied distance is especially important as we examine the various models and metaphors for ministry based on the model of Christ as the head.

Among the ecclesial implications of the pneumatologically conditioned Christology to which Zizioulas gives priority are, according to Papanikolaou, first, the church is the *reassembly* of people and not simply a diaspora of missionaries. Second, the Holy Spirit does not simply aid individuals but establishes communion. Particularly important for my argument are the next three implications:

Third, the church is not comprised of individuals, but it is only “in and through the community” that one acquires a true identity and personal distinction. Fourth, if the Spirit realizes the event of Christ in history, then the community formed by the communion of the Holy Spirit iconically realizes the presence of Christ. Unlike the missionary-historical approach, there is no distance between the head and the body.... Finally, the identity of the church is Christ.<sup>128</sup>

No one person acts in the place of Christ in the community. The community *is*, iconically, Christ. Not a part of it, but all of it. As we will see, the presbyter stands *in persona ecclesiae*, and it is the *ekklesia* that stands *in persona Christi*. The church, the community, is the body of

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<sup>125</sup> My understanding of this distinction and its ecclesial implications are indebted to the work of Aristotle Papanikolaou. *Ibid.*, 34ff.

<sup>126</sup> John Zizioulas, “Implications Ecclésiologiques De Deux Types De Pneumatologie,” in *Communion Sanctorum: Mélanges Offerts À Jean-Jacques Von Allmen* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1981), 142. As cited in Aristotle Papanikolaou, *Being With God*, 34.

<sup>127</sup> John Zizioulas, “Implications Ecclésiologiques De Deux Types De Pneumatologie,” 142. As cited in Aristotle Papanikolaou, *Being With God*, 34.

Christ (which is a metaphor!), pointing to and acting as the presence of Christ in the world by the power of the Spirit. Recall also from the last chapter that the person who stands *in persona ecclesiae*, according to iconographic tradition, is the Theotokos. Thus, we can also say that the presider stands *in persona Theotokos*.<sup>129</sup>

### *Priestly Functions*

If it is not the presider who acts in the person of Christ, but the community, how do we understand the many Christic symbols attributed to the presider? Zizioulas's insistence that the gathered assembly is itself Christ overlaps Schmemmann's emphasis on concelebration. Concelebration does not rule out distinct roles within the worshipping assembly, and consonant with his liturgical focus, Schmemmann derives these roles from the liturgy. Ecclesial roles are functional for Schmemmann, and ordination to the priesthood grants the ordinand the "gifts necessary for the edification of the Church through pastoral ministry, sacramental power and teaching ability."<sup>130</sup> Each of these functions reflect *aspects of Christ's ministry* as high priest, teacher and shepherd.<sup>131</sup>

There are other "aspects" to Christ's ministry in which other members of the church engage (such as caring for the poor or healing the sick) in the "liturgy after the liturgy." The presider exercises certain aspects of Christ's work, each of which has an associated capability behind it, such as pastoral ability (the shepherd) or teaching skill (the teacher). We use metaphors to describe these aspects and capabilities because metaphors as verbal icons do something unique, they evoke *qualities* of a function, a *way* of relating, which cannot be

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 34-35.

<sup>129</sup> It is perhaps no coincidence that bishops, the original 'presiders' and the one in whose stead the presbyter as presider stands, wear around their neck an icon of the Theotokos in addition to the priestly cross.

<sup>130</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Life*, 26. A crucial topic which will not be addressed here is whether ordination grants these gifts, or ordination is granted as a recognition of the presence of these gifts.

evoked simply by naming the function. For Chrysostom to characterize the baptismal work of the presider as midwifery, “spiritual travail” (*On the Priesthood*, III.5), and the responsibility and authority of the clergy as superseding that of “natural parents” (*On the Priesthood*, III.6), is to evoke a required quality of relationship that must characterize the exercise of the priestly function.<sup>132</sup> When Gregory of Nazianzus likens his educative efforts to that of a woman in labor and his teaching to a sweet stream of breast milk, he evokes something of both the importance of his teaching as nourishment of life, and the intimacy of his role as a teaching mother to his people.<sup>133</sup> In the liturgy itself, the function of the presbyter is eucharistic, sacerdotal, offering to God the worship of the Church, and to the people the grace of God.<sup>134</sup> The presider simultaneously reflects the “priesthood” of Christ as well as the priesthood of all believers. All the baptized are priests (and prophets and rulers), and the priestly task of humanity is to offer the world back to God. The presider is the offerer of the people who are offering their praise and worship.

#### *Gendered Priests?*

At this point, it seems appropriate to pause to ask the question, whither gender? If, as is argued by opponents to female priests, the priesthood is so clearly a male role, where is the imagery or functions that reveal this? My presentation of the liturgy has thus far barely mentioned gender. Am I simply glossing over elements I do not like? Hardly. The reality is that sexed bodies and gendered imagery play no *explicit* part in the liturgical theologies of either Schmemmann or Zizioulas (nor any other Orthodox liturgical theologian that I know of). Our *implicit* theology is another matter, to which I will return below. Explicitly gendered

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>132</sup> John Chrysostom, *On Priesthood*, 73.

<sup>133</sup> Suzanne Abrams Rebillard, “Speaking for Salvation,” 19, 23.

imagery is simply not a significant way in which Orthodox envision the actions, gifts or relationships formed within the liturgy. Even Schmemmann says nothing about gendered metaphors or symbolism, except, of course, in the very few places where he unequivocally rejected even the suggestion of female priests.

This silence on the part of Schmemmann is no surprise given the lack of gendered imagery within the liturgy, his theological source. The single prayer to explicitly utilize gendered metaphors is during the vesting of the clergy. In preparation for the liturgy, both the presbyter and deacon put on the *stikharion*, the white robe worn under all other vestments. Schmemmann, in a little book for Christian educators, refers to the vesting process in order, once again, to stress the dual role of the presbyter as a representative of both the *laos* and Christic ministry. The *stikharion* represents the common baptism of members at which they were “vested in the white robe of the new creation and new life,” while other vestments are signs of particular functions or virtues: the stole (*epitrakhilion*) is a sign of the presider’s priestly and pastoral function after the Good Shepherd; the cuffs indicate that the priest’s hands are now Christ’s; the belt is a sign of obedience, readiness and submission; the outer vestment (*phelonin*) is the grace that covers all humanity in Christ.<sup>135</sup> Each vestment has an accompanying prayer spoken quietly as the item is put on. Both the deacon and the presbyter say the following as they put on the common baptismal robe:

Let my soul rejoice in the Lord; for he has clothed me with the robe of salvation, and the garment of joy: he has put a mitre on me as on a bridegroom, and adorned me with ornaments as a bride (Isaiah 61:10).<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Life*, 38.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>136</sup> This text is quotation of Isaiah 61:10. Teva Regule, in an unpublished paper, argues that this text presents an eschatological icon linked by Isaiah 42.1-10 and Luke 4.16-31. This linkage frames the eschatological reality of the servant of Israel as one of salvation seen in justice, righteousness, rebuilding, covenant and joy. This insight merits further investigation regarding the inherent, but often neglected, connection between social

This reference to the models of bride and bridegroom is the sole, *explicit* application of gendered imagery to the clergy in the eucharistic liturgy, and like the metaphors utilized by Chrysostom, it draws on *both* masculine and feminine imagery.<sup>137</sup>

*Implicitly*, however, the Orthodox liturgy resounds with gendered associations, precisely because while it *verbally* says very little, it *visually* communicates a great deal. A lack of gendered language does not mean that the liturgy is not, in effect, gendered.<sup>138</sup> The effectiveness of this visual communication is evident in the often visceral and theologically untenable arguments that initially arise when the subject of female priests is proposed.<sup>139</sup> We “know,” *because we see it*, that women do not belong in the altar. Yet the sharpest minds have failed to support this visual knowledge with the required theological substance that might keep such a belief afloat.

