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Preface to the 1982 Edition of *Women and the Priesthood*

Thomas Hopko, ed., *Women and the Priesthood* (2d ed.):
St Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 1999, pp. 3-4.

The authors of the articles and essays collected in this book do not pretend to have exhausted or even simply to have touched upon all the important questions raised by the decision of some Western Christian communions to admit women to the ordained ministry. It is rather a very preliminary, very tentative reaction to a problem which, since the Orthodox Church has never faced it existentially, remains for her a *casus irrealis*. We are, however, asked "to be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks us a reason of the hope that is in us" (1 Pet 3:15). We cannot consider this extremely important matter as simply alien to us and, therefore, to be ignored— hence, this beginning of an answer, however tentative and fragmentary.

Three essential points, it seems to me, constitute the foundation of this answer. In the first place is the affirmation, common to all Orthodox theologians, of the impossibility of isolating the problem of women's ordination from the totality of the Church's *Tradition*, from the faith in the triune God, in the creation, fall and redemption, in the Church and the mystery of her "theandric" life. Once more the question of *tradition* stands at the very center and challenges us with essential questions. What is it? Is it the living memory and consciousness of the Church, the essential term of reference or criterion by which we discern the essential unbrokenness of the Church's life and identity during her pilgrimage through history? Or is it itself a product, or a sequence of products, of history, in the light of which it is to be reevaluated, judged or rejected?

In the second place, Orthodox theology is unanimous, I am sure, in affirming that the question of women's ordination must be seen and discussed within the scriptural doctrine of man and woman, i.e., of Christian scriptural and doctrinal *anthropology*, and not within the perspective of "human rights," "equality," etc.— categories whose ability to adequately express the Christian understanding of man and woman is, to say the least, questionable.

And this takes us to the third essential context: that of *ecclesiology*, of the understanding of the Church and the mystery of salvation. As presented today, it is the result of too

many reductions. For if its root is surrender to culture, its pattern of development is shaped by *clericalism*. Clericalism is, on the one hand, the reduction of the Church to a power structure; and on the other hand, her reduction of that power structure to *clergy*. Thus, the alleged inferiority of women within secular society corresponds to their inferiority within the ecclesiastical power structure, their exclusion from the "clergy." And therefore, their liberation in secular society must correspond their liberation in the Church, i.e., their admission to the priesthood, etc.

The Church simply cannot be reduced to these categories. As long as we try to measure the ineffable mystery of her life by concepts and ideas *a priori* alien to her very essence, we *mutilate* her and her real power, glory and beauty. Her real life simply escapes us.

It is my hope that the serious reader, whether agreeing or disagreeing with the approach of the Orthodox Church to the ordination of women, will try to understand this approach as expressed in this book, however inadequately, and will realize its true scope and significance.

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