The conviction that energizes opponents to female priesthood is precisely the conviction that the *ordo* is the source of our theology. What we do must indicate what we believe, no? Therefore, there must be a reason, in the *ordo*, which legitimates the long-standing practice of the church in excluding women from the altar space and denying them ordination. Of course, conveniently overlooked in this insistence that women cannot enter the altar is the reality that for half of our ecclesial history, female deacons were ordained in the altar, received communion in the altar, and female monastics still, to this day, enter the altar during the liturgy.<sup>140</sup> Initially, such a response seems faithful to Schmemmann’s insistence

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justice as rebuilding the God’s creation and the liturgy. Teva Regule, “Iconic Restoration in Isaiah 61: 1–11,” (Unpublished Paper).

<sup>137</sup> See Chapter 2.3.4

<sup>138</sup> Teresa Berger, “The Challenge of Gender for Liturgical Tradition,” *Worship* 82, no. 3 (2008): 243 - 261.

<sup>139</sup> I say “untenable” in light of the revised consideration of theologians such as Kallistos Ware, who initially cited a number of arguments opposing female priests, but in revisiting his own arguments, declared them insufficiently Orthodox to hold any weight.

<sup>140</sup> On the female diaconate see Kyriaki K. Fitzgerald, *Women Deacons in the Orthodox Church: Called to Holiness and Ministry*; Valerie A. Karras, “Female Deacons in the Byzantine Church.” For a report regarding the recent

that the liturgy forms our theology. Yet I do not think it actually is faithful. Schmemmann comments that the problem with symbolic or mysteriological interpretations of the liturgy is that they are *external* to the *ordo* itself. They do not spring from the text or movement of the liturgy. This accounts for the substantial differences between the various interpretations. The reason for this, he says, “is that they apply to the liturgy their particular vision rather than seek in the liturgy the vision implied in its own *ordo*, in its own structures and texts, in short, its own symbolism.”<sup>141</sup> Yet this is precisely what occurs when the subject turns from the liturgy to the participation of women in the liturgy. Liturgical texts simply do not provide the resources to identify particular roles with particular sexes. Liturgical *movement*, as it exists today, insists that priestly (though in reality, any altar-related role) functions can only be embodied by males. In an effort to harmonize the discord between word and movement, external visions of gender are read *into* liturgical texts, in effect, reifying the visible without critique. The problem is that these theologies then undermine a liturgical vision of concelebration, the shared presence of Christ in all present, and the ability to acquire true identity and personal distinction through the practice of gifts granted by the Holy Spirit.

### A Paucity of Imagination

To illustrate my point I will briefly elaborate on what I consider the restricted vision of two theologians who address, and reject, the possibility of female priests. In each of these

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ordination of two female monastics in Greece, see Phyllis Zagano, “Grant Her Your Spirit,” *America* 192, no. 4 (2005): 18-21. For a thorough examination of women’s liturgical roles, see Valerie A. Karras, *Women in the Byzantine Liturgy* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming). Karras explores various areas of women’s liturgical participation in the Byzantine church, particularly in the Eucharistic liturgy, with a culturally contextualized and chronologically comparative methodology. The book includes chapters on theological anthropology with respect to gender, liturgical space, ritual impurity (menstruation and childbirth), monastic women, and various consecrated and ordained orders for women in the early and Byzantine church (most notably, the female diaconate).

arguments, the following should be noted: first, the assumptions regarding gender do not derive from, but are external to, liturgical texts and movement. Second, these proposals exclude all but a few of the metaphors that evoke the capabilities and relationships required of priests. Third, they posit a single task of the priest that overshadows all others. And finally, each theologian's choice of primary metaphor and task contradicts the choice made by the other. In other words, they cannot both be true. My goal is not to evaluate in full detail the merits of each argument, but to show that these visions of gendered roles simply do not arise from the liturgy. They are externally imposed. At points, they also contradict key elements of liturgical theology.

*Patitsas*

Perhaps the most interesting and recent comment on the possible ordination of women comes from Timothy Patitsas. Patitsas develops a complicated schema in which he seeks to balance the similarities and differences of men and women through a chiasmic approach based on the three Christian offices of priest, prophet and king. While all Christians are called to each of the three offices, there is an "initial priority" for men in the kingly office as "headship," and women in the prophetic as "truth-telling."<sup>142</sup> Gender differentiation lies in practicing the offices in the "proper sequence." Each sex has a

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<sup>141</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, "Symbols and Symbolism in the Byzantine Liturgy: Liturgical Symbols and Their Theological Interpretation," in *Liturgy and Tradition: Theological Reflections of Alexander Schmemmann* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990), 125.

<sup>142</sup> Timothy Patitsas, "The Marriage of Priests: Towards an Orthodox Christian Theology of Gender," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (2007), 72, 74. Patitsas proposes a theological anthropology which he argues is based on the Holy Week cycle, the writings of St. Silouan the Athonite (1866-1938) and the work of the economist and urbanist Jane Jacobs. Patitsas readily acknowledges that this prioritizing of offices has an "arbitrary character" in light of patristic anthropology, and that scripture makes no such distinctions. *Ibid.*, 100, 75. He offers scriptural support not for the assignment of offices, but the assignment of the qualities which he associates with the offices, affirming a Pauline interpretation which emphasizes "masculine headship and self-sacrifice, and feminine purity and modest unknowing (e.g., in 1 Cor 11.1-16 and in Eph 5.22-33)." *Ibid.*, 102.

primary responsibility to enact their respective initial priorities, and only secondarily (but necessarily) to enact the other office. The priestly office is not gendered, but is a manner of exercising the other two offices, namely, in a “self-sacrificial” way.<sup>143</sup> Key, however is that love truly comes to rest *by becoming other*, by men and women symbolizing the primary office of *the other gender*. Thus, the Mother of God is honored not for her feminine truth-telling but as the masculine “Invincible General (*Ypermachos Strategos*).” The archetypical ‘Man’ John the Baptist, however, does enact the primary feminine office by being the Prophet and Forerunner.<sup>144</sup>

Patitsas allows that “the fact that both genders are called, albeit in differing sequences, to fulfill all three offices might lend encouragement to those considering the ordination of women. On the other hand, the powerful notion that love necessarily involves coming to symbolize our beloved points in the direction of the eucharistic priesthood remaining restricted to males.”<sup>145</sup> Why? Because the liturgy is the place where we express love as *becoming the other*. The congregation, often composed predominantly of women, embodies the *male task* of standing guard outside the altar.<sup>146</sup> The priest, on the other hand, embodies a *female task*, he “‘brings forth’ from behind a veil the incarnate Logos for the nourishment of the people...”<sup>147</sup> “It is not,” reasons Patitsas,

that such a calling is unsuited to femininity, but rather that it is too well suited. ‘Take, eat, this is my body; drink of it all of you, this is my blood’ (Mt 26.26-29; Mk 14.22-26; Lk 22.15-20; 1 Cor 11.24-25) are first of all maternal statements, after all, and, in the demanding world of Christian liturgy, it is the

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 101. Though he makes no such reference, it is likely not a coincidence that Patitsas shares these archetypical figures with Evdokimov, though unlike Evdokimov, they each most perfectly express primary aspect of the other rather than themselves.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.



calling of males, rather than of females, to symbolize the feminine office.<sup>148</sup>

Patitsas's reasoning introduces a host of theological and liturgical problems. First, he focuses solely on the words of institution and the act of bringing the food out from behind the veil (the closed curtain in the Russian tradition?). Yet as Schmemmann argues, there are many liturgical moments of equal value. Second, focusing on the presbyter's offering obscures that the food itself was originally offered by the people. The presbyter offers not from his own body, but *returns* the body of the people. Only by severing presbyter from laity, by instituting a clerical divide into the complex offerings that occur throughout the various movements of the liturgy, can this make sense. Third, Patitsas has forgotten that the bringing forth of the gifts was (and still is in some congregations) done by the *deacon*, not the presbyter. While we do not know if female deacons carried the gifts to men during the liturgy, we are certain they carried them to women outside of the liturgy. A woman's body at one point did exactly the task Patitsas restricts to a male body. Fourth, Patitsas seems to think the only relevant members of the congregation are women. It is true that congregations are often comprised more by women than men, but we hardly want to build a theological anthropology or liturgical theology on this trend. Further, what about the men who are present? Are they not guardians? By not acting prophetically in the Eucharist, are they failing to love? Or, in the liturgy, should all males be prophetic presbyters and all women guardian congregants?

Finally, Patitsas characterizes the words of institution, attributed first to Jesus, as "maternal statements," flesh and blood from one's own flesh and blood, an ultimate expression of the gestation, birthing and nourishing process. What is surprising is that Patitsas does not reach back into the tradition and appeal to a theologian such as Symeon in

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

order to characterize the presider as standing *in persona Theotokos*, bringing forth the Word to the people. Patitsas images the presbyter as a woman bringing forth the Word, while simultaneously excluding actual, living women from the office, all on the principle of love. It is *love* that prevents a woman from excessively exercising her femininity, and *love* that allows only a man to do so. It is astonishing that in the name of love, a possibly liberative vision that hints at the fluidity of gendered symbols and highlights the importance of becoming ecstatically ‘other’ without losing oneself results in the same exclusion of women that Evdokimov and Hopko arrive at, but by using precisely the opposite tack.

### *Hopko*

Hopko makes even less mention of the liturgy than does Patitsas. Hopko’s first response to the question of female ordination was to associate Christ with masculinity and the Spirit with femininity, a theory strongly rejected by many Orthodox theologians.<sup>149</sup> His second foray into the subject, however, rests entirely on a related cluster of metaphors: the priest as head, father, and bridegroom. Hopko presumes “theological and spiritual reasons” for male priesthood given the presence of women in all places except among priests and bishops. This absence, he claims, can hardly “be attributed...to evil or ignorance.”<sup>150</sup> Hopko roots his argument in theological anthropology, reading Gen 2:18 (“Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.’”) in light of 1 Cor 11:3. The woman is defined as a “helpmeet” to the man.

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<sup>149</sup> Hopko’s first article can be found in two places: Thomas Hopko, “On the Male Character of Christian Priesthood.”; “On the Male Character of Christian Priesthood,” in *Women and the Priesthood* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1983). The later version includes Hopko’s response to extensive criticisms generated by his first publication of the argument. His argument reflects elements of Evdokimov, who associates the Spirit with femininity, though in a much less dogmatic and far more open-ended manner than Hopko. Hopko never returned to this type of argumentation, and his second major article on the subject makes only a very small mention of the femininity of the Spirit.

<sup>150</sup> Thomas Hopko, “Presbyter/Bishop: A Masculine Ministry,” 140.

Though neither can exist without the other and are equal in value to one another, “a certain priority is given to Adam who has the name of Man (*anthropos*) even when he is alone. Adam the man is the head of Eve the woman, just as ‘the head of every man is Christ...and the head of Christ is God’ (1 Cor 11:3).”<sup>151</sup> Hopko acknowledges Paul’s insistence that in baptism there is not man and woman (Gal 3:28) but he prioritizes 1 Cor 11:7-12 in which women reflect men who reflect God.<sup>152</sup> In other words, for Hopko the headship of man over woman is presumed due to the “certain priority” given to men as a part of the order of nature created by God in Genesis 2, even though authority is not clearly granted in the text until the post-fall consequences of Genesis.<sup>153</sup> All relations between men and women, even those supposedly ‘restored’ by baptism (as in Gal 3:28) should be read in light of this

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 144. These biblical interpretations are extraordinarily problematic. Not only is there no account given by Hopko of Gen. 1 in which there is a simultaneous creation of male and female, but Hopko does not discuss alternative interpretations of *ezer*, or “helper,” and he neglects to note that the “enmity” between husband and wife is not established until Gen 3:15. For an excellent and now classic exegesis of Genesis 2-3 which posits very different conclusions, see Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1978). In taking this particular tack, Hopko’s interpretation is more akin to literalist Protestant interpretations. Ironically, Hopko chooses to dialogue in his text not with Orthodox exegetes, but with Paul Jewett, an evangelical Protestant faculty member of Fuller Theological Seminary who disagreed at virtually every turn with Hopko’s theology and biblical exegesis. It was my privilege to study homiletics as a seminarian under his co-editor, Marguerite Shuster. Jewett’s main work on the subject is Paul King Jewett, and Marguerite Shuster, *Who We Are: Our Dignity as Human: A Neo-Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996). For excellent discussions of early patristic interpretations of Genesis 2, see Harrison’s collection of articles: Nonna Verna Harrison, “Male and Female in Cappadocian Theology.”; “Gender, Generation, and Virginité in Cappadocian Theology,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 47 (1996): 38-68; “Women, Human Identity, and the Image of God: Antiochene Interpretations,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9, no. 2 (2001): 205-49; “Women and the Image of God According to St. John Chrysostom.”; “Eve, the Mother of God, and Other Women,” *Ecumenical Review* 60 (2008): 71-81.

<sup>152</sup> Hopko, though he does not cite them, has the support of two theologians whom Harrison characterizes as outside the Greek patristic mainstream, the Antiochenes Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia. See Nonna Verna Harrison, “Women, Human Identity, and the Image of God: Antiochene Interpretations.”

<sup>153</sup> The content of this “priority” is left vaguely defined. But like Evdokimov, Hopko does something that continually strikes me as strange. Despite her lack of priority, a woman is the true “spiritual” being. Her personhood is found in empowering a man to be human, a woman is a man’s life, “the one who allows him to find his being, express his personhood, and fulfill his calling from God. Woman empowers, enables and inspires man’s service of love which he cannot fulfill without her.” Note that this assumes that she is somehow *more* human, and so can lead her man into his more full humanity. Love is the fundamental Christian vocation, into which men are led (“allowed,” “empowered,” “enabled,” “inspired”) *by women*. And yet it is men who have priority, spiritually, maritally, naturally. Thomas Hopko, “Presbyter/Bishop: A Masculine Ministry,” 144, 146.

“priority,” precisely because for Hopko, the priority of man over women is a part of creation itself, not a fallen order.<sup>154</sup>

How then does this relate to priesthood? First, for Hopko Christ is “a male human being, the true and final Adam.”<sup>155</sup> Second, Christ is “the Church’s one prophet and teacher, her unique high priest and bishop, her only pastor and king. The sacramental presence and image of Christ in the Church and the churches as the last and true Adam, the personal bridegroom, head and husband of his creaturely bride, is the presbyter/bishop.”<sup>156</sup> Note that Hopko exclusively defines the priesthood through male marital metaphors. Third, only men may represent Christ the head. Despite the baptismal status of all believers as priests, prophets and rulers, “the headship which sacramentally actualizes the headship of Jesus himself may be exercised only by certain men.”<sup>157</sup> The priesthood is a sacramental and iconic ministry of Christ as, *and only as*, the new Adam, head and husband of the Church.”<sup>158</sup> The symbolic reality of the situation is ‘clear.’ Women simply

...cannot be bishops and priests in the Orthodox view because it is not in their divine calling and competence as women. It is contrary to the gospel of God in Christ Jesus, contrary to the person and work of Christ, and contrary to the spiritual, moral, sacramental, symbolic, and even poetic and aesthetic design and dispensation of God for creation in the ‘new creation’ in the Church until Christ returns in glory at the end of the ages.<sup>159</sup>

Notice a number of key features of Hopko’s reasoning. First, Christ, despite his full assumption of human nature as priest, prophet and ruler, a nature both men and women ‘acquire’ through *theosis*, is primarily the male Adam. It is not clear that Christ encompassed Eve. If he did not assume Eve as fully as Adam, then are the descendants of Eve (only

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<sup>154</sup> For an extended discussion of Gal. 3:28, see Thomas Hopko, “Galatians 3:28: An Orthodox Interpretation,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 35, no. 2-3 (1991): 169 - 186.

<sup>155</sup> Thomas Hopko, “Presbyter/Bishop: A Masculine Ministry,” 147.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

women?) not healed? The Adam-Eve/Christ-Mary typology is hardly new to Hopko.

However, using the ancient Eve/Mary typology to underscore the maleness of Christ is an application that Kyriaki FitzGerald reminds us is viewed as a “misdirection” by patristic scholars.<sup>160</sup> Rather than simply a description of a post-fall situation, Hopko’s use of the typology is definitive, defining men and women as they ‘ought’ to be in a way that it did not do in its original usages.<sup>161</sup> Second, all male and female persons are defined in relation to one another *exclusively through marital language*, regardless of actual marital status. Third, the vision of marriage derives from Genesis 3 and 1 Corinthians 11, texts that are both *post-lapsarian visions* of human relationships (a point to which I will return below). Fourth, the presbyter/bishop is defined exclusively in terms of the same marital language in which men are defined: husband, father, head.

Hopko transposes a particular version of marital theology into priestly language without demonstrating that either the liturgy itself or sacerdotal theology gives a similar primacy to the metaphors he exclusively uses to describe the priesthood.<sup>162</sup> On what grounds does he exclude the possibility of women being bridegrooms, despite the many men who are brides in the liturgy? On the grounds that such language is *not* metaphorical. Hopko highlights the many metaphors that provide verbal images of God: a loving mother, a brooding hen, or Paul’s pastoral care as like a nursing woman. “But sometimes,” claims Hopko, “the words and images are not metaphorical, but theological, spiritual and

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>160</sup> Kyriaki K. FitzGerald, “The Eve-Mary Typology and Women in the Orthodox Church: Reconsidering Rhodes,” *Anglican Theological Review* 84, no. 3 (2002), 632.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> He relies on the use of the honorific “father,” failing to mention that the same title is traditionally given to deacons and male monastics (regardless of their clerical status). If women as deacons were presumably called “mother,” on what grounds does Hopko use metaphorical language to exclude women?

substantial, and as such, real, true and unchangeable.”<sup>163</sup> Unsurprisingly given his argument, God “is the Father,” Christ “is” a bridegroom, and bishops and priests “are fathers, husbands and heads of their specific churchly families with a specific spiritual calling and a specific sacramental consecration given and received specifically for this particular purpose.”<sup>164</sup> Hopko offers no explanation for how such obviously metaphorical terms are suddenly literal, nor any criteria for discerning between literal and metaphorical terms. As already noted above, the only place within liturgy itself that the presbyter (and deacon) are imaged as groom is in the same breath in which they are imaged as bride.

The liturgy, and the many images and metaphors it utilizes and embodies, is not a source for Hopko. Nor it seems, are balanced understandings of metaphor or iconodule theology. Hopko’s (mis)use of metaphorical language cannot be overlooked. The consequences of his declaration that the presbyter/bishop is exclusively Christ the groom/father/head is to undermine the consistent way metaphors are used in Orthodox theology, the iconodule theology in which resemblance and illustration are not the means by which an icon participates in the reality towards which it points, and a liturgical theology that emphasizes concelebration. Hopko’s theology is sustainable only if one agrees with his particular theology of male marital headship as defining *all* male and female relations (much less actual marriages), if the priest is *only* imaged using particular male metaphors, and if one favors rigid clericalism.

### *Summary*

Hopko rests his interpretation of appropriate gendered behavior and roles on a particular reading of Genesis in light of 1 Corinthians. Patitsas relies on the work of an

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<sup>163</sup> Thomas Hopko, “Presbyter/Bishop: A Masculine Ministry,” 160.

economist. Neither uses liturgical texts or movement as sources of their theology. For Hopko, men and women must exhibit only the gendered behavior that corresponds to their sex. To do otherwise is to deny themselves. Yet for Patitsas it is the opposite. It is in self-sacrificially denying one's primary office in order to exercise one's secondary office that love is truly expressed, and so men take on the female office and women the male office. For Hopko, the dominant metaphor of priestly liturgical relations is that of the head/husband/father/bridegroom, while for Patitsas it is the mother who feeds her children. For Hopko, the priesthood is too masculine to be exercised by a woman. For Patitsas, it is too feminine. The logic of each theory, if applied to the other's primary symbols, would lead to exactly the opposite conclusions. The only elements these theologies have in common is a reasoning *about the liturgy* that does not take into account the theological 'reasoning' *of the liturgy*, and a resulting exclusion of women from the sacramental priesthood.

### **Eschatological?**

There is one aspect of Hopko's argument to which I would like to briefly return as its implications, if taken seriously, entirely undermine what both Schmemmann and Zizioulas posit as the *telos* of the liturgy: the embodiment in the present, through the liturgy, of the coming reign of God, our eschatological future and hope. I have already noted that Hopko's scriptural exegesis is post-lapsarian. Given the priority marital relations take in shaping all male-female relations, it is surprising that Hopko argues that in the *parousia* there will be no sacraments of marriage, baptism, Eucharist or ordination.<sup>165</sup> But, he cautions, and here is the

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 154. This is even more surprising given that modern Orthodox theologians argue that the sacrament of marriage is eternal.

crucial point, the *church* is “bound by the world in its present, ‘pre-parousia’ condition.”<sup>166</sup> Yet the church also witnesses to the *parousia* as a “sacramental, mystical, eschatological community.”<sup>167</sup> Hopko as much as admits that his marital vision is limited to *this world*.<sup>168</sup> Moreover, he denies the presence in the church of an eschatological future in which headship over human persons no longer has a place, precisely in order to explain why men remain the heads of women even in the liturgy. In order to support the continued exclusion of women from the liturgy, Hopko must shift (or simply deny) liturgical visions. For Hopko, the church, or more specifically, the liturgy in which human relationships as *ecclesial* relationships are formed and exemplified, *is not an eschatological vision of the reign of God*.

I could hardly agree more: the liturgy as it is currently practiced falls far short of the eschatological vision of God’s joyful reign. Unlike Hopko, I am not content to allow the limited vision of “this world” to impoverish the imagination of God’s people regarding the possibilities for joyful, *ekstatic* relationships in and through the church. Our life as Christians is not dictated by the paucity of imagination created by visions limited to a world that remains unredeemed through the Incarnation. Rather, with Schmemmann and Zizioulas, I believe we should strive to enter into the coming of God by embodying our expanding vision of godly relationships to the best of our abilities. We must become the icon of the reign of God that our theology claims as our individual and communal *telos*. Paradoxically, it is only by embodying our future that we can even imagine it as possible, and only by imagining it as possible can we embody it.

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., emphasis added.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> A pertinent question is, why is it that the relationships between men and women continue to be limited by this world in a way that the relationship between slave and free is no longer limited in either the world or the church? However, this is not my focus here.



### Enacted Idolatry

Returning to where we started in this chapter, the liturgy should not be bound and conditioned by history (though it can never ignore history). Rather, it is a future-oriented vision of human relationships. An icon is not a *pre-parousia* vision, but a vision of the transformation possible through the Spirit, *now*. An icon of an individual is of a lover of God and neighbor. An icon of the reign of God is of “a certain set of relationships...the only setting from which we can extrapolate ethical actions.”<sup>169</sup> This set of relationships says Zizioulas (a statement with which I think Schmemmann would entirely agree) is an image of what “they will be in the end.”<sup>170</sup> Yet if we are not careful in our liturgical observations, we run the danger of reifying the visible. Ironically, both Patitsas and Hopko, using theology external to the liturgy itself, actually justify its current, exclusionary practices. Hopko does this explicitly, assuming that there must be unarticulated reasons for such long-standing practices. It does not seem to occur to either of them that perhaps what we see is not as it should be.

Given the formative quality that what we see has for our beliefs regarding ourselves and God, this is no surprise. Hopko and Patitsas are simply teaching *what they see*. The liturgy’s current embodied practice falls short of recognizing the unique, irreducible and free humanity of all of its members. Rather, a liturgy that excludes women from its sacred spaces, that denies the presence of female bodies in every part of its liturgical movement, communicates a visual idolatry that results in an enacted idolatry. By visually idolizing maleness as able to express something of the divine that no female can ever hope to do (despite ample evidence otherwise in the tradition), we *enact our idolatry*. We make our idolatry

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<sup>169</sup> John Zizioulas, “Action and Icon,” 68.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 67.

physical, bodily. We practice (both “do” and “rehearse”) it. And in the cyclical dynamic that is the liturgy, by enacting this idolatry in our most sacred gathering, we teach it as sacred rather than idolatrous.

#### 4.4: Critical Joy

It is no coincidence that Zizioulas presents an iconic interpretation of the liturgy as Johannine. “In the beginning when God created,” “was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (Gen 1:1, Jn 1:1) From its opening lines, the gospel of John invites us to return to the garden as “children of God” (Jn 1:12) who are “born from above” (Jn 3:3). The gospel of John presents the recapitulation of the world through Christ, it is an invitation to enter into this creative, and ongoing, work. The liturgy that embodies this Johannine vision is meant, according to Zizioulas, to be the embodiment of this invitation and creative work in the world, a vision of what is to come, in and through what is present. It is worthwhile remembering that in Orthodox theology, the garden was not a place of final *perfection*. It was a home in which men and women, created in the image of God, were called to mature into the likeness, to become fully human. The liturgy, likewise, is a place of ongoing growth into perfection, not only of the individual worshippers, but of the community and of the very relations that are the mark of the reign of God. Liturgy “strives to present what will happen,” which is different than saying that the liturgy *succeeds* in its efforts.<sup>171</sup> To declare the liturgy successful without constant, critical appraisal of its practices is to reify the visible and ignore the ways in which it is content to copy history rather than

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

transcend it.<sup>172</sup> The mark of the liturgy, according to Schmemmann, is a joy whose only entrance is the Eucharist, and which is the only transforming power of the world.<sup>173</sup> The joy gained by participating in the liturgy is what makes possible our movement back into the world, to which, in which and for which we carry and distribute that joy.

Schmemmann says little about what communicates this world-transforming joy. So let me posit the following: transforming joy is experienced in *recognizing* oneself and others as unique and irreducible, and in *relating* towards others according to this mutually recognized uniqueness. The human person is *hypostatic*, that is, unique and irreducible. Human uniqueness is, in an indefinable fashion, the way in which one person expresses particularities that are common (hair color, sex, temperament) in a manner that, taken together, is completely unlike any other person. Uniqueness is also visible in the capabilities, inclinations, virtues and gifts through which each person relates to the world. As sons and daughters of a God who became incarnate for the world, we participate with God when we act in our flesh, in our bodies, for the world. Divine-human communion is to be and become who we are in relationship with the other. We become more fully human as we exercise our uniqueness on behalf of those *outside* ourselves. Our uniqueness is *ekstatic*. We are free *for* the other. But there is more. A liturgy, or really, any ‘work’ where we are able to recognize ourselves (and others) as uniquely able to *ekstatically* participate in the work of God for the life of the world, produces *ecstasy*. To go beyond oneself is to experience joy, it is to practice joy.

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<sup>172</sup> To quote Zizioulas again and more fully, the liturgy “strives to present what will happen...what one sees in the icon is not the state of things as they have been in history but as they will be in the end. The eschaton respects history not by copying it but by transforming it, and transcending especially the antinomies and limitations of history.” Ibid., 67-68.

<sup>173</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 25, 55.

Yet the liturgy is not just a collection of individual icons, but rather a gathering of men and women made in the image of God who through their virtuous relations with one another embody an icon of the reign of God. The liturgy is the “pattern of actions by which God seeks to establish communion between himself and humankind.”<sup>174</sup> This “pattern of divine activity” foreshadows the reign of God in which all the capabilities, gifts, and virtues of men and women are welcome and necessary in order to embody the love and joy of God in the world. Salvation, *theosis*, is corporate and relational, it is “irreducibly social.”<sup>175</sup> If the community fails to engage in patterns of activity, liturgical movements, which visibly and physically affirm the uniqueness of each person, *the liturgy must change*. Our patterns of action, our relationships of love to one another must conform to what we know to be true about one another, and they must reflect our eschatological *hope*, not our fallen present. If we now know, in a way that perhaps we were not as aware of in our traditional past, that women too are capable of virtue, that they too are icons of God in Christ through the Spirit, we must embody that knowledge in our practices. The community itself must be transformed by our growth into God. As a community, we must embody joy in all our relations.

Consider the moments that bring joy. For a scholar, joy is often the result of a well-conceived and received argument, the satisfaction that results from exercising one’s gifts and interests well. For a parent, the joy at seeing a child share a beloved toy, knowing (perhaps only for a moment) that a lesson was learned. Joy often comes unexpectedly through a gesture of friendship, the satisfaction of being seen for who you truly are, through being asked to contribute according to one’s gifts. Joy is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), it is the result of a life lived through the Spirit. It is not just a feeling, but a sense of

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<sup>174</sup> Vigen Guroian, “Seeing Worship as Ethics,” 101.

<sup>175</sup> Bruce T. Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory*, 104.

satisfaction and delight that is communicated, sometimes without any intent to do so. Have not many of us seen the jittery excitement of a young boy participating in a liturgical procession for the first time, and smiled at both his ineptitude as well as his obvious pleasure at being included? Or the proud young teen who stands in front of the altar and reads (audibly even!) the epistle to the assembled community? Have we not experienced joy at hearing the beautiful voice of a chanter leading us in prayer, a joy at a gift exercised on behalf of the community and at being assisted to pray beautifully? Or the joy of a choir, volunteer musicians who together sing our prayers? What of the joy of seeing a grieving friend comforted by a skilled pastor, or learning a new and exciting aspect of our faith from a talented and passionate teacher or preacher? Each of these moments of joy are the result of the *recognition* and *exercise* of gifts, capabilities and virtues on behalf of the other. The simple reality is that it is joyful to see, offer and receive gifts and capabilities done well.

Joy is not everything. There are, after all, other fruits of the Spirit. Its absence, however, is not simply the loss of a pleasant feeling. It is an indication that something is missing, something is wrong: it is a red-flag. Just as Schmemmann's abridged joy led him to repeatedly critique the liturgy, the lack of joy experienced by women and the men who love them rightly challenges liturgical practices. What of the sadness and frustration of the parent who must explain to a daughter that she cannot join her brother in the altar? What of the sadness and confusion of the young girl who cannot participate (despite possessing the same abilities) as her brother does? If anyone thinks that girls don't want to participate, ask their parents. Or, witness the enthusiasm around being "myrrhbearers" at the tomb of Christ, the one service of the year where some (hardly many) churches allow girls to participate in liturgical processions and stand with candles before (though not in) the altar. Ask female chanters how they feel as they watch their male colleagues access the chant stand by walking

through the altar while they must ‘go around.’<sup>176</sup> What of frustration of actively encouraging altar boys to read the epistle, and making no similar effort to encourage girls? What of the increasing number of women who are attending seminary, who are receiving the same pastoral and pedagogical education as men, but who lack any venue in which to exercise their gifts?

Yet, as much as the absence of joy is an indication of a problem, it is not always the sign of problem in the liturgy. Many of us fail to experience joy for reasons entirely external to the liturgy itself. We had a bad day, a bad week, a bad month. Our lack of joy results from our own emotional or psychological state. This line of reasoning is true, but it is too often turned against those who ask why exclusion is allowed in the liturgy. The joylessness felt by many women who cannot exercise their gifts in the liturgy is interpreted as “their fault,” a result of a misperception of their capabilities and gifts along the lines of Hopko’s declaration that women simply “lack the competence” despite the obvious existence of competent female leaders. Or, perhaps, these women are indeed competent, but they do not understand that the liturgy is not the place to exercise their gifts and they need to be competent elsewhere. The joy these women feel at the desire to exercise their competencies is turned against them, a sign that they are not truly being women.

The problem is not simply the absence of joy for which there can be many reasons. Rather, it is the introduction of something that has no place in the liturgy: suffering. “Suffering,” says Zizioulas “can never be a characteristic of the eschatological reality. A new heaven and a new earth in which justice dwells and where death is no more, is the content of

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<sup>176</sup> It is often noted that male chanters should also ‘go around,’ as the altar is not a walkway. This is true. However, the fact remains that men are allowed without correction to do so, but a woman who did so (if she could even get through the door) would likely be scolded and shamed.

the icon of the kingdom.”<sup>177</sup> Orthodoxy intentionally emphasizes the risen Christ in its eucharistic practice, not Christ crucified. If suffering is characteristic of the icon, even for some, the icon fails to point to its prototype, a reign in which tears are wiped from the faces of the faithful (Is. 25:8), “where everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (Is. 35: 10).

The consistent claim of Zizioulas and Schmemmann is that the liturgy is the primary (if not the sole) source for what we need to become truly human. As Papanikolaou summarizes, “true identity and personal distinction” is acquired only “in and through the community.”<sup>178</sup> Many things serve as distinctive features, not all of which are even possible or reasonable to ‘practice’ within the liturgy, such as bodily characteristics or personality traits. But within the community, among our most important qualities are the unique ways in which we relate to one another through the gifts given by the Spirit. These gifts are not given randomly, but “to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit *for the common good*” (1 Cor 12:7). Similarly echoed in Ephesians, “The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, *to equip the saints* for the work of ministry, *for building up the body of Christ*, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-13). True identity and personal distinction is found in the *ekstatic*, for-the-other, exercise of the gifts of the Spirit in order that all of us may mature into Christ. A person who cannot exercise her gifts for the other does not discover her personal distinction in community. And a community that does not recognize or receive the personal distinction

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<sup>177</sup> John Zizioulas, “Action and Icon,” 70.

<sup>178</sup> Aristotle Papanikolaou, *Being With God*, 34.

of all its members according to their gifts does not grow into the full stature of Christ. As a result, everyone suffers.

This suffering need not be the last word. Orthodox theology, liturgical and iconographic, fails to provide a reason to deny women priesthood.<sup>179</sup> More important, however, is that Orthodox theology already offers compelling reason to include women in all aspects of sacramental leadership, if only we have eyes to see.

The liturgy is already a concelebration, a shared work of the people in which each person has different tasks towards a common goal. The presider does not act alone, but in his words gives voice to the people, and in his body carries them into the altar. Excluding women from standing in the altar is simply arbitrary if they are already celebrating the liturgy. Symbolically, the presider may be at the head of the body, precisely the position of the Virgin *strategos* who stood at the head of her armies like Judith before her. Yet the presider is also the Virgin *Orans*, arms raised in the prayer of the church, bearing Christ as she did, nurturing the birth of Christ in each and every liturgical participant (presider included). Despite the fluidity of symbols within the liturgy, despite the distribution of gifts among the faithful, the liturgical practice of limiting the actual bodies that enter the altar to men alone visually signals, and practically restricts, the embodiment of these symbols and the practice of particular gifts and capabilities only to men. We must see to believe. This is the theology of our liturgy, of our icons. And if we refuse or make it difficult to see, then we refuse or make it difficult to believe. We do this to the detriment of the women and men who would, if given the opportunity, joyfully offer and receive their gifts through the liturgy for the life of the world.

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<sup>179</sup> Stating that there is no theological reason against the ordination of women is as bold as most Orthodox theologians have been on the subject.



## Conclusion

The Orthodox perspective is not unanimous and monolithic. A path to transcend this conflict may yet remain open, not through indifference but through a deepening of the authentic tradition.

Élisabeth Behr-Sigel<sup>1</sup>

## The Arguments

At its heart, this dissertation is about recognition. It is about identifying one another as unique and irreducible persons with capabilities, virtues and gifts, acknowledging the existence of these qualities, and appreciating their value for the ecclesial community, and for the world. The focus is on the recognition of women, and in particular, on recognizing that it is both possible and necessary to ordain appropriately gifted women to the priesthood.

I begin my argument by returning to traditional texts on the priesthood, examining them for evidence of a “masculine ministry.” A careful reading of both Gregory of Nazianzus and John Chrysostom simply provides no verification of inherently masculine aspects of the priesthood. Rather, the priesthood is imaged as an *eikon* of virtue, and multiple models and metaphors are utilized to evoke the relationships, functions, and virtues required for adequate exercise of the priestly ministry. The priest shepherds the people of God, discerns sin-sickness and the best course of treatment as a physician, midwives Christians into a new life, and nurtures that life with the life-giving breast-milk of theological truth. At no point do any of these gifts require a male (or female) body. Rather, the presider, through embodied actions and relationships points, as do all icons, both living and ‘written,’ to Christ.

## Conclusion

Moving from text to image, I highlight the importance of *seeing* virtue through particular embodied men and women. It is by *seeing* the virtues of the saints depicted in the icons and narratives of their lives that we are invited to *participate* in a life of virtue. The gaze of the saint issues the command, “thou shalt love,” and provides us with the visually imaginative tools necessary spark our imagination and inspire our action. In the diverse tradition of iconography, especially of images of the Theotokos, it is clear that a single person, a woman in this case, models for Christians the full range of virtues necessary for the Christian life. Even more importantly, these virtues are made visible in activities and social roles not considered typically female in contemporaneous society. Mary is faithful and learned disciple, teacher and leader of the church, the body through which we receive Christ, and bearer of God in and to the world. As a model of what it is to be a human participating in the divine, the Mother of God invites each Christian to bear Christ in her body in order to birth Christ into the world. According to Theodore the Studite, the more diverse are the bearers of God, the greater glory offered to God through creation.

Finally then, I move from the ‘written’ images of icons to the icon of the reign of God, the liturgy. The liturgy, as an ascending movement towards God, ‘embodies’ *patterns of relationship* that are meant to reflect divine patterns. In the practice of the liturgy we see the intersections of virtue as relational (that which “perfects us in our relations”) and the relational formation of virtue. The liturgy teaches through word, sight and action how we are to recognize and love our neighbor. The liturgy is an icon of eschatological hope, in which we see *and practice* what it is to love one another as God loves us. The liturgy is celebrated by men and women who together image Christ, who is offered, offers and receives.

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<sup>1</sup> Élisabeth Behr-Sigel, “The Ordination of Women: A Point of Contention in Ecumenical Dialogue,” 50. 289

## Distorted Visions

Each element of my argument from text, image and liturgy shows how reduction and limitation distort our vision. Reducing the priesthood to the minimally used (at least in the patristic texts examined here) metaphors of father, husband and bridegroom ignores the rich tradition of multiple and multifaceted metaphors used to describe the priesthood. Rather than allow metaphors to jolt our imaginations and create new associations, we lock our eyes on only a few. The result is an inadequate understanding of both the priesthood and the laity, no different than if Gregory or John had chosen to remain with the model of a shepherd, and never developed the image of the priest as a philosopher-physician and spiritual *parent* (not simply father).

Modern social preoccupations with gender and sex further distort the gaze, reducing the feminine to a limited set of virtues and capabilities, idealized through the reading of a single image of Mary. Not only are there alternative ways to read the *eleousa*, but ‘conceptual images’ must incorporate the majestic Virgin Enthroned, the ancient Virgin Orans, and the sometimes militant Virgin *Hodegetria*. The visibility of diverse *human* virtue embodied in these images and their accompanying narrations is blocked by flesh and blood. This is akin to idolatry, venerating the wood and paint, the medium or the symbol rather than honoring the person made present in the icon.

This refusal to see is compounded by a liturgy in which rigid gender roles create an *enacted* idolatry. Rather than practice in one of our most sacred spaces the recognition and affirmation of each person as unique, irreducible and dynamic, we practice (both “do” and “rehearse”) exclusion. This reduction is a failure to embody as best we can the eschatological vision of God’s joyful reign. This reign is made visible in both individual persons who relate according to the virtues of God, and the patterns of actions within the

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community. A distorted vision inhibits the formation of persons within the liturgy. When the community fails to see the uniqueness of a person, her unique gifts remain unrecognized, a dishonor to her and to her gifts, especially those *charisms* granted by the Spirit. This communal failure also dishonors God by putting human conceptions ahead of God's freedom to act in and through the world in the way God chooses rather than the way we choose. Yet our formation of persons is dependent upon our community. A distorted vision does not simply dishonor a person and God, but also inhibits the ways in which a person can come to know herself as uniquely created and gifted by God. Further, the community cannot receive what it refuses to see. So the unrecognized gifts of a person are not contributed to the community for the sake of its own growth into God. Distorted visions of persons affect not only individuals, but the community itself. This leads to a diminishment of the church as a true locus of eschatological joy and disempowers its mission in the world.

## Further Study

My arguments introduce theological, ethical and ecclesiological questions that warrant further exploration. Creative theological and ethical minds will see additional areas of exploration. Perhaps the most obvious is the need to develop a more robust theological anthropology and an examination of the significance of gender. Both Valerie Karras and Nonna Harrison have produced an immense amount of scholarship addressing patristic views on gender. But an Orthodox theological anthropology of gender cogent for *today* must also incorporate contemporary psychological, scientific and experiential understandings of sex and gender. This incorporation will likely result in both a recognition of the rich wisdom

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embedded in the Orthodox tradition as well as a thoughtful rejection of false patterns of belief and practice.

A methodological trajectory to further consider, is developing virtue ethics as a primary mode of Orthodox ethical discourse. This dissertation assumes it as a model, in part due to the ubiquitous discussion of virtue throughout the Orthodox tradition. Yet its constant presence does not equate to a careful articulation of its role in human relationships, nor its significance for theology and liturgy. Further work must be done to develop an understanding of *theosis* and virtue in light of the social, relational and communal view of the person emphasized in Orthodox anthropology. *Theosis*, divine-human communion or ‘becoming more fully human,’ is in part the result of communal practices that form relational agents. Considering virtue as act-in-relation respects the dynamic quality of the person crucial to Orthodoxy, builds a bridge between the moral theories and practices of other religious traditions, and reflects recent work on the social constitution of the self. An Orthodox virtue ethic will likely find interesting parallels between recent shifts in virtue theory, feminist-oriented ethics of care, and the social construction of the human person.

A theological and ecclesiological trajectory is to investigate is the basis for change within the Orthodox tradition and practice. For many Orthodox, change is simply impossible, no matter how good the theological reasons. Modern Orthodox theologians have responded to Papal infallibility with a declaration of the infallibility of the (Orthodox) Church. Yet what if *theosis* happens to the community as much as to the individual? If the ecclesial body is becoming, change can be seen as a positive value rather than a perceived betrayal of ‘tradition.’ Change becomes a sign of the presence and work of the Spirit moving us towards a more fully human body of Christ. A compelling theology of change will

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remind us that our liturgy is an *anticipation* of the reign of God, and help us discern the rich ecclesiological potential in Stăniloae's phrase "eschatological development."<sup>2</sup>

Finally, the discerning reader will have already noticed a conspicuous lack of conversation with Christian ethicists and theologians, particularly Catholic, who have developed arguments for the ordination of women from their own traditions. Given the frequent (but hardly universal and sometimes perceived rather than real) similarity between Orthodox and Catholic theology, it is reasonable to think that there can and should be collaboration between Orthodox and Catholic feminists on this topic. I eagerly look forward to this collaboration. However, this dissertation is an attempt to develop an Orthodox framework that allows for the full participation of women in the ministries of the church. It seems to me that only a sufficiently developed Orthodox framework can contribute to, and be enriched by, dialogue with other traditions. It is my hope that this dissertation provides tools for theologians outside Orthodoxy through its focus on Orthodox liturgical practice.

## Practical Issues

My insistence that we must, for ethical, theological and liturgical reasons, change our liturgical practices to include women according to their real gifts and capabilities does not mean we should, or can, do so immediately. The refusal to ordain female deacons, for which there is ample historical precedent as well as a relatively recent 'official' endorsement to reinstate the practice indicates, at best, reticence to change. Perhaps it indicates a lack of will on the part of hierarchs to engage divisive change, understandable given Orthodoxy's propensity for conflict. At worst, it indicates an egregious neglect of the welfare of men and

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<sup>2</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Theology and the Church*, 186.

## Conclusion

women in the church. If we cannot once again ordain female deacons, we can hardly start with priests.

However, we can start somewhere. Sympathetic clergy and theologians can intentionally teach about the inclusion of women. They can take every reasonable opportunity to teach and preach about the call of women to engage in the full range of church ministry, not simply the traditional tasks of service outside the liturgy. The increasing number of female graduates of Orthodox theological institutions can be supported in non-ordained ministries that are described with terms typically associated with priestly duties, such as “pastoral assistants.” Seminaries and hierarchs can seek to encourage and place more women in hospital and military chaplaincies. Perhaps most effective, and entirely in-keeping with the importance of visual learning, would be the inclusion of girls alongside boys in the altar service of the liturgy. This is already practiced in some churches, though every effort is made to avoid attention. The drama that ensued in 2004 after a picture of an altar girl was seen on the internet, and led to the reaffirmation of an “ancient practice” that falsely excludes females from the altar space, illustrates both the visceral reaction against the presence of women in the altar and the grief caused by the theologically and historically untenable arguments used to justify such an exclusion.<sup>3</sup> This is a just a short list of practical steps towards a greater inclusion of women. More practical minds than my own can surely add to this list. What remains to be seen is if will and courage exists on the part of our ecclesial leaders.

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<sup>3</sup> The picture, the decision of the synod of the Orthodox Church in America (OCA), a response which was not published in the OCA newspaper, and the numerous comments of grieving and angry Orthodox can be found at <http://stnina.org/online-journal/feature-articles/altar-girls>. The situation is also summarized in Valerie A. Karras, “Orthodox Theologies of Women and Ordained Ministry,” 115, n. 5.

## Concluding Comments

Few responsible Orthodox would refuse to admit that women have suffered as a result of social discrimination, even if they would not agree on the extent of this discrimination and its consequences. The 1988 *Conclusions* of the Consultation in Rhodes acknowledges that even Orthodox Christian communities have frequently failed in accounting for discrimination in their midst, declaring that any “act which denies the dignity of the human person and any act which discriminates against women and men on the basis of gender is a sin.”<sup>4</sup> Yet neither this consultation, nor the vast majority of Orthodox theological work, adequately accounts for the long-standing practice of exclusion based on gender (and sex) within the liturgy. It is my hope, and prayer, as a theologian and ethicist of the Orthodox Church, that this dissertation offers sufficient reason to renew our vision, revise our liturgical practices, and recognize the unique, irreducible and dynamic humanity of all men and women who are created in the image and likeness of God, and called to joyfully embody virtue “the life of the world.”

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<sup>4</sup> Gennadios Limouris, *The Place of Woman*, 28.



